

God, Are You Really There?

✖ When times are tough, it's easy to feel that God has abandoned us. We must learn that His presence is a promise.

More than once during your spiritual journey, particularly when you were facing difficult circumstances, you have undoubtedly asked yourself, "How can I know God's presence in my life?" This is the type of question that often draws a cliché and leaves the inquirer feeling somewhat guilty for having asked it. Among those clichés may be the quoting of various Scriptures such as Matthew 18:20: "'For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them'" (NKJV) or Psalm 22:3: "But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel."

The inference is that one need only gather with others to pray or sing praises to the Lord to be assured of His presence. Add Psalm 100 to these verses and you will be given the key to entering His presence: Begin with thanksgiving, progress to praise and ultimately be swept through the veil, standing before Him with singing.

So many times I have given this "formula" in sermons. I since have learned that formulas do not work with God. But because I had personally discovered that I could walk into God-consciousness by applying this strategy in faith, I believed others would do the same. Most of those attending the meetings I led did so as we corporately took each step.

However, I soon learned that few sustained the awareness of God's presence when the meetings ended and they returned to "business as usual" at home, in the workplace, and tragically even in church services. This realization left me wondering why and sent me to God for answers.

Here are the answers the Lord gave me to my query about why

some believers do not walk in God-consciousness on a regular basis.

They are afraid they cannot meet the requirements for His presence. In Psalm 15:1 David asks: "Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?" Then he gives the answer: "He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord; he who swears to his own hurt and does not change; he who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved" (vv. 2-5).

The promise of never being moved, or dismissed from His presence, should be enough stimulus for us all to claim it. Yet often we don't because of our fear that the requirements are impossible to meet.

Harboring such a fear proves that we do not intimately know our God. He repeatedly tells us in His Word that He has provided for all our needs by Christ Jesus. God never asks us for anything He has not already made provision for.

Our confusion comes from yielding to fleshly desires and lusts rather than relying on the Spirit within, whom Jesus sent to be our teacher-enabler. The apostle Paul explains this conflict in his letter to the Galatians: "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (5:17).

Look again at Psalm 15 and note that we need the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22-23 to meet each of the requirements. To the one who has love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness

and temperance (self-control) active in his life, the requirements for a constant awareness of the presence of the Lord are easily met.

Galatians 5:25 says, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." This verse infers that we who have the Spirit should progress in the life He enables us to live.

They are not obedient. Too many sort through God's Word for the Scriptures they choose to live by. Promises of wealth, health, favor and blessing are especially popular. The cry to be shown His glory and the plea for an open heaven and latter rain are being sung in many circles.

What is wrong with claiming these promises? Absolutely nothing, unless we are choosing to bypass the conditions for such blessings. In fact, we are encouraged to believe the Scriptures, to rehearse them from morning through night, to hide them in our hearts, and to testify of and with them. But the power of the tongue is limited by the believing in the heart that these things are true. It is not the rote that moves God but the obedience to His Word and faith in Himself that assures us of His abiding presence.

Our society is one that is driven by a rapid pace, quick results and immediate solutions. It is little wonder that Christians have fallen into the trap of believing they can manipulate God by demanding something, even the sense of His presence, in their time frame by simply quoting Scripture. "In Jesus' name" has become a slogan of demand rather than an awareness of divine authority given to believers by an omnipotent God through Jesus Christ.

I am amazed at how few Christians spend quality time reading and meditating on God's Word. Their lack of faith is directly related to that neglect. A Sunday sermon, even if complemented by a mid-week message, is not sufficient to bring us into an intimate relationship with our Beloved, and to an increasing

knowledge of Him, His love, His care, His compassion and His desires. The Bible makes it clear that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

Is it any wonder that prayer, thanksgiving and praise seem so difficult for us to exercise continually? If, due to a lack of study of the Word, we are not convinced (that is, do not have faith) that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think (see Eph. 3:20), or that His plans for us are plans to prosper and not to harm us, to bring us to a good end and give us a hope and a future, as Jeremiah 29:11 promises, then we have little motivation to sing His praise. Not only that, but we have forgotten His care of us through the years so that we are not thankful either. Therefore we have no confidence—we have cast it away—and are an open target for the enemy to shoot the bullets of discouragement, disappointment, despair and defeat right to our spirits. Instead of a celebration of Jesus, we have a pity party for self.

