

**PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD**

**Ron Christian, Compiler**

**Growing A Godly Life” - Devotional Series**

**Book 5 - Divine Communion**

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**INTRODUCTION TO BOOK FIVE**

**By  
Ron Christian**

**Throughout the Holy Scriptures there are two ‘pictures’ of God. God is pictured as the High and Lofty and Majestic One. God is also pictured as the Personal and Intimate One. Both are valid pictures of God and each picture is needed to balance the other. To think of God in His transcendence is to be filled with awe, reverence, and ‘holy’ fear. To think of God in His immanence is to be filled with courage, joy, and purpose.**

**‘Transcendence’ means that which surpasses physical reality; that which is beyond man’s comprehension. It is a common fact that there are many things in the physical realm that are beyond man’s understanding. We can’t fully comprehend the vastness of the universe. We can’t fully understand the human mind or soul. We can’t fully comprehend the happenings around us - many of which are full of ‘mystery’ and ‘perplexities’. If we can’t understand these things, it is certain that we mere humans cannot fully comprehend Almighty God! His ‘ways’ are past finding out. His ways are higher than our ways, as high as the heavens are above the earth! However, simply because we cannot understand God, does not make God any less real. Because an ant cannot understand Einstein’s Law of Relativity (and most men cannot), does that fact make his Law any less a reality? God is in a realm beyond man’s capacity to understand. “God is Creator and we are but the created. Shall the created one complain if he does not understand all the mind of the Creator?” (Stand Up In Praise To God; Paul Rees; pg. 19)**

**God is different than man, so different that it is difficult to even compare man with God. God is the Eternal Creator, while man the creature is confined by the limitations of time. God is the High and Lofty One (Isaiah 57: 15; Psalm 29: 4; Psalm 93: 1). God is above all things, and all things belong to Him (I Chronicles 29: 11). God is all-powerful (Isaiah 40: 12, 15). God’s name is Holy (Isaiah 57: 15). None can be likened unto God or be His equal (Exodus 15: 11). Man’s encounter with the Holy One naturally creates reverential fear (Genesis 28: 16-17; Exodus 3: 2-6; Isaiah 6: 1-6; Revelation 15: 4).**

**The Christian believes that God is objectively real and distinct from the universe. The created presupposes the Creator who is over and above the creation.**

**While the Christian acknowledges God’s holiness, loftiness, and majesty, the Christian’s knowledge of God is found in other ways than through the transcendent qualities of Almighty God. “The Hebraic-Christian knowledge of God is not knowledge of God in his transcendent ‘otherness’ (which is plainly impossible to man’s finite spirit), but in his active nearness, as it is experienced in nature and history and in the inmost shrine of the individual soul. The most high God, though transcending his creation and abiding in his holy heaven, is nevertheless nigh unto men.” (Christian Doctrine; Whale; pg. 113)**

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**The Christian acknowledges God’s transcendence, but the Christian never entertains an idea of God as cold, disinterested, or detached from human activity. The Christian acknowledges the difficulty of comprehending how God can be personally interested in every person’s problems, and how God can simultaneously hear every man’s prayers. However, it is because the Christian does not mold God into some type of superhuman man, but instead acknowledges God as supra-human (beyond human categories), that the Christian is able to accept the concept of God’s total and personal involvement in the ‘human situation’.**

**God is everywhere present in His world. *“I can never be lost to your Spirit! I can never get away from my God! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there. If I ride the morning winds to the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, your strength will support me. If I try to hide in the darkness, the night becomes light around me. For even darkness cannot hide from God; to you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are both alike to you.”* (Psalm 139: 7-12, Living Bible) “Tell me where is God”, said an atheist to a child. “I will”, said the child, “if you will tell me where He is not.”**

**Far from God being detached and disinterested in man, God is always taking the initiative in seeking man. There is a story of a woman who was trying to find God. “She had a certain dream which she dreamed more than once, namely, that she was standing in front of a thick, plate glass window. As she looked at it, she seemed to see God on the other side. She hammered on the window, trying to attract His attention, but without success. She grew more and more desperate, and began to call to Him and found herself shrieking at the top of her voice. And then a quiet, calm voice at her side said: ‘Why are you making so much noise? There is nothing between us’. Perhaps that illustrates our difficulty, does it not? We have been thinking all along that God was somewhere far away, unapproachable...some place that was difficult of access...and we have been groping around for a long time, and all the while He is standing beside us.” (Mr. Jones, Meet the Master; Peter Marshall; pg. 131)**

**The God who is the Lofty One is also the God who is the Immanent One - the One who is pleased to dwell with the man that is contrite and humble. The Majestic God is the Merciful God - the God who “revives the spirit of the humble” (Isaiah 57: 15). God gives strength to the weak. *“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”* (Isaiah 40: 29-31)**

**The greatest of all revelations is the revelation that God is a personal God, that He is personally concerned in every person who has ever lived or who will ever live! God**

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wants to be a personal friend of man! God treats every individual in a personable and friendly way! He loves each person in the world as if there was only one person in the world to love! He counts the hair on each person's head! “A community canvass was being made. At a certain door the questioner asked the woman who answered his knock what children she had. She began, ‘Well, there's Willie, and Horace’. But the canvasser interrupted, ‘Never mind names, I just want numbers.’ Then she grew impatient and a bit indignant. ‘They haven't got numbers’, she protested. ‘Every one of them's got a name.’ Quite so! They were her children. She was their mother. They had personalities that spoke with all the eloquence of their individual characteristics. She knew them not by number but by name. So God looks upon His human creatures. Why, according to Isaiah He calls even the stars by names.” (Stand Up In Praise To God; Paul Rees; pgs. 23, 24) God knows all things that are going on in His world. *“For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings.”* (Job 34:21) God knows the ‘John Doe’ on the street corner, with all his problems and frustrations. God has an infinite concern for him!

A healthy concept of God takes into account both God's transcendence and God's immanence. God's transcendence will keep us from becoming too intimate or ‘familiar’ with Almighty God. It is nothing less than blasphemy to describe God as ‘the Man upstairs’! No human being is to ‘buddy’ with the High and Holy One! On the other hand, Jesus taught His followers to call God ‘Abba’ (Father)! God, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, is closer to man than his hands and feet and breathing! God's ‘immanence’ (closeness) guarantees faith and courage, and gives comfort in the face of life's many conflicts and calamities. True worship of God will always combine these two aspects of God - transcendence and immanence. The following incident illustrates this healthy combination, the combination of God's Majesty and God's Intimacy. “Joseph Twitchell tells how he went to visit Horace Bushnell when Bushnell was an old man. At night Bushnell took him out for a walk on the hillside. As they walked in the dark, suddenly Bushnell said, ‘Let us kneel and pray’, and so he prayed. Twitchell, telling of it afterwards, said, ‘I was afraid to stretch out my hand in the darkness in case I should touch God.’” (Daily Study Bible; Corinthians; William Barclay; pg. 148) Here there was the intimate nearness of God and also the awesome transcendence of God. Both must be acknowledged and nurtured in the life of the true believer.

To repeat what was earlier stated: “Knowledge of God is not knowledge of God in his transcendent ‘otherness’ (which is plainly impossible to man's finite spirit), but in his active nearness, as it is experienced in nature and history and in the inmost shrine of the individual soul.” Before a human can experience any personal fellowship with God, he must affirm the fact of God's omni-presence. Said John Wesley, “True, our narrow understanding but imperfectly comprehends this. But as He created and sustains all things, He is present at all time, in all places.”

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**The Christian who takes seriously the Christian doctrine of the 'omni-presence of God' is the Christian who 'practices the presence of God' in his life, by meditating often on the power and the love of God and by praying often throughout his everyday routine. Susanna Wesley believed that it was important to recognize that God is not confined to 'the closet' (of secret prayer during one's regular devotional period), but that God is everywhere and that He can be loved and worshiped (during the multitude of daily household tasks). Later in her life Susanna prayed, "Help me, Lord, to remember that religion is not to be confined to the church, or closet, nor exercised only in prayer and meditation, but that everywhere I am in Thy presence." This is 'incarnational Christianity' - recognizing that the God who incarnated Himself in human flesh through Jesus Christ is the God who continues to be intimately involved in all of man's activities and relationships! Many years ago Ruth Graham (the wife of the famous evangelist Billy Graham) advocated this type of praying throughout the entire day. As a busy housewife she said that she did not have time to get down on her knees often. She admitted that she did most of her praying "on the hoof". She then said: "But to know that you can wash dishes, iron, clean, shop, drive, and in whatever you have to do, Jesus Christ is there beside you, urging you to talk over your problems with him - that is a joy and a comfort it is impossible to describe." (Alive To God Through Prayer; Donald Demaray; pg. 89) Frank Laubach, the famous Christian who brought literacy to millions of persons throughout the world, 'practiced the presence of God' in his life in amazing and wonderful ways. He learned regularly to commune with God as he carried on a most active and productive ministry. He developed the skill of listening to God speak to him while he worked. On March 11, 1937, while he was working on a literacy plan for the Urdu Dialect Indian dialect, he wrote, "Of all today's miracles, the greatest is this: To know that I find Thee best when I work listening, not when I am still or meditative or even on my knees in prayer, but when I work listening and co-operating." (Streams of Living Water; Richard Foster; pg. 44)**

**The phrase 'Practicing the Presence of God' was made popular by Brother Lawrence (Nicholas Herman) who wrote a 'spiritual classic' by this title. This man who lived in the seventeenth century (1611-1691) worked as a cook in his Discalced ("barefooted") Carmelite community. He wrote, "For me the time of action does not differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are together calling for as many different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as when upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament.....I made this my business, as much all the day long as at the appointed times of prayer; or at all times, every hour, every minute, even in the height of my business, I drove away from my mind everything that was capable of interrupting my thought of God....When we are faithful to keep ourselves in His holy Presence, and set Him always before us; this not only hinders our offending Him, and doing anything that may displease Him, at least wilfully, but it also begets in us a holy freedom, and if I may so speak, a familiarity with God, wherewith we ask, and that successfully, the graces we stand in need of. In fine, by often repeating these acts, they become habitual, and the presence of God is rendered as it were natural to**

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**us...There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with God: those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it: yet I do not advise you to do it from that motive; it is not pleasure which we ought to seek in this exercise; but let us do it from a principle of love, and because God would have us...He requires no great matters of us; a little remembrance of Him from time to time, a little adoration: sometimes to pray for His grace, sometimes to offer Him your sufferings, and sometimes to return Him thanks for the favors He has given you, and still gives you, in the midst of your troubles, and to console yourself with Him the ofttest you can. Lift up your heart to Him, sometimes even at your meals, and when you are in company: the least little remembrance will always be acceptable to Him. You need not cry very loud; He is nearer to us than we are aware of.” (The Christian Reader, Inspirational and Devotional Classics; compiled and edited by Stanley Irving Stuber; pgs. 288, 293-295)**

**OMNIPRESENCE**

**Lord of all being! Throned afar,  
Thy glory flames from sun and star;  
Center and soul of every sphere,  
Yet to each loving heart how near!**

