

CHAPTER FIVE

Practicing God's Presence

Where I Am Re-formed

1 – I have been created to be like God, and to live continually in his Presence. These two reinforce each other.

2 – The more time I spend in God's Presence the more I become like him. The more I become like him the more I desire to be in his Presence.

3 – Why then does entering God's Presence and staying there seem so hard, so unnatural? Because I chose to go away from him. This damaged me.

4 – Separated from God's Presence, our inner lives became badly distorted. Trying to find our way on our own, harmful habits took root within.

5 – Distanced from Reality, being with God came to seem undesirable—unobtainable. Our need now is to be forgiven, cleansed, healed, re-formed.

6 – David's capacity to sin showed the state of his inner life. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." (Psalm 51:10)

7 – Learning how to live in God's Presence involves daily:

- dying with Christ to the old life
- relying on Christ for his resurrection life

8 – Isn't God everywhere? Surely I am always in his Presence. In one sense this is true. But we are referring to "presence" in another sense.

9 – Two people can be in the same room yet one not be "present" to the other. One can be relationally withdrawn while still physically "there".

10 – Humans can go away from God's Presence. "Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod." (Genesis 4:6)

11 – God is always and everywhere present to us, but we are not always present to him. In our ruined state we have learned to "block him out".

12 – Practicing God's Presence involves choosing actions to:

- un-learn blocking God out

- re-learn coming present to him and staying there

13 – God is Spirit. He does not normally make himself present to us through our physical senses, although he certainly can whenever he wishes.

14 – To practice God’s Presence:

- I rely on the fact that God is there
- I choose actions to help place my thoughts on him and keep them there

15 – As my thoughts wander from God, I learn to train them to return in shorter and shorter intervals. I ask the Spirit to transform my thoughts.

16 – In what way is all this “practice”? Learning any skill is practice: playing an instrument, speaking a language, mastering a sport, becoming a surgeon.

17 – To un-learn the wrong, then re-learn the right, some instruction is required. But there is no substitute for practice, practice, practice.

18 – Practice—moment by moment choices to establish new habits—is key to inner change. The Holy Spirit does the work; my choices invite him in.

19 – The Bible tells us to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), abide in Christ (John 15:4), be filled with the Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18) Each requires being in God’s Presence.

20 – These are all commands—activities for which we are responsible, relying on God. They describe “practicing” or “living in” God’s Presence.

21 – Prerequisite for living in God’s Presence is knowing how to access his forgiveness and cleansing. The cross of Christ accomplishes this.

22 – In prayer I bring sins of which I am aware to Christ on the cross. I tell him the truth (confession). I ask for forgiveness and cleansing. I trust him to hear and respond.

23 – Having brought my sin to Christ on the cross, I thank him for his forgiveness. I then wait to hear anything more he would say to me. I obey.

24 – As I bring my sins to Christ on the cross, I may not feel anything. Feelings are not required; truth in the inner life is required.

25 – The healing of my person begins when:

- I come into God’s Presence
- I listen for the healing word he is always ready to speak
- I obey

26 – I cannot heal myself. I cannot make myself holy. But I can learn how to obey. Jesus teaches me how in apprenticeship to him.

27 – Practicing God’s Presence is supported by spiritual exercises—activities for training the inner life—disciplines we learn from Jesus.

28 – Spiritual practices—prayer, study, fasting, giving, etc.—have no power to earn me favor with God. Nothing does! Favor with God is a gift.

29 – We freely choose spiritual practices:

- to counteract the effects of inner damage
- to open our lives to God’s transforming Presence

30 – Exercises for training the spirit are similar to exercises for training the body. Dallas Willard: Grace is not opposed to effort; grace is opposed to earning.

31 – “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalms 16:11)