Enjoying God's Presence

In contrast, *the recognition of God's presence* comes to the one who expects and looks for God in all situations and places:

- In the sanctuary (see Ps. 150)
- In godly leaders (see Heb. 13:7)
- In other believers (see Matt. 18:20)
- In the family of God (the body of Christ)
- In nature (see ; 1)
- In himself. “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).
- In troubled situations. We have these promises from Hebrews 13:5: “He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” and Psalm 138:3,7: “In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with

strength in my soul. ... Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand will save me."

- In his past, present and future. Hebrews 13:8 tells us: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." And before the Israelites took possession of the promised land, Moses exhorted them to always remember all the way the Lord had led them through the wilderness, protected them from their enemies and other dangers, fed them, given them the power to get wealth and supplied their every need (see Deut. 8). He has been there for all of us in similar ways.

The response to God's presence is often singing and dancing, clapping one's hands and raising one's arms. There are times for victory shouts and playing of instruments. But there are also times of silence when it would seem a violation of reverence even to stir. Bowing, kneeling and prostrating oneself are appropriate expressions of adoration at such times. Giving an offering is an expression of worship, too.

The methods are less important than the motives. We are instructed to seek the kingdom (the rule) of God *first*—and to love the Lord our God with *all* our heart, mind, soul and strength and also our neighbor as ourselves. Considering these commandments, it becomes obvious that worship must be an acknowledgement of His presence, and His presence is brought about by worship when it is offered in spirit and truth. Whatever form of expression we use can be acceptable to Him only when given by one who is walking humbly with his God.

How can we be sure His presence is real and that He is in our lives? His Word assures us of it, and God honors His Word, as Psalm 138:2 declares: "You have magnified Your word above all Your name." Other proofs include:

- God's Spirit: confirming, convicting, convincing,

conceiving and conquering

- Prophecy: God's Word to us personally
- Revelation: the understanding of the Word. The apostle Paul wrote: "How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (Eph.3:3-5).
- Inspiration: insight from the Holy Spirit. "And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6); "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52).
- Intercession: God Himself enters into our praying (Rom. 8: 28).
- Believing: "The genuineness of your faith ... may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:7-9).

Are you discouraged by unfulfilled prophecies or answers to prayers that have been delayed or denied? Do you lack the joy you are promised or once had and lost? Has doubt crept into your thoughts because of the pressures of life and the hurts of situations? Are you in pain or facing the threat of death despite the many prayers of others and yourself? Have you lost faith in people due to betrayal and abuse? Does it seem that love has no place in your life and that possessions have been stolen?

If your answer to any of these questions is yes, know that

there are many people today who can identify with you—but there is One who will not leave you there. Lift up your head and focus on your unfailing God. Every prophecy remains a promise, and every delay has a purpose.

God's joy is in you: Call it forth and demand its expression. He will restore both your soul and your losses, and He will arise with healing in His wings. God's love sent Jesus to the cross, Christ's love became your salvation and your eternal victory. "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps. 118:24) because He dwells in His temple, which temple we are (see 1 Cor. 3:16-17).

The Bible tells us that God is *always* with us. You can experience and enjoy the reality of His presence by coming to know Him intimately through prayer, worship and the study of His Word, by being obedient to His commands, by walking in the Spirit and by exercising your faith to believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (see Heb. 11:6). 3

Iverna Tompkins *has been ministering nationally and internationally through Iverna Tompkins Ministries () for more than 45 years. She is the author of several books and is currently the chief of staff at Church for the Nations in Phoenix.*