**Sun of our life, thy quickening ray  
Sheds on our path the glow of day;  
Star of our hope, thy softened light  
Cheers the long watches of the night.**

**Lord of all life, below, above,  
Whose light is truth, whose warmth is love,  
Before thy ever-blazing throne  
We ask no luster of our own.**

**Grant us thy truth to make us free,  
And kindling hearts that burn for thee,  
Till all thy living altars claim  
One holy light, one heavenly flame.**

**Oliver W. Holmes**

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **CONTEMPLATE HIS MAJESTIC PERSONHOOD**

**Psalm 143:5-10; Colossians 1:27**

### **COMMUNING MOMENT BY MOMENT WITH THE LORD**

**The Psalmist says, “...Do not hide Thy face from me, lest I become like those who go down to the pit. Let me hear Thy loving kindness in the morning; for I trust in Thee; teach me the way in which I should walk...” (Psalm 143: 7b-8, NASB) What does it say to those around us if our lives as Christians are like unbelievers’ lives, or, in the dramatic words of the Psalm, like those who go down to the pit? What if we are not very much different from an ungodly culture generally? If the observer is a thinking person, it must be obvious: either our God does not exist, or He exists but we are not in touch with Him.**

**Is the evidence for the grace and power of God lacking in the lives of those who claim to be his people? Could this be the cause for much of the reluctance in our culture to take the claims of Christianity seriously? Let us consider these things in very practical terms: do we spend our resources (e.g. time, money, love, energy) in a manner significantly different from the unbelievers around us? Do we commit to and love our spouses in such a way that others take notice? Do our children reflect a style of parenting that might suggest hope and answers to an onlooker struggling with her own children? What do we do with our leisure time? Do our lives generally display a wholeness, a focus, a sense of purpose that is appealing to someone seeking truth and meaning?**

**If not, then perhaps we should not wonder that there is little motivation to listen to our earnest “witnessing” about the Lord. There is no evidence. There is nothing to cause the hearer to believe that what we say is anything more than a fairy tale of our own making.**

**It is not uncommon, following these uncomfortable observations, for the Christian to fall back on one or both of two responses: “I shared the message and have done my part, it is the fault of the other who has chosen to reject God.” Perhaps, as painful as it is, the listener is simply rejecting us, because our lives do not demonstrate that we have an answer that is real.**

**The second response is often to say, “Then I must work harder. I must learn more so that my life will reflect an attractiveness to others. I must get up earlier, and study harder, and invest more, and surrender more completely.” And how long will you sustain that effort? And what will be attractive about a life of exacting discipline, of unending incompleteness, of never being “good enough”?**

**No, instead let us return to our hypothetical observer in the first paragraph. Notice what he says. Either God does not exist or we are not in touch with Him. If God is as**

**we claim Him to be, as we believe the Bible teaches us about Him, and if were in touch with Him, would that clear up the problem? Surely if we really knew and were in close communion with out God, our lives would reflect the meaning, purpose, order, peace, and wholesomeness that is found only in Him. Notice again what Paul writes: “...*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*” (Colossians 1: 27, NIV) Let us then not work harder or strive more diligently, but let us commune moment by moment with the Lord, and then allow things to take their course: for surely as He fills us and indwells us, our lives must reflect some of His beauty and brightness.**

**“Lord, teach me and help me to be so in tune with you that those around me cannot help but be drawn to you as they see the way I live. Not through me, but through you living in me. Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus Christ in me is all my hope and strength.**

**- Erik Ritschard -**

**NOTES:**

**Luke 10: 38-42, Matthew 11: 28-30**

**BEING IN CHRIST IS FIRST - ‘DOING’ FOR CHRIST IS SECOND**

**Perhaps there are some, who upon reflection on yesterday’s devotion, will respond, “But surely we must do something. Surely we are meant for more than just a contemplative life of fellowship with God. Surely we must worship, and work, and put into action the things that we believe.” And the answer, obviously, is of course we must. Nevertheless the questions remain: What inspires our worship? What empowers our actions?**

**Are we as Christians pursuing good things because they are our duty, or because our church expects us to do them, or because we have some vague sense that they are somehow morally right? Where will be the difference or the attractiveness in that? Unbelievers strive for personal and social goals as well. They too often have a sense of duty that inspires discipline and work. They too can translate their beliefs into action and accomplish “great” things. What then is the difference, or ought to be the difference, between the lives of unbelievers and of Christians? What should it be that makes our lives an attractive witness to the saving grace and power of God?**

**When a person observes the life of an unbeliever who is accomplishing significant things in the world, he or she must observe, “What a great man!” Or perhaps, “What marvelous faculties she has!” Or again, “What drive, what ambition!” Yet in contrast, perhaps when the Christian is observed the comments should be, “How is this possible?” “What does this mean?” “If only my life were so ordered and at peace!”**

**It is not the things we do which will attract others to the Lord. It is who we are. Anyone can do. Doing can be comparatively easy, especially for a short time. Being is another matter. How many do you know who are at rest with themselves and the world? How many are deeply content, at peace, and whole? Do we not earnestly seek these things? Do we not long for them? Are they not precisely what Jesus offers to us? Why then do they often seem to be in short supply?**

**Perhaps we Christians often substitute Activity for Being, and in doing so, reduce or negate the meaning and the value of our activity. To be sure, the things we do are often “good” things, but are they keeping us from thinking of and investing in something better? What good is “witnessing” if we witness only of ourselves? What good is “serving” if we are motivated by our own need for affirmation and approval? What help will “giving” be if we do so only to receive something in return?**

**What then is needed? Perhaps we also should choose the part of Mary, who, sitting at the feet of Jesus, was commended as having “chosen what is better.” If we were to sit at His feet and find “rest for our souls,” we would become Whole, a real man or woman who would then be fully equipped to Do in a world desperately in need of genuine**

**Christianity.**

**“Father, give me understanding as to how I can “sit at your feet” and be refreshed today. Show me how to make it my priority. Teach me how to delight myself in you. I give you my whole self to be yours forever. Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Today I am anticipating the answer to my prayer as God speaks to me and teaches me.**

**- Erik Ritschard -**

**NOTES:**

Luke 10: 38-42; Matthew 11: 28-30

**SERVICE - THE OVERFLOW OF LOVE FOR GOD!**

We have still left the question of Doing partially unanswered. If Christians focus on sitting at Jesus’ feet, how will the work get done? Someone in Mary and Martha’s house probably asked the same question. Can you hear the muttering? “Terrific, so we all sit at Jesus’ feet, and the food gets cold, and we all are hungry and tired. Why is Jesus so impractical?”

Review what Jesus says to Martha: “*You are worried about many things, but only one thing is needed.*” One thing? Out of all the complexity of our lives we are to believe that only one thing is needed? What is this One, this Singleness, that is all we need? We must conclude, as we noted yesterday, that the One Thing we need is simply the Lord. So again, how does the work get done?

“The work” disappears. Perhaps Martha muttered, or someone else in the house muttered, as Jesus commended Mary. Sit at His feet a moment, though. What is food compared to this moment, this teaching, this authority, this love, this peace, this wholeness that just radiates from His being? What are the preparations in comparison? Why, they are nothing - if they must still be done they become only a fleeting moment, a joyful, brief outworking of what we have been hearing. “Love my neighbor? Why yes, I will, in the simple, wonderful act of laying out this table that they may be refreshed. Care for the needy? Why, there are needy right here in my household. No, Mary, please - you relax and let me take care of this.”

What has happened? The burden of the work has been lifted, to be replaced by true work: work that is a reflection of our time spent at Jesus’ feet, work that shines and radiates with love and joy and the best we have to offer because it is suddenly in perspective and focus. Our communion with Jesus and with our heavenly Father so changes our perspective and our attitude that what we previously thought of as “work,” we now pursue naturally because it has become a consequence of our being. We become loving, thoughtful, kind, peaceful, whole men and women; and in becoming so, we begin to act accordingly. When we sit at Jesus’ feet, when we commune moment by moment with the Father, then our lives will reflect His glory, then people will reflect His glory, then people will be attracted to the Father because of what they see in us, and then our witness will be genuine indeed.

“Lord, as my life proceeds today, Help me to ever see, That in all that I must do and say, I have need of only Thee. Amen.”

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The same God who saved me can live through me moment by moment and make me effective in all my roles in life.**

**- Erik Ritschard -**

**NOTES:**

Luke 19: 38-42; Psalm 62: 1-8

### SITTING OFTEN AT JESUS' FEET

Someone may conclude, after yesterday's reading, that what has been said is all well and good, but that it is too simplistic, too idealistic, too unrealistic. After all, we live in a world of pain and sorrow, and suffering, and death. Do you tell the single young mother, struggling with life, “You need only sit at Jesus' feet?” Do you speak such words to the grieving widow who has just lost her husband? To the homeless man on the street? No.

Those words are for ourselves, and will be difficult enough at times. When the inevitable difficulties and tragedies of life crowd in, we will find it very challenging indeed to “let go” and “sit” at Jesus' feet. Yet this is exactly where faith enters in. What does Jesus say? “Only one thing is needed.” Do we believe Him? When we are really busy, really hurting, really exhausted, really at our wit's end, do we believe Him? Do we trust Him? Will He help us?

The others around us we care for and love in very practical ways as a reflection of our being in Christ. Because we have been sitting at His feet, we find shelter for the homeless, comfort the grieving with out time and other resources, provide help for the helpless. For ourselves, we go back to Jesus. We sit at His feet again. We listen, and pour out our hearts, and sometimes we weep. We take to Him all that is too big for us, and all that confuses, and all that distracts. The others we can lead to Jesus as they are ready and as He calls them. We must already be in His presence, being renewed daily, being filled, being again made whole in the midst of so much fragmentation.

