PRACTICING THE PRESENCE
Spiritual Disciplines Handbook (59-62)
by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

"*Several time 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

DESIRE	to develop a continual openness and awareness of Christ's presence living in me
DEFINITION	Practicing the presence is an invitation to see and experience every moment as a gift of God. It is to live alive to union with the Trinity.
SCRIPTURE	"Your new life, which is your real life-even though invisible to spectators-is with Christ in God. He is your life. When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you'll show up, too-the real you, the glorious you. Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ." (Colossians 3:3-4 *The Message*) "The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it." (Deuteronomy 30:14) "You have your heads in your Bibles constantly because you think you'll find eternal life there. But you miss the forest for the trees. These Scriptures are all about me! And here I am, standing right before you, and you aren't willing to receive from me the life you say you want." (John 5:39-40 *The Message*)
PRACTICE INCLUDE	• developing a rhythm of living that brings God to mind throughout the day • intentionally recollecting yourself before God as you engage in the activities and duties of life • seeking to see others through the eyes of God • stopping throughout the day to listen to God • carrying or placing symbols in your office and home that remind you of Christ's presence • using breath prayer, centering prayer
GOD-GIVEN FRUIT	• keeping company with Jesus all day long • having a deeper union with Christ • living a new way of being by letting go of your need to manipulate, compete and control • living as though the present moment has no competition • receiving each moment as sacred • abiding in Christ so that you see him in those who drain, irritate and anger • seeing yourself through God's eyes rather than the eyes of others • finding Christ as your joy, sorrow, emptiness and fullness • remaining open and teachable at all moments • growing in awareness of your constant need of God

PRACTICING THE PRESENCE

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 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 form 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 on Practicing the Presence

The God Hunt by Karen Mains
Invitation to Presence by Wendy Miller
Living Presence by Tilden Edwards
Practicing the Presence by Brother Lawrence

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