

Practicing Presence

How do we practice the presence of God? Through prayer and service.

Prayer

Prayer is entering into the presence of God here and now. Prayer is the way in which we become present to the moment and listen to God who is with us. God is always where we are. God is with us until the end of time. We have to be here. We have to listen. We have to be attentive. Prayer is the discipline of attentiveness, of being here.

I really want to ask you to practice prayer as a practice of the presence of God. You don't have to say many words. You don't have to have deep thoughts. You don't have to worry about how to think. You can just be where you are and say, "I love you. I love you. I know you love me and I love you. I don't have any big things to say. I don't have any profound words to express, but I am here and I want you to be with me and I want to be with you." It is that simple. It is a very simple thing. Prayer is not complicated. It is not difficult. If people ask you how you pray just tell them, "Sit down and say, 'Lord, here I am.'"

Distractions mean that we are being pulled into the past or into the future. That is what a distraction is.

We start thinking about what happened yesterday or what is happening tomorrow. Distractions mean we are not yet fully here. We are not fully present yet. That is okay. You have to smile to yourself and say, "I am distracted. I am not fully here. I am not fully trusting. I am still all over the place. I want to pray, but I am still thinking about this person who got to me yesterday and I wish I could give her a little talk," or "Tomorrow, I have to go to work and my son has to go to the hospital, and I have to see this person tomorrow to discuss a promotion." Sure, that is us—we are never totally here. If we were totally here we would be in heaven so we are never totally here. We are a little bit in the past, a little bit in the future, and all over the place, actually.

But even so, it is very important to say, "I want to be more here because I know that you, God, are here. I know you love me. I know that all I need is here and therefore I am going to sit here for a moment and say thank you for being a faithful God, thank you for your name I AM. Thank you for your Son, Jesus, who came to be with us. Thank you for the Spirit, who dwells in me so deeply that I don't even feel it all the time or experience it, but I know it. I know, just as I know that I am breathing without feeling that breath all the time, so I know that you, God, are with me even if I don't feel it all the time."

Prayer is that simple presence that we have to practice. I promise you, if you practice prayer you will be

fully rewarded. God does not wait long to tell you how close he is to you. A lot of struggles you have about the past or the future might become less painful or less dominating or less imprisoning. They will always be there—you will always be distracted and always be worrying—but you have a place in yourself that is rather free of it. You have your fears, your anxieties, and they are all around you, but in the center of all the storms there is this quiet place where you can say, “I love you. You love me. It is here and now. It is good to be here. It is good to be in your presence, Lord. I don’t need anything else.”

Service

Service is being involved in something that is for the people of God.

At times, we might be involved in larger things—clothing the naked, sheltering the poor, helping the refugees, visiting the sick or imprisoned, but it is always small to begin with. It begins with small gestures. Being kind to your family and the people you work with, saying a patient word, writing a card, sending a flower.

Be attentive. Be attentive. Be attentive.

When we pray frequently and know that God is in us here and now, we are very attentive to others because we are less preoccupied with ourselves. We are less worried about ourselves and if we are not very wor-