Is your life filled with challenge now, with change, perhaps with grief? Is there suffering, or anger, or fear? Are you weary with “being a Christian,” tired of life's injustices, ready to give up? “You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.” This is not idealism, this is how God has chosen to do genuine work among men. Come, sit at his feet in faith. Be renewed; be healed in spirit and soul. The circumstances around you may not change, but you will change, and then your life and lives of others can change as well. Will you believe the Lord? Come, let Him take your burden, come sit at His feet. *“My soul finds rest in God alone...”* (Psalm 62: 1, NIV)

“Lord, it is tempting to disbelieve, but I need and want you. Please take me into your arms just now. I turn again from trying to live by my own strength and my own will, and surrender it all again to you. Teach me how to be at your feet even as the moments of each day pass. Take this situation that is consuming me, and change me so that I may work out your will in the midst of this circumstance. Change me, Lord, change me. I want to be a true reflection of your glory, a real witness in the world. I want to see your power in my life. I want to be so filled with you that my life cannot help but be a witness

**to others. Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: In the midst of the challenges of my day, I will remember who God is and what He has promised.**

**- Erik Ritschard -**

**NOTES:**

**Proverbs 23: 7; Philippians 4: 8**

**THINK!**

**First of all, draw seven perpendicular - parallel - equal lines. Next, add five lines to these, and when properly placed you have printed the word “THINK”. You have no doubt been interrupted in conversation after using the word THINK, by a friend jovially saying, “That’s a new experience, isn’t it?” The remark - “His mouth is in gear but his mind isn’t” is too often true.**

**The thought life is an integral part of us, this being verified both from personal experience and the Word of God. Proverbs (23: 7) says that *“as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.”* What we are outwardly is a result of what we are inwardly.**

**Conveniences are ever present to assist us in thinking. The paperbacks on book stands lend themselves to “filth for thought,” and the civil laws are the only prohibitive barriers corralling the thought from breaking forth into actions. Packaged diversion of all kinds beckon the individual to become a glutton on the garbage offered to the mind. Thousands of people live mentally in the gutter of life, though outwardly respectable.**

**Paul realized the value of the controlled thought life when he wrote: *“Fill your minds with those things that are good and deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable”* (Philippians 4: 8, Living Bible) The sky is the limit and there are no fences here. Correct thinking is an old sound principle affording inner health. Carroll Simcox said: “The soul is dyed in the color of that which it habitually contemplates.”**

**The following true account reveals the importance of developing a heart and mind that thinks upon things that edify. “When Hanns Lilje, the courageous German Evangelical pastor, was imprisoned by the Nazi, he kept not only his faith but his sanity alive by use of his inscape (defined as what you see with that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude.) In his book of witness, The Valley of the Shadow, he relates:**

**“I made a strictly ordered rule-of-life for each day, which included regular meditation and prolonged periods of prayer, followed by periods of thought on theological and ecclesiastical questions. The result of these reflections helps me in my work today. Since I had no paper to write down the result of my thinking I not only repeated it over and over again, in order to impress it upon my memory, but I frequently translated my thoughts into English, or French, or even into Latin, and this, in itself, did my memory a great deal of good. Under these circumstances, I could only repeat passages from the Bible, and verses from the hymn book, which I had retained in my memory. How grateful I am to all my teachers who had made me learn by heart hymns and**

**poems, Greek lyrics, Latin odes, or Hebrew psalms! They provided me with a treasure which in those hard days was literally priceless.”**

**Think! Fill the mind with good things.**

**“Dear Lord, you give to us so many helps to enable the mind and heart to muse upon: the Bible, good books, music, nature. Thank you! Amen!”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: In the midst of things that direct our attention to things less valuable, I will think on noble things for spiritual edification.**

**- Floyd Cooper -**

**NOTES:**

**Psalms 118: 22-29**

### **THE POWER AND GLORY OF PRAISE AND WORSHIP**

**Driving in the thick of early morning rush hour traffic is an incredible experience. Most drivers use it as a time to wake up. Some put on their make-up while others talk on their cellular phones. I found myself doing something quite unique and wonderful during my rush hour drive. I spent that time worshipping my God.**

**This experience is only different because normally I would spend that time in prayer for myself - what I need to do that day or some other personal concern. But this week I turned my focus on Jesus and simply, yet beautifully, started to praise His name. I spoke scriptures which I could remember and sang choruses and old hymns. For half an hour each day I was caught up in the wonder and majesty of my God.**

**What was significantly different about my week is that I could tell that God was always going before me. When I would spend time offering Him my personal worship, the opportunities of the day were opened wide. Those opportunities may have presented themselves any way, but I was acutely more aware of His presence. I had a confidence and a peace about me.**

**At one point, driving in a neighborhood which was unfamiliar to me, I was praising God in song and prayer while searching for an address where I had an appointment. After missing the turn I wanted to take, I turned on the next street, only to find the building right on that corner. Now, the building was always there - God didn't move it to accommodate my prayer, but he nudged me to drive one block further to find my destination. That was how my week proceeded because I continued to worship God each day.**

**God inhabits the praise of His people. In other words, when we worship Him, He will be there with us. By relinquishing my usual pattern of praying for myself and turning my full attention on my most awesome God, I found Him always close, leading me without having to ask it of Him.**

**If you want to be close to God, praise Him. Forget yourself and recognize you are in the presence of the great “I AM!” Not only will God be with you, but He will go ahead of you. There is nothing more exciting than knowing God is already at your next appointment.**

**“O God, I know there is no magic formula by which I will receive Your blessing. No phrase...no word...no incantation will cause You to turn Your ears to me. Nonetheless, I will worship and praise You all the days of my life, for You alone are God and are deserving of my worship. I praise Your name! To the glory of my Lord Jesus. Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God does not want me to pretend to worship Him. He wants me to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Because the Lord is with me, I will praise Him.**

**- Thomas Duckworth -**

**NOTES:**

**Romans 12: 11**

**MAINTAIN THE SPIRITUAL GLOW**

**Home from the hospital, the little guy cried much of the night. Walking the floor and offering warm milk were to no avail. Exhausted, my wife called our neighbor, a nurse, who came, added a blanket or two and he slept peacefully into the morning. He needed extra physical warmth which was not found earlier.**

**Olin Curtis in 'The Christian Faith', writing of the Christian exertion (activity) of the Holy Spirit, says: "1) The Holy Spirit does something for every man; 2) but He will do more for the moral person who, in anytime, or in any place, makes his best personal response to the initiative moral pressure; 3) and He will do still more for men in any situation where the Christian message is declared; 4) and He will do still more for men when the Christian message is declared in a situation which is quick with the faith and love and sacrifice belonging to actual Christian experience."**

**A definition of terms and reading through this statement will enable one to more fully comprehend what Curtis is saying. But, it is the fourth point now which is worth our consideration. And I want to place that statement in the context of the worship/prayer/Bible study services of the church.**

**The fourth statement above is involved with an atmosphere. "...and He (the Holy Spirit) will do still more for men when the Christian message is declared in a situation which is quick with the faith and love and sacrifice belonging to actual Christian experience." Is he not saying that the Christian in that situation is really alive when there is faith, love, and a sense of God's presence in his life?**

**A warm spiritual atmosphere prepared by our cooperation with the Holy Spirit, is essential. Consequently, the sinner will be convinced of his/her sin, or drawn to the Savior because of the atmosphere of God's presence. Consequently, the Christian at such a service will leave with strength and courage, ready to face problems which may be present. Depending on the individual's state, hope, love, positiveness, faith, etc., will be realized.**

**Lukewarmness in the heart will lower the 'temperature' in a service. With the heart's hearth ablaze with devotion to God, the 'temperature' rises. Paul exhorts us in Romans 12: 11 - "*Be aglow with the Spirit.*" The same scripture paraphrased by others says: "Maintain the spiritual glow" (Moffatt). "Be aglow and burning with the Spirit" (ANT). "Keep the fire of the Spirit burning" (JBP).**

**The words of a recent song of affirmation fits well here -**

**There’s a sweet, sweet spirit in this place,  
And I know that it’s the Spirit of the Lord.**

**When I speak of a warm spiritual atmosphere in a church service, you understand what I say, don’t you? The atmosphere of love and grace and God’s presence will fragrantize the places of worship, bringing healing, hope, courage, joy and uplift to those in attendance.**

**“O Lord, we covet the Holy Spirit to be present in every church service in order to minister to people in their needs.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: As I open the curtains of this day, I will keep the fires of the Spirit burning upon my heart’s altar in order to bless others.**

**- Floyd Cooper -**

**NOTES:**

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1. What does it say to those around us if our lives as Christians are like unbelievers' lives (i.e., like those who go down to the 'pit' - Psalm 143: 7-8)?**
- 2. Why is evidence for the grace and power of God so often lacking in the lives of those who claim to be Christians? If we (as believers) do not closely follow Christ (and consistently demonstrate the love and compassion of Christ in our lives), can we expect unbelievers to take the claims of Christ seriously? Why or why not? What makes you different from those around you who do not know God?**
- 3. Share ways in which following Christ should seriously make a difference in:**
  - (a) The way you spend your money.**
  - (b) The way you spend your time.**
  - (c) The way you treat your spouse.**
  - (d) The way you love and discipline your children.**
  - (e) The way you use your leisure time.**
- 4. Give your personal response (or reaction) to the following statement: “Perhaps, as painful as it is, the listener (i.e., the unbeliever to whom we are witnessing) is simply rejecting us, because our lives do not demonstrate that we have an answer that is real.”**
- 5. What is it that most challenges nonbelievers to seriously consider the claims of Christ, and that most attracts nonbelievers to the beautiful person of Christ? (Note Colossians 1: 27)**
- 6. In terms of ‘character’ and ‘motivations’, how can you tell the difference between a morally-oriented and highly-disciplined and humanitarian-minded non-believer who accomplishes “great things” through his serious discipline and hard work, and a highly disciplined Christian who seeks seriously to commune with God and to fill his life with “good works”?**
- 7. Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “It is not the things we ‘Do’ which will attract others to the Lord. It is who we ‘Are’.”**
- 8. Regardless of how many “great things” a nonbeliever does in the world, is it possible for such a person to be deeply and inwardly content, and at peace with himself, and genuinely ‘whole’, without his experiencing a personal conversion to God?**
- 9. Which should come First - ‘Being’ in Christ, or ‘Doing’ for Christ? Why?**

- 10. Out of the complexity of our lives (as believers), with our multitude of activities and plans and relationships, what is the one indispensable thing that is needed in our lives?**
- 11. Tell if you believe it is Biblically accurate to declare the following: “Christian Service in the world is simply the overflow of deep love for God which is discovered and cultivated in the quiet and intimacy of personal communion with Almighty God. Our communion with Jesus and with our heavenly Father so changes our perspective and our attitude that what we previously thought of as ‘work’, we now pursue naturally because it has become a consequence of our Being. Because we have been sitting at His feet, we find shelter for the homeless, comfort the grieving with our time and other resources, provide help for the helpless.”**
- 12. Tell to what extent you agree (or disagree) with the following statement: “What we are outwardly is a result of what we are inwardly.” (Note Proverbs 23: 7)**
- 13. Give your personal explanation and illustration of the following statement: “The soul is dyed in the color of that which it habitually contemplates.”**
- 14. Why is it so important for a Christian to fill his mind with “good thoughts”, through memorization of Holy Scripture and through meditation on edifying thoughts in inspirational books?**
- 15. Do you make it a practice to spend at least a short time each day in offering personal worship and praise to your God, simply “bathing” in His presence and love? If so, when and where and how? What has been the result, in terms of spiritual and practical benefits, to yourself? Tell what the following statement means to you: “God inhabits the praise of His people.”**
- 16. From your own personal life, share a time when you found the following to be “very true”: “If you want to be close to God, praise Him. Forget yourself and recognize you are in the presence of the great ‘I Am’!”**
- 17. As a believer, what can you personally do (in terms of disciplined responses) to help “keep the fires of the Spirit burning” on the altar of your heart, in order that your life may bless and encourage others (both fellow Christians and non-believers)? (Note Romans 12: 11) As an earnest Christian, do you have a “wholesome fear” that you may “quench” or “grieve” or “embarrass” the blessed Holy Spirit who indwells your life? (Note Ephesians 4: 30) How would such a “wholesome fear” be a deterrent to your yielding to temptation?**



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **APPRECIATE HIS CONSTANT PRESENCE**

**Job 37: 1-24**

### **SENSING GOD’S PRESENCE AT UNEXPECTED TIMES**

**Surprise! Don’t you just love it when friends sneak up behind you and shout, “Surprise!” You are always glad to see them, even though you may have been startled by the surprise. What is most wonderful is the feeling which comes from knowing they really care about you, otherwise they would not attempt to surprise you.**

**Although I really should not have been surprised, it was a pleasant surprise. While driving to work early one morning a bright flash reflected into my eyes from my car’s rearview mirror. Instinctively I shifted my vision toward the mirror and witnessed a most beautiful sunrise. The sun glowed with a passionate orange, sending streams of light through the snow laden tree branches. The coral colors reflected off of the magnificent clouds which surrounded the flaming sphere. And God said, “Surprise!”**

**Three distinct reactions occurred only seconds after seeing this beautiful sunrise. First, I chuckled. It was humorous to be surprised in such a gorgeous fashion. Second, I condemned myself for being surprised. I should have known that God is always near. There should be no surprise to turn around and see Him behind us. Third, I was moved that He cared enough to touch my spirit in such an awesome way. Within my heart I felt as if this morning’s sunrise was just for me.**

**The remainder of the day held no particular blessings. Nothing spectacular happened after this delightful experience. It was a moment in time, an instant, if you will, where I was reminded that God was watching over me and He just wanted me to know. His watchful eye was not judging me, or causing me to feel I had better watch every move I make. He just wanted me to know that He was there and He cares. That was sufficient.**

**I still smile over this experience, vividly remembering the bursting orange colors in my mirror. I still have to remind myself that God is always near. He is in the sunshine that is sneaking through the window shade as I write this. He is in the air I breathe. He is in the memories I hold dear. Most of all, I still know that He cares.**

**Isn’t it amazing how long lasting the assurance of His presence remains after a fleeting moment of divine surprise? He realizes we need to rediscover that truth now and again. Although this feeling may wear away, it is exciting to know that God is always full of surprises!**

**“Glorious Father, make me fully aware of your presence today...in the beauty of nature as well as in the lives of those I encounter. Fill me with awe and wonder at your marvelous works. In so doing, I will constantly be reminded of your love for me and give You thanks. Your name be praised! Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am not alone, wherever I may be, the Lord is with me.**

**- Thomas Duckworth -**

**NOTES:**

**Ephesians 4: 17-32**

**THE ‘SECULAR’ AND THE ‘SACRED’ BECOME ONE!**

**God is God on Sunday and all during the week. He is God in the marketplace. He is there when “the rubber hits the road,” where the real issues and concerns of living are experienced. He is involved constantly in the life of the Christian. The secular and the sacred become one. Spiritual implications are seen in everything. The question is asked, “What is God trying to teach me in this situation? What character trait, what attitude, what direction is He suggesting through this event or condition impinging upon my life?”**

**God can use the conditions of life to achieve His major purpose for us - to reproduce the character of Christ in our lives. But He is a gentleman; He does not force himself upon us. We can choose to cooperate with Him by allowing life events and conditions to assist us in becoming what He wants us to become. Or we can seek our will, our rights, and our interpretation of what we think life should be.**

**A life that speaks is best demonstrated in the family. Here, our real selves are seen for what they are. Life is lived as a joyous response to God’s gift of himself, of life, and of salvation. God is called upon to help in all things. He and His purposes are seen in all things. A spiritual understanding is sought in all our experiences. We strive to cooperate with God in achieving His purposes for ourselves, the world, other family members, and His kingdom. As our family members observe this, our lives speak to their lives. The question is not “Do we witness?” but rather “What do we witness?” We witness positively for Christ when He is seen as real, relevant, personal, and precious to us.**

**Frequently during seminars I ask participants to identify the best teacher they have ever known. After that, I ask them to remember what that great teacher taught them. Then, I inquire which was easier to recall - the teaching or the teacher. The ratio is about ten to one in favor of the teacher. We remember the person, personality, commitment, enthusiasm, and love for the subject matter. The life speaks plainer, louder, and clearer than the ideas, values, or concepts in the subject matter. These latter are given flesh and blood, relevance, and significance when expressed through our lives. Do you suppose that may be the reason both Jesus and Paul stressed modeling?**

**“My Heavenly Father, though I acknowledge that I am very imperfect in my character, help me always to seek to model godly virtues in my life, so that those, both young and older, who ‘imitate’ me may find themselves imitating Christ! Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I commit myself to embracing Christian values with my mind, to speaking gracious words with my mouth, to making selfless decisions with my will - all for the purpose of cultivating a Christlike character throughout my lifetime on earth.**

**- Dorsey Brause -**

**NOTES:**

**Psalm 95: 6**

**FOR HIM THE BELL TOLLS**

**The raspberries were abundant and so ripe as they fell from the branches into my hand. On this weather record-breaking warm October day, I decided to harvest the crop of juicy, rich purple fruit which grows in my back yard. I was so absorbed in my labor that I had not noticed the sun setting behind those majestic mountains of ours. It was a beautiful day and a perfect ending to that day. I have always been pleased with the raspberries, which originated from a friend’s back yard many years ago. My little transplanted three foot section grew into a thirty foot length of tall branches covered with luscious fruit.**

**While picking nearly two quarts of berries that afternoon, my thoughts were not focused on anything particular. Immersed in my thoughts, I was not aware of the sights and sounds around me. Even though I have learned to “tune-out” unwanted city noises such as screeching cars or roaring airplanes, the sound I faintly heard in the distance brought me instantly into an attitude of reverence.**

**There is a neighborhood church a few blocks away from my home. Every evening at six o’clock, beautiful carrion bells chime from this church’s steeple. Some nights I hear them. Other nights I dismiss them without a thought. This night, they touched my heart. The tune which played that night was an old hymn written by Charles Wesley titled, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.” The only lines I have memorized from that hymn are “Jesus, Thou art all compassion,” and “Alpha and Omega be.” For some reason, in the vast recesses of my mind, those words must have significant meaning. The tune itself was heart warming.**

**Singing this tune in my head while the sun continued to set caused me to ponder the effective ministry of church bells. How do people in this quiet community respond to this sound? Do they hear it or even know it is coming from a church? For most of us, it has become a familiar sound which simply feels like it belongs. Perhaps for many it is just a reminder that it is six o’clock. That could mean it’s time to prepare dinner, or that “Daddy’s home,” or even less meaningful yet perhaps truest of all, that “The Simpson’s” is airing on television. None-the-less, like clock work, day after day, seven days a week, the chimes play on.**

**Regardless of how others perceive the message of the bells, for this moment it meant far more than a simple reminder of the time. Although I have heard them nightly for seventeen years, I seldom gave much thought to their meaning or purpose. Tonight, however, they were a witness to my spirit. On his night I bowed my head in awe of God’s majesty. I prayed and gave thanks for His wonderful love.**

**Those alluring chimes stirred my heart. While the darkness surrounded me I entered dusk with this thought: “Though the day is through and night has begun, God still reigns on His throne.” All was right in the world and the bells were proclaiming it. The bells tolled for Him!**

**“Almighty God, You have separated the day from night yet You have never separated me from Your presence. Make me acutely aware that You are near...even now...even here. Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is always near.**

**- Thomas Duckworth -**

**NOTES:**

**Proverbs 22:6; Matthew 28: 20,  
Revelations 3: 20**

### **JESUS VISITS MY KITCHEN**

**Jesus, God’s Son, came to earth to teach us about God. He walked and talked with men and women. He sat on the mountainside, or in a boat and taught the multitude. He took his disciples apart to a quiet place to teach them deeper truths about God. Jesus was with them and they experienced his presence. How can we do that today?**

**Brother Lawrence is probably the best known example of a person who practiced the presence of God. As he washed the pots and pans in the kitchen, he talked with God as if he were a companion in the chore.**

**Today many Christians wear a little bracelet with the letters WWJD imprinted on it. Whenever they have to make a decision, they think, “What would Jesus do?” Some times just asking God aloud helps find the solution. Jesus said, “Lo, I am with you always...” When I am with a friend, we talk, we share intimacies, we reveal problems, feelings, disappointments and victories. Can I communicate with God in the same way? Can I practice the presence of God? I think I’ll try.**

**Lord, just look at the mess I made while I was defrosting the refrigerator. I know I should have done it sooner but you know how I hate doing it. Oh, look, here are some fresh vegetables - well, they were fresh when I bought them last week. They look pretty sad now so I will throw them in a pot and make soup.**

**I remember how you promised that if we opened the door and let you in, you would have supper with us. So I really do want you to stay and have supper tonight.**

**Lord, I never know how many people I will have for dinner. It is so much fun when my teenagers bring their friends home. Some of them come from broken homes and really need someone to talk to.**

**Yet, sometimes my children rebel and run out the door. Oh, Lord, I am not a very good mother. But you promised that if we train up a child in the way he should go, when he is old, he will not depart from it.**

**I’m trying so hard to memorize scripture, Lord. The ones I copy and put by the sink are always memorized well because I spend so much time there. All the dirty dishes mean that we eat well and I know there are many children around the world who go to bed hungry. If I have soup left over tonight, I think I’ll take it to the family down the street.**

**Their children have not been very nice to our children but maybe they are hungry. I hate to throw so much food away when I clean out the refrigerator so I will give it away instead of pushing it to the back of the refrigerator.**

**When you visited Mary and Martha’s home, Mary sat at your feet and learned. I am afraid I am more like Martha. So, Lord, I invite you into my kitchen to watch me clean up my mess and prepare dinner because I know I am having company tonight.**

**“Lord, thank you for being with me even when I have to defrost my refrigerator.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Jesus said, “Lo, I am with you always,” so that means in my kitchen most of the time.**

**- Laura Drewer -**

**NOTES:**

**Ezekiel 36: 23-28**

**‘SEEING’ GOD IN EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES AND RELATIONSHIPS**

**I am told and believe that there are a hundred million miracles which occur every day. Where are these miracles? They are all around us. Wherever you look, there is a miracle nearby. Wherever there is a miracle, Jesus is there too! Where did I see Jesus?**

**I saw him in the face of a young man who silently,  
patiently, and lovingly listened to an older gentleman  
tell his story.**

**I saw him in the bright eyes of a young child who  
whispered to his mother, “I love you.”**

**I saw him in the ribbons of pink clouds in the beautiful  
morning sky.**

**I saw him through the words of a book which reminded me  
to listen for God to speak.**

**I saw him in darkness during the night when sleep would  
not come.**

**I saw in the frantic call of a boy calling out for his lost  
younger brother.**

**I saw him in the mirror as he reminded me that it is OK to  
love myself.**

**If I am willing, I will find him everywhere I turn.  
I would even see him in your eyes if I could see  
you right now, for you too are a miracle of God!**

**“You are my God and there is none like You. Everywhere I turn, I find You. Grant that I may see with the eyes of my heart and enjoy every miracle You have set before me. In the name of the risen Lord. Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is always ready to reveal Himself when I watch with believing eyes.**

**- Thomas Duckworth -**

**Exodus 33: 32; Psalm 91: 4**

**THANK GOD FOR HIS BLANKETS AND COVERINGS**

**I love the story of the elderly Christian who loved to praise God. This was permitted in the old church building, but the members of the church Board thought it not proper in their new chapel. They were aware that the lady was poor and in need of a blanket. They decided to make this offer. They would supply her with a new blanket, providing she would not get up in the new church, and shout praises to the Lord. The dear lady kept silent for several weeks, but one Sunday morning, she could keep silent no longer. She stood up, in a church full of people, and said, “Blanket or no blanket, PRAISE THE LORD”.**

**Think of it! “COVERED BY GOD’S HANDS”! Covered by His feathers refers to the wings of a bird, wherein lies the bird’s strength. Thus, the Christian is covered by God’s strength. I wish to challenge you with this thought. “It is up to us to appropriate God’s strength”. Jesus tells us that we have not because we ask not. Be brave! Use your privilege of asking The Heavenly Father to cover you with His strength.**

**I was holding a revival in a very cold climate. The first night I stayed in the pastor’s home, I nearly froze as I tried to sleep. In the morning the pastor’s wife asked how I had slept. I was honest and told her I was cold all night long. Sylvia said, “That’s impossible”. She then took me to the room and pointed to a pile of blankets neatly stacked in a corner. To add insult to injury, she called me by name, and said, “There is an electric blanket on the bed”.. I can assure you, I slept warm the rest of the week.**

**The resources were there. I just didn’t appropriate them. It’s tragic, but true. Many of us children of God suffer needlessly. We do without because we do not take advantage of God’s resources. After my experience of freezing all night, I can appreciate better the sacrifice the elderly lady was making when she said, “Blanket or no blanket, Praise the Lord”.**

**He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock  
That shadows a dry thirsty land.  
He hideth my life in the depths of His love  
And covers me there with His hand,  
And covers me there with His hand.  
Fanny Crosby**

**“Dear Heavenly Father, I pause this day to say ‘Thanks’. Thanks for your hands that cover me when I need to feel your presence. Thanks, too, for Your ever present STRENGTH which You have promised to cover me with.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Starting here and now, I am determined to appropriate from you the many blessings that you have for your children. I am determined to remind myself often, that my forgiven sins are covered by the blood of Jesus Christ!**

**- Lowell Weller -**

**NOTES:**

Psalm 91: 1-16

**THE SECRET PLACE OF THE MOST HIGH**

**I have many childhood memories of happy times spent at my grandmother’s farm. On a clear Spring day, I would often lie on my back in green grass and let my gaze drift lazily beyond the bounds of earth, penetrating blue sky and resting in an imaginary world which grown-ups referred to simply as heaven. I used to try to imagine how far I would have to go to get there and how long it would take and what transportation I would use. I squinted extra hard trying to catch a glimpse into that mysterious, far-off world. Even though my visual efforts never quite broke through, heaven seemed as real to me as the bluebonnets and buttercups I could reach out and touch.**

**One day when I was ten, I ran across Psalm 91 in the Bible, and verse one described heaven in these magnificent terms: *“He who dwells in the Secret Place of The Most High shall abide under the shadow of The Almighty”*. What a way to capture a youngsters’s imagination. It was definitely a secret place because in all my hours of gazing, I had never caught a single glimpse of it. And God was certainly most high - beyond the scope of airplanes and stars and my imagination. Needless to say, the definition stuck. Secret places were music to a kid’s ears, and most high was power to a little person like me.**

**Then there was the second part about abiding under the shadow of The Almighty. Shadows were a lot of fun. They were always there. You could play games with them, but you could never outsmart them. I tried to imagine how big the shadow of The Almighty would be.**

**In later years, I came to know God as my refuge and fortress (vs. 2), my protector and deliverer (vs. 3). I marveled that angels watched over me (vs. 11). Sometimes I even checked the closets to see if I could catch one off guard. God’s favor was present with me (vs. 9) that made me feel special.**

**Now I’m an adult. As my knowledge of God and the world I live in grows, sometimes my faith shrinks. On Spring days, God seems father away than the bluebonnets and buttercups. A busy schedule eliminates daydreaming and stargazing. My closets are too cluttered to hide angels. Only the memories made by a little girl on grandma’s farm remind me that The Almighty is merely a shadow away and heaven is as near as a prayer. And I wonder if that tinkling sound I just heard was a wind chime or an angel’s wing.**

**“Dear God, no matter how old I get, help me always to remember that You are never far away?”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is real. God is near. God is my friend.**

**- Loretta Jenkins -**

**NOTES:**

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1. Have you had an experience (or experiences) when you especially sensed the closeness of God’s presence, while you were enjoying the beauties of nature? When and where?**
- 2. As a believer who sincerely desires to be close to your Creator, share ways in which you have learned to “practice the presence of God” (i.e., ways in which you have learned to “sensitize” yourself to the omnipresence of God).**
- 3. Isn’t it amazing how long lasting the assurance of God’s presence remains after a fleeting moment of “divine surprise” when He revealed Himself to you in a special way? Do you honestly believe that God is always near to you, regardless of the “ups and downs” of your “Christian life”? Why or why not?**
- 4. Do you believe that the ‘secular’ and the ‘sacred’ places are equally “invaded” by the presence of God, that God is in the marketplace on Monday just as much as He is in the holy sanctuary on Sunday? (Note John 4: 24)**
- 5. Tell why it is important for you (as a sincere believer) to ask yourself the following questions: “What is God trying to teach me in this situation? What character trait, what attitude, what direction is He suggesting through this event or condition impinging upon my life?”**
- 6. Even though God is all-powerful (sovereign), do you believe that God limits Himself in His expression of His power, for the purpose of allowing human beings to express the unique characteristic of their creation, namely, the exercise of “Free Will”? Why or why not? Tell why you agree or disagree with the following statements: “We can choose to cooperate with Him by allowing life events and conditions to assist us in becoming what He wants us to become. Or we can seek our will, our rights, and our interpretation of what we think life should be.”**
- 7. Tell if you believe the following statement rightly describes the “essence” of all true and effective witness: “We witness positively for Christ when He is seen as real, relevant, personal, and precious to us.”**
- 8. Do you believe that the life (and lifestyle) of a Christian “speaks” plainer, louder, and clearer, than the ideas, values, concepts, and philosophy of Christian teaching? Why or why not? Would you (as a believer) rather ‘preach’ a sermon, or ‘be’ a sermon? Which do you remember best, the character (personality and attitudes) of your teacher, or the communication (teachings and words and lessons) of your teacher? Why?**

- 9. Have you seriously considered the development of a close and personable relationship with a young believer, for the purpose of your ‘mentoring’ (by your example and friendship) authentic and mature “Christian living” for that young believer?**
- 10. In your “daily environment”, are there “routine” sights and sounds which you believe God could use more effectively to remind you of God’s faithfulness and love and beauty and power? How can the sensitive use of your physical properties ( sight, sound, smell, taste, feel) help you to become more aware of the unseen presence of God in your life?**
- 11. Do you believe (with the saint ‘Brother Lawrence’) that you can experience the presence of God as much in your kitchen (as you wash the dishes), as you can experience His presence at the Holy Communion (Lord’s Supper)? Why or why not?**
- 12. Have you “trained” yourself to “see” God and to “hear” God, in the face and words and actions of your friends (and even ‘strangers’)?**
- 13. If God is “all-powerful” and is willing (and even eager) to impart His strength to His believing children (Christians), why do you think that so many Christians feel so weak, powerless, inadequate, victimized by life’s happenings?**
- 14. As a result of reading Psalm 91, what can you conclude about the presence, protection, power, and provision of Almighty God?**

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **ANTICIPATE HIS COMPASSIONATE INTERVENTION**

**Psalm 61: 1-4**

**EXPERIENCING HIS SHELTERING CARE**

**The train was leaving the station, and we were not on it! It was a moonless night in southern India, and my wife and I were found to be on the wrong car, and directed to take our bags along a strange platform to find our assigned seats in a car much nearer the front of the train.**

**Hastily summoning a porter, we piled our bags and cases into his arms and placed a handbag on his head, then scurried ahead to find our proper place. The train moved faster, but at last we saw the open door of our car, with hands reaching down to lift us up. Breathless, we turned to take our luggage, expecting the porter to be close behind, but alas, he was nowhere in sight!**

**All our goods, including passports, plane tickets, and travelers checks, were in the handbag on his head. Where was he? Had he taken advantage of our plight and absconded with our documents?**

**“Stop this train!” my wife shouted, and plunged into the nearest compartment behind her to yank the red cord above the window, reserved for emergencies. Long moments later, the great train slowed and, out of the darkness, our heavy-laden porter plodded into view. The conductor, too, arrived to ascertain the cause of the sudden stop, and saw us into our compartment before giving the signal to proceed.**

**We had just experienced the “shelter of his wings.” We were helpless, and in the midst of strangers, and far, far from home. We had no tour guide to solve our dilemma. How to know what to do?**

**The Psalmist knew what to say.....**

**“Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer;  
from the end of the earth I call to thee,  
when my heart is faint. (v. 1, 2a)**

**There are other dilemmas, perhaps social or spiritual, that call for such a prayer. We may be about to lose something vital to our survival, or be overwhelmed by circumstances beyond our control. Then we can pray “Lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (v. 2b) and the hand of God sets things right. How else explain it? We can sing.....**

**“Under his wings I am safely abiding;  
Though the night deepens and tempests are wild,  
Still I can trust him; I know he will keep me;  
He has redeemed me and I am his child.”**

**- William Cushing -**

**“Our Father in Heaven, take our hand and so enable us to trust you, that we may go fearlessly into dark places.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I shall trust him, so as to be safe under the shelter of his wings, at ALL times!**

**- Eugene Stewart -**

**NOTES:**

Exodus 14

STAND STILL AND SEE

Sometimes the things we think of as destructive are meant to save us. The setting of Exodus 13 is an awesome chase scene. Pharaoh has finally let the children of Israel out of Egypt. They have traveled far enough that they are beginning to feel safe enough to rest, when they look up and see 600 chariots and all the captains of Egypt and their men. (vs. 7-9) In front of them is the Red Sea. Panic sets in (vs. 10). Fear causes them to whine and blame Moses and heap all their anger on him when just moments before they had been feeling smug about their daring escape and resident super hero. I can almost feel their terror. There seems to be no place to hide and no place to run. Then Moses utters these amazing words: *“Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.”* (vs. 43) I’m sure they were already running inside. They just didn’t know which way to direct their legs. We can all relate to their predicament. Nervous energy oozes out of most of us. We are so busy trying to help God that it’s hard to stand still, and to commune in His presence and to observe His power. But, in this case, they had no choice. With the Egyptian army behind them, and the sea in front of them, many of them had already given into fatalism before Moses was able to complete his statement: *“The Lord will fight for you and you will hold your peace.”* (vs. 14) Image their astonishment when Moses lifted his staff over the sea and commanded them to go forward. I wonder if he had to give the first few guys in the line a little shove. The waters of the sea became curtains of protection on either side as they walked across the river bed. That think which they had believed to be destructive became an instrument of salvation for them.

I remember a day in the life of my oldest son when what he believed to be destructive actually saved his life. It was a Saturday morning. He was a young teen. He had a lot of friends. Some of them wanted to go to Dallas for the weekend. I didn’t tell him he couldn’t go because of bad company or a poor chaperone but because of something I couldn’t shake. Naturally, he didn’t understand. I didn’t even understand myself. But in my heart I knew I would always regret it if I let him out the door. He was angry and hurt, and he pouted and fumed and gave me the cold shoulder all weekend. Imagine his surprise when one of his friends called Sunday night to describe the van accident. Two of the boys were still in the hospital. Barrett would have been sitting in the death seat. He came into my room with tears in his eyes and hugged me and said: “Thank you, Mom!” The next day the story came out in the local newspaper. He cut it out and put it under the glass overlay on his dresser to remind him of God’s protective love. Today he’s 27 years old, and he still stores it in his keepsake box.

Next time you find yourself beside a sea of troubles with enemies on all sides, remember the God of Moses. Let Him fight for you in marvelous and unexpected ways while you “Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.”

**“Dear God, when challenges come, give me the courage to trust You and to be still.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If the God who fought for Moses fights for me, why should I fear?**

**- Loretta Jenkins -**

**NOTES:**

**Matthew 6**

**A SURPRISE BIRTHDAY PRESENT**

**Last Tuesday was my birthday and I had to go to Tacoma, 40 miles from my home. I do not like to go to a doctor alone. This time I had to get a cat-scan on my chest. My husband could not go with me because he had a doctor’s appointment in Shelton. His hip and shoulder have been causing him a lot of pain recently.**

**I finally called a friend and asked her to go along. She agreed. We had a wonderful time sharing our hearts on the trip. I do not know Tacoma so she helped me find where I was to go.**

**After the appointment, we had breakfast together as I had not eaten since the night before. I told her it was my birthday and we exchanged stories about unusual birthdays we had. When I took her home, she gave me fresh vegetables from her garden. I was so delighted because I cannot grow anything in my rocky soil.**

**At home, I found my husband asleep. He aroused just enough to inform me that the doctor said he had tendinitis and had given him some strong pills. Then he slept most of the day.**

**Thursday, I went downtown and worked at Sonrise, a free clothing store. I volunteer occasionally as my schedule allows. After several hours of continuous work, another volunteer brought me a bath robe with the tag for \$39.95 on it. “I think this would fit you; would you like to have it?” she asked. I looked up and all I could say was, Tuesday was my birthday and I had not expected to receive a present. However, for sometime I had been needing a new bathrobe. I had decided to tell my children that is what I wanted for Christmas when they asked in December.**

**When I returned home, I noticed that the next door neighbor who is moving, had a small fire in her backyard. The three retarded boys from next door were there. I walked to their house and asked their mom if she was aware of the fire and she assured me it was okay. Then she asked, “Would you like to have a piece of cake?” I never bake cakes but I felt I should make one today.” All I could say was, “Thank you, Lord.” Then I shared my testimony about how our great God hears our heart’s desires and answers.**

**At times we get so caught up in trying to solve our problems ourselves, that we forget that God is with us and cares for us. If I had a lot of money and could have picked out a new bathrobe, I never would have found one so beautiful. It was dark green with red**

**and purple flowers on it. It was long and snapped down the front. I feel like a queen wearing it. Every time I think about this birthday, I will remember God’s miracle just for me.**

**“Thank you, Father, that you know my heart and care about my every wish. Help me to acknowledge and thank you more.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The richest king never owned a robe so beautiful as God created to clothe His child.**

**- Laura Drewer -**

**NOTES:**

**Isaiah 43: 1- 5**

**HEARING THE VOICE OF GOD**

**It was early in the morning of a lonely night in our apartment in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. My dear wife lay in the hospital, awaiting surgery following a cancer diagnosis that hit us suddenly in the midst of our ministry at the Bible Seminary there.**

**After months of vague symptoms, her doctor had ordered blood tests and x-rays, which revealed the malignancy. She was ordered to hospital immediately and a surgeon was consulted. He had scheduled the operation for the following morning. At 10 p.m. I retired and soon fell asleep.**

**At about the stroke of 4 a.m., I awoke from a nightmare, having dreamt that the operation was over, and I was consulting the doctor by phone. He seemed to be saying - “Your wife came through the surgery very well, but I am afraid the results are not promising. We did not get all the cancer, and she may have only three months to live.”**

**“My God, what are you telling me?” I cried, “Is this dream a warning of hard times ahead for us?” Then there came a voice, clearly speaking these words,**

**Fear not, I am with you, Oh be not dismayed,  
For I am thy God, and will still give you aid.  
I'll comfort you, strengthen you, and cause you to stand  
Upheld by my gracious, omnipotent Hand.  
Joshua 10: 25, Isaiah 41: 10.**

**When through the deep waters I call you to go,  
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow.  
For I will be with you, your sorrows to bless  
and sanctify to you your deepest distress.  
Isaiah 43:2, Psalms 18: 16**

**I immediately arose, took my Bible and read a Psalm, then tried to repeat the words of the hymn I knew to be “How Firm A Foundation,” but I could not repeat them. I had to find a hymnal and memorize those lines.**

**In the days that followed, a confirmation of His presence came many times as she recovered. Radiation was prescribed, and an appointment was made for treatments. As we sat in church a few days later, the pastor called for this hymn. As we looked at verse four, I whispered to my wife, “Honey, this verse is for your ordeal tomorrow.”**

**When through fiery trials, your pathway shall lie,  
My strength all sufficient shall be your supply.  
The flames shall not hurt thee, I only design.  
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.  
I Peter 4: 12, II Corinthians 12: 9**

**“Father God, help me to trust you to ‘walk me through’ every life situation. Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God speaks in clear, distinct ways that provide support for my spirit in difficult times.**

**- Eugene Stewart -**

**NOTES:**

John 10: 1-21

### LOOK FOR THE SHEPHERD, STUPID

Picture a sheep being taunted by a wolf. The wolf lunges toward the sheep as if to bite it, then stops short and gives a low throaty growl. The sheep, frightened, looks to the left and right for help; it sees none. Panicked now, it starts to run. The wolf ambles alongside and pokes his nose against the sheep's side just to scare it. The sheep tries to run faster but is awkward, while the wolf runs easily and casually nips at the legs of its terrified victim.

I don't like this picture because in this scene I am the sheep - fearful, vulnerable, weak - and the wolf has all the power and control that I want but do not have.

But that is not the whole picture. Sometimes there are many wolves!

What do we sheep do in these situations? The typical responses: Fret and sweat. Panic, worry, and hurry. Run. Whine and cry. Look for a hiding place. In haste and with urgency we try to take care of ourselves, and we make a potentially fatal error: we forget the shepherd.

For us, the shepherd is always near. Silently and invisibly the shepherd moves with us where ever we go, always near. How does he do it? That's a mystery. Why? A bigger mystery!

Jesus gives the answer. He watches over us so that we can have good lives. He said, *“I have come that they (which refers to you and me) may have life and have it to the full”*. (John 10: 10) Life to the full!

Life to the full includes, joy, friendship, being curious about a mystery and then delighted with its resolution, exercise and rest, mental and emotional stimulation and gratification, humor and laughter, and a multitude of other pleasures.

But life to the full may also include such wolves as fear, pain, enemies, confusion, depression and death. *“I am the good shepherd,”* Jesus said then, and says today to you and me (John 10: 11a). He will not let the wolves devour us. *“The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”*. (11b)

His care is so intense and complete that it is hard for us to understand, but it comes well recommended. *“Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall”* (Psalm 55: 22) Will that work? Peter, who found (and created ) more than a fair share of hassles believed it. He must have relied on God's promise from Psalms, because he wrote the same thing in his first letter: *“Cast all your anxiety on him*

***(God) because he cares for you”. (I Peter 5: 7) That’s an impressive endorsement of God’s continuing love for us, his sheep.***

**There will always be wolves and we will always be vulnerable to them. But we don’t have to be alone; we can be within the care of a shepherd. In the protection of The Shepherd we are safe indeed. Forever.**

**“Thank you, great heavenly Father, that you created me a sheep. Thank you for the provision of your son, Jesus Christ, who has promised to protect and nurture me in spite of dangers that lurk all around. I love you. Thank you for loving me first and for protecting me; I can’t do it for myself. Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION OF THE DAY: Close to the shepherd, I am safe; *completely* safe.**

**- Richard Walters -**

**NOTES:**

Joshua 1: 1-9

### GAINING STRENGTH AND COURAGE

Their beloved leader is dead. The status of the encampment is precarious. There are enemies on every side who want the Israelites banished from their midst. It is time to move forward, and God has a message for them.

Joshua is the man of the hour. In prayer he receives his marching orders *“Go over this Jordan...to the land I am giving...to the people of Israel.”* (v. 2)

The leader of a nation is a lonely person, isolated by both power and responsibility. Joshua felt it keenly, but was given the utmost in reassurance, *“...the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”* (v. 9)

Joshua had experience. He led the group of twelve that reconnoitered the promised land, forty years earlier. He had learned how difficult it was to persuade the reluctant and fearful. He had successful battles with hostiles in the land; he saw the consequences of moral failure inside his own camp; he watched as Moses had dealt with rebellion and complaining all too frequently.

Joshua had the promises of God, which had led the Israelites out of Egypt, over the Red Sea and through the desert of Sinai to their present place in Moab, facing the promised land, Canaan, over the river to the west.

But there was more, he had ‘the book of the law’ in his hands. (v. 8) The record of Moses’ encounter with God was a source of inspiration, but was it enough to move the multitude, against all odds to the other side? Prosperity and success was promised, but at what cost would they be obtained?

Three times Joshua hears God say *“Be strong, and of good courage”* (vv. 6, 7, 9). The Lord was speaking. His people now must move forward.

The Christian message here is the name Joshua, a name which becomes ‘Jesus’ in the New Testament. Joshua led the people of God into the Promised Land: interceded for them when they went astray; and led them to victory over the forces of evil. Likewise, Jesus is the captain of our salvation who intercedes for His people, captain of our salvation who intercedes for His people, brings them into the promised rest, gives them an inheritance, and makes victory over sin possible.

Do you have a ‘promised land’ before you? You have the Book in your hand, and the Holy Spirit speaking to you. What hinders your taking the prize?

**“O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, do be our help in days to come, and our eternal home.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: With the Bible in my hand, the Lord by my side, and His Spirit in my heart, I will not be afraid.**

**- Eugene Stewart -**

**NOTES:**

Isaiah 26: 3

**THE POSTURE OF THE MIND**

**The Christian lives in a knock-about-world as any other person. He/she is not exempt from testing, taxes, troubles, tempests, tragedy, and turbulence. He has peace with God because of sins forgiven and Christ’s abiding presence within.**

**The posture of the mind toward a circumstance in life has much more to do with our peace than the circumstance itself. This is not a grin-and-bear-it attitude, nor whatever-will-be-will-be, nor of unconcerned acquiescence.**

**The heart and will may be thoroughly Christian, yet the mind be in turmoil from outside forces. Oswald Chambers in his devotional book, *My Utmost For His Highest* asks: “Are you painfully disturbed just now, distracted by the waves and billows of God’s providential permission, and having, as it were, turned over the boulders of your belief, and you still finding no well of peace or joy or comfort; is all barren?” Is this your station now; or an experience from the past?**

**A. B. Simpson writing about inward peace says: “While we are burdened with our own cares, He cannot give us His. While we are occupied with ourselves, we cannot be at leisure to serve Him. Our minds will be so filled with our own anxieties that we would not be equal to the trust which He requires of us, and so, before He can entrust us with His work, He wants to deliver us from every burden and anxiety.”**

**A gem from God’s Word will enable you to regain peace of mind. Isaiah 26: 3 “*Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee.*” Align this with 2 Corinthians 10: 5b - “*...take every thought captive to obey Christ...*” The stability of “the Lord God (who) is an everlasting rock” (Isaiah 26: 4), enables the mind to have something/someone steadfast to which it may be anchored.**

**Peace is dependent in large part upon the posture of the mind. If you prefer another word or phrase - the attitude or the frame of mind.**

**Perhaps the following suggestions will assist you concerning peace of mind:**

- 1. As a Christian you have peace because of God’s forgiveness.**
- 2. Upon awakening in the morning, immediately think beyond those things that may annoy or disturb you. With anticipation think of some little thing you will do this day - something you really enjoy doing.**
- 3. You must accept whether you like it or not, and by God’s grace you and God together will work through this difficult situation.**

- 4. Someone has said: “Are you looking unto Jesus now, in the immediate matter that is pressing, and receiving from Him peace? If so, He will be a gracious benediction of peace in and through you. But if you try to worry it out, you obliterate Him and deserve all you get.”**

**“Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin? The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.” - Edward H. Bickersteth.**

**“Dear God, I thank you for the peace you give. But in the difficult circumstances of life enable my mind to remain steadfast and trustful. Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If difficulties come my way today, I will trust God, and discipline my mind to keep stayed upon Him.**

**- Floyd Cooper -**

**NOTES:**

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1. Share a social, physical, or spiritual dilemma in which you felt overwhelmed by circumstances beyond your own ‘control’, that motivated you to cry out in “desperation” for the Lord’s mercy and powerful intervention. (Notes Psalm 61: 1-2)**
- 2. Can you think of a time in your life (or in the life of someone who is “near and dear” to you) when you experienced “God’s protective love” (i.e., a time when you realized that God or His protective “angels” spared you from a serious physical or spiritual “calamity”)?**
- 3. Have you ever received “God’s protection” or “God’s blessing” through what seemed to you (at the time) as something “painful” (such as the discipline and punishment of a parent, or the rebuke and reproof from a close friend, or the counsel of a pastor, etc.)?**
- 4. Have you ever experienced a time (or an occasion) when you felt overwhelmed with a sense of God’s presence and with an overflow of God’s “good gifts” (material and social and spiritual gifts)? As a result of God’s “amazing grace”, were you “lost in wonder, love, and praise”?**
- 5. Share a time in your life when you faced a “crisis” (physical illness, death of a loved one, financial loss, job loss, impending surgery, transfer to a new community and separation from relatives and friends, etc.), and in which you experienced a special outpouring of God’s love and comfort and strength and companionship. During such a “crisis”, did you find encouragement through meditation on Scripture, or through recitation of hymns, or through counsel with a friend, or through meditation and prayer?**
- 6. Why do believers (sheep) often forget their “Good Shepherd” during times of “crises” and “calamities”, focusing more on the ‘problems’ (circumstances of life) rather than on the ‘salvation’ (the power and protection and intervention of the “Good Shepherd”)?**
- 7. According to Psalm 55: 22 and I Peter 5: 7, what are believers commanded to do, during their times of “crisis” and “calamities”?**
- 8. According to John 10: 1-21, what specific provisions does the “Good Shepherd” make available to “Sheep” (believers)?**

- 9. Just as God promised the land of Canaan (i.e., “the land of milk and honey”) to Joshua and the Israelites, do you believe that God has a “promised land” of new opportunity and ministry for you “to possess”? Since you (as a believer) have the Book (Bible) in your hand and the indwelling Holy Spirit in your heart, what hinders your taking the “prize”?**
- 10. Tell to what extent you agree (or disagree) with the following statement: “The posture of the mind toward a circumstance in life has much more to do with our peace than the circumstance itself.”**
- 11. Do you think it is possible for the ‘heart’ and ‘will’ of a person to be thoroughly Christian and, at the same time, for the ‘mind’ of such a believer to be in turmoil from outside forces? Why or why not?**
- 12. Why is it difficult, if not impossible, for a believer to be preoccupied with his own troublesome burdens and anxiety-ridden mind (thoughts), and at the same time to be concerned with the “Lord’s Work” and “Kingdom Causes”?**
- 13. What have you found as “helpful aids” during your times of “crisis” and “calamities” and “troubles”? (Note Isaiah 26: 3; 2 Corinthians 10: 5; Philippians 4: 6-9)**
- 14. Does the stability of “the Lord God who is an everlasting rock” (Isaiah 26: 4) give you assurance of a reliable “anchor” for your soul, amidst all the changes and chances and calamities of life?**
- 15. Give your personal response or reaction to the following quotation: “Are you looking unto Jesus now, in the immediate matter that is pressing, and receiving from Him peace? If so, He will be a gracious benediction of peace in and through you. But if you try to worry it out, you obliterate Him and deserve all you get.”**



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FOLLOW HIS CAREFUL GUIDANCE**

## A STILL, SMALL VOICE

We live in a noisy world. Inhabitants of our present age have spent a lot of effort perfecting sound techniques. We watch movies by surround sound in crowded theaters. Tape decks with stereophonic sound make car windows vibrate and send shock waves through entire neighborhoods. Rock concerts shatter the silence of summer nights. Car phone conversations interrupt the tranquility of country drives. Freeway traffic and emergency sirens intrude on the sleep of city dwellers. With all of our sound mastery, distractions make it difficult to hear the voice of God in the modern world. We can relate to Elijah’s God of earthquake, wind, and fire; but like him, our ears are out of tune with the still, small voice.

You remember the great prophet Elijah and his daring escapades in I Kings 17-19. First, he found sanctuary in the home of the Widow of Zarephath. There, with God’s unique provisions of a bottomless barrel of meal and an ever flowing cruse of oil, he survived a famine. Then the widow’s son died, and God gave Elijah the awesome power to resurrect the dead. Later in Chapter 18, this prophet of steel condemned King Ahab face to face and confronted 450 disciples of Baal in a mountain sacrifice contest. God’s hand was obviously on this man, but he was only a man.

A strange thing happened at the beginning of Chapter 19. It reminds me of literature’s famous line: “Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.” There Jezebel entered the picture and put out a “wanted poster” on the prophet; and in verse 3, God’s man of the hour “go out of Dodge”. Depressed and desperate, Elijah became a suicidal figure and retreated to a cave on the Mountain of God. (v. 8) in verse 10, Elijah tearfully recounted his resume to God, and in verse 11, God told Elijah to go out and stand on the top of the mountain. While he stood there, he survived rock-breaking winds, and earthquake, and a fire; but he did not hear the voice of God until all the noise and drama were past. Verse 12 and 13 say: “...after the fire a still, small voice...came to him and said, ‘What are you doing here?’” We know he recognized the voice because he wrapped his face in his mantle and waited for instructions in the cave entrance. Later he followed God’s directives.

If the writer of this story was a cartoonist, we would have a side-splitting laugh while watching a super hero who would face down a king and bring God’s fire from heaven run for forty days to get away from an angry woman. The truth is too often we find ourselves in Elijah’s track shoes. Confidence makes us cocky when the crowd is cheering and the contest is going our way. But when we come down from the mountaintop and find enemies of the faith have put out warrants for our spiritual arrest, we tie our Reeboks and set out for the nearest cave. While waiting for God’s dynamic rescue, accompanied by special effects and surround sound, we miss the soothing reassurance of the still small voice. Maybe what God wanted Elijah to hear was

**something he’d forgotten in his stranglehold on survival” The God who called fired down from Heaven was the same God who accompanied a frantic fugitive to a lonely cave.**

**Elijah’s God is still with us today. His still, small voice echoes across our noisy world. The God who breaks rocks also mends hearts. The God who flashes power across the wings of the storm is also the God whose blood flowed from Calvary. The God of the miraculous is also the God of the mundane. And you will more often than not find the God of stereophonic sound wrapped in stillness. *He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*” (Matthew 13: 9)**

**“Dear God, whether in sound or in silence, help me to hear your voice.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When God seems to be drowned out by the noise of life, I will listen for his still, small voice.**

**- Loretta Jenkins -**

**NOTES:**

Psalm 46: 1-11

**LISTENING AND OBEDIENCE**

The horse was probably first domesticated during the Bronze Age by Nomadic herdsman of Central Asia. There are many breeds developed for different purposes. The draft breed descended from Medieval war horses and included the English Shire and the French Percheron. The harness breed, such as the Hanoverian and the Hackney, and the saddle breed, such as the Lipizzaner and the Thoroughbred, were domesticated since ancient times for riding and for pulling vehicles and heavy loads.

My husband has a great love for horses and has worked and trained several different kinds for several purposes. He seems to have a natural ability in dealing with them. He gets them used to his touch and smell so they can detect his presence before they can see him. They learn to recognize his most firm or his most gentle voice tones as well. I have heard his horses answer his call by a neigh when far out in the pasture and out of sight, and I have seen the horses raise their head in response to his call and start moving toward him at a trot or a fast gallop. It is always interesting to see their response to him in comparison to one of us when we give the same call. They perhaps might lift their heads out of curiosity, but they will soon become engrossed in grazing again or they may even run farther away. I have seen them follow my husband all around, perhaps even playfully biting him to get his attention. These horses can easily distinguish between my husband (their ‘master’) and others who are mere ‘strangers’.

So it is with the shepherd and his sheep. John 10:45 tells us that *“He (the Shepherd) goeth before them and the sheep follow Him for they know His voice and the stranger they will not follow, but will flee from Him for they know not the voice of a stranger.”* In John 10: 14, Jesus says, *I am the door. By me if any man enters in he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture.”* *Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is the one who gives His life for the sheep”* (John 10:11). The hired hand will desert the flock when the wolf appears because *“he careth not for the sheep”* as the shepherd does (verses 12, 13). Jesus is the Good Shepherd and our only hope for salvation and our only defense against the Evil One. Let us, as believers (as sheep), become increasingly aware of the unseen (but very real) presence of the Good Shepherd in our lives!

**“Father, I pray in Jesus’ name that you would help me not to be complacent and to become engrossed in the daily activities of life, and, as a result, become unaware of your presence. Help me to listen for your voice and to respond in obedience to your commands.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I am assured that my Good Shepherd will never leave me or abandon me to the ‘wolves’ of this evil world. My Good Shepherd will always listen for my calls for help! In the close company of my Good Shepherd, I am safe and secure!**

**- Joyce Calkins -**

**NOTES:**

**Romans 11: 33, Revelations 15: 3**

### **THE GOD WHO GUIDES**

**Many believe that the Unchanging God no longer guides His children; that we are left to work out what God wants us to be or where He wants us to go.**

**In 1968, I attended a large Conference of two merging denominations. As I stood on the campgrounds, I noticed a tall dignified black man. I felt led to get acquainted and to find out where he was from. I introduced myself and his first words, after saying hello, were “Do you hold revivals?” “Yes,” I replied. Immediately he asked if I would come to Jamaica and hold meetings.**

**God opened the door, then He supplied the finances for my wife and me to go to Jamaica for two weeks of revival work. Yes, where God guides, God does supply.**

**Our first days were in Mitchell Town in a small church with about eight small pews and one lantern that hung in the front of the church. Each evening there were about 250 men, women and children in attendance. Each evening the altar was lined with those seeking salvation.**

**My last service was in the mountains, about an hour’s distance from Kingston. This church must have had a little more wealth, for they had two lanterns. I was sitting on a small platform. There was a very large spider on the wall about six inches from my head. As I watched and prayed, I kept my eye on the spider. I knew that if it moved, I was going to move also. I had intended to preach about the Judgment of God, but God led me to speak on the Name of Jesus and The Healing Power of God. In the congregation sat a crippled woman whose son had driven us to that quaint church in the mountains. She had to be carried by one of her two sons, as she was unable to walk. After preaching, I felt led of God to ask “Is there anyone here tonight who feels God wants to heal you now?” The little lady raised her hand. Once again her son picked her up and carried her to a small altar where he steadied her on a little stool. The Superintendent over the Jamaican work, a missionary, and I prayed for this precious lady. God had guided me to preach this message: now the God who Guides supplied healing. This little woman with great faith WALKED.**

**Question. Why didn’t God tell me in the morning that I was not to preach on the Judgment instead of waiting until I came to the church? I cannot answer this question. But in the words of the poet, “Ours is not to question why, ours is but to do or die”. We only need to follow God, our Guide, and to recall the text in the book of Romans that GOD’S WAYS ARE PAST FINDING OUT. His ways are above our ways and His thoughts above our thoughts. Christ is the shepherd; we are His sheep...HE LEADS AND WE ARE SIMPLY TO FOLLOW.**

***“And they brought to Jesus a man sick of this palsy, and Jesus seeing their faith, said to the man with the palsy: Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee”*** Matthew records a few verses later that the man arose and walked.

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Father, God, should I never receive healing of my infirmities, I will always believe you are still the Great Healer and The Saviour of Mankind.**

**- Lowell Weller -**

Isaiah 55

**BEING GUIDED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT**

**One of the often baffling circumstances of life is when a God-given opportunity is presented, but the occasion is complicated by present duty, economic considerations, health status, or the calendar!**

**Then it's time to think and pray it through until one has the assurance of the Spirit of God that the answer is clear and unmistakable. One can then proceed to make decisions to realize God's plan and we can take steps with confidence, knowing it is right and appropriate.**

**I once had such an occasion in my life. As pastor of a church, I was obliged to take a part-time job to meet every-day expenses. An offer came to be a team-member on an evangelistic junket to a number of foreign countries. It was an opportunity to develop a world-view that would enlarge my vision of the Church and my place in it.**

**But the circumstances were complex and formidable. It seemed at first unwise and not feasible, yet the call was clear and it seemed my duty was to pray that the door would somehow be opened, or it be clear that it was closed.**

**I opened my Bible one Monday morning, burdened with the problem, seeking guidance from above. The page before me was Isaiah 55, and I began to read, listening for a Message that would give counsel and direction.**

**I read *'he who has no money, come, buy and eat!'* and more - *'a witness to the people,' 'my word shall not return to me empty.'* (vvs. 1, 4, 11)**

**And then came a clear, bold message, *'You shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace.'* (v. 12) The words seemed to literally come off the page in bold relief, unmistakably mine!**

**There was assurance, I could make decisions, arrange my calendar, raise funds, and prepare for departure. It seemed clearly to be in His will that I go.**

**Nine months later I could say “Praise the Lord, He did it!” I had seen the nations, preached and sang the Gospel, and witnessed salvation come to many who heard our message in a three-month odyssey to 15 nations of the world.**

**It was a watershed experience, attested by the Church, giving me goals not previously set, and encouraging me every step ahead as again and again the words of that signal**

**verse came into focus *“Ye shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing.”***

**“Father in Heaven, my deep desire is to know you and your precious Will for me so that my life as it is lived out may reflect that Will daily, and so accomplish my place in life as an ‘instrument of righteousness.’” (Romans 6: 13)**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will proceed courageously when God says “Go!”**

**- Eugene Stewart -**

**NOTES:**

**Psalm 51: 10-12; Psalm 139: 1-9; I John 1: 7-9**

## **IN TOUCH**

**I heard the screech of brakes, a yell, and then I caught sight of a dark red Monte Carlo swinging around me with a hand obscenely gesturing in my direction. I realized with a rush that I had turned across a lane without seeing the red car and had narrowly escaped an accident. The boys in the Monte Carlo didn't let me off easily; they continued to yell angrily. I felt fear, embarrassment, and a cold sense of being out of touch.**

**I had been thinking about my errands, the buildup of storm clouds in the west, and what I would prepare for dinner. I was not paying attention to the business of driving. I was also out of touch with God. I had left the house in haste without affirming His guidance and asking His blessing on my errands. My world was out of sync. How badly only God could know, but my near accident said something about the danger of proceeding while out of touch.**

**How do I keep in touch? God is always there, yet sometimes He has to bring me up short in order to remind me of that fact. I carry responsibility for affirming His presence, committing to His will, and keeping open to the flow of His Spirit through me, but I do sometimes forget. So what can I do about it?**

**I'm human; I haven't been a believer all of my life. I am forming new habits that go with my full commitment to Him, but those habits are not yet deeply imprinted. So I must be stubbornly patient with myself while I develop strategies to reinforce and strengthen my new patterns.**

**Two major strategies help me. One is making signs and notes to myself which are visible as I go about my daily routines. The refrigerator, the bathroom mirror, my wallet - all carry cues to remind me that I belong to Jesus and that He wants to guide me in His perfect way every moment.**

**The second is to practice positive self-talk. “God loves you, Kay,” or “God wants the best for you, Kay,” or “I am yours, Lord Jesus, and I believe that You are guiding me this moment.” I have a developing repertoire of such “inner scripts” which I repeat whenever my mind is not occupied with a particular task. Sometimes when my mind is occupied, I take time out for one of these self-talk breaks. They are life and nourishment to me as the Spirit floods through the open door they create.**

**“Loving Heavenly Father, teach me to ‘practice the presence of God’ in my daily life. Before I go to sleep each night, teach me to commit my conscious and unconscious weaknesses and sins to You - that my soul may be purged from all guilt, resentment, and**

**bitterness. Before I start each new day, enable me to surrender all my thoughts, plans, and relationships to You, that I may experience both confidence and humility as I keep in close touch with You. Thank you. Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: By an act of will, I can place myself in touch. I can purposefully say the words, “Thank You, Lord, that You want to be in touch with me. I affirm your perfect plan and guidance for me now!”**

**- Kay Kline -**

**NOTES:**

John 1: 35-51

### BEING SENSITIVE TO THE ‘CURRENTS’ OF GOD’S GUIDANCE

We are living in a century of many new discoveries, on earth and in space. We have many choices of entertainment and recreation. I have always been interested in air travel, and I have had a special interest in gliding. The pilot straps himself into the front seat of a glider and then he takes the controls. Another pilot in a tow plane yanks the craft into the air and tows it to about 3500 feet. Then he pulls a lever to release the tow rope. The glider suddenly slows and the noise of the wind speeding by the cockpit softens and there is no engine noise. Soaring to about 60 miles per hour, the pilot begins searching for a thermal, which is a warm column of air, to lift the craft higher. Cumulus clouds form when pillars of warm air suddenly cool at higher altitudes, and this can raise the craft quickly, seven or eight hundred feet per minute. After rising to five or six thousand feet, the pilot can hold the craft level easily at sixty miles per hour. Finding the ‘right currents’ of air is important in this sport.

The fisherman also looks for the ‘right currents’. He uses many different lures on his line, and he knows which to use in the different waters, whether they be calm or turbulent waters. He reads the signs to know if the fish are hungry and if they are responding to a particular type of bait. The experienced fisherman knows when to react quickly to the nibbles and strikes. He knows how patiently to reel them in.

The One who was most sensitive to the ‘currents’ of God’s presence and guidance was Jesus, the Son of the Father. Jesus was a ‘master fisherman’ who knew perfectly how to ‘fish for the souls of men’ (as demonstrated in John 1). Like Jesus, the followers of the “Master Fisherman’ must be able to detect those who are spiritually hungry and those who are searching for reality. Effective soul-winners, like the Master Soul-winner, are persons who are sensitive to the ‘currents’ of God’s special guidance. ‘Fishers of men’ are learning to ‘practice the presence of God’ in their lives. With one ear, they listen to the ‘small still voice of the Lord’, and with the other ear they listen to the ‘cries of anguish from the heartbroken sinners’. Effective, Spirit-controlled soul-winners know when to speak and when to remain silent. They are ready to give an honest answer to honest questions and doubts. *“Quietly trust yourself to Christ your Lord and if anybody asks why you believe as you do, be ready to tell him, and do it in a gentle and respectful way.”* (I Peter 3:16, Living Bible) We must keep God at the controls of our ‘craft’ and let Him continually lift us up so that, in turn, we can guide others to a saving relationship with Him. What is the greatest God-given privilege in life? To help others know the joy of sins forgiven and to experience the freedom of soaring to new heights in Christ’s abundant life and love! Learn to discern the ‘spiritual currents’!

“Thank you, Jesus, for the times of spiritual flight into your presence where the winds are calm and I can glide peacefully above the turbulent circumstances of my life.”

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: My ‘craft’ can daily experience the thermal power of His love, as He holds me steady and He lifts me to new heights! Someday my soul will take its final flight to be with the Lord in eternity!**

**- Joyce Calkins -**

**NOTES:**

**Song of Solomon 2: 14 (KJV)**

**THE SECRET PLACES OF THE STAIRS**

**Isabel Kuhn tells in her book Stones of Fire of a young Tibetan Christian lad, Third Sister (Mary), who, when enduring a great trial in her life, had learned the secret of the stairs. This near-overwhelming test came as result of her own obstinance, and continued even following inward victory.**

**“O my dove, that are in...the secret places of the stairs...let me hear thy voice” (Song of Solomon 2: 14, KJV)**

**There is a viewless cloistered room,  
As high as heaven, as fair as day,  
Where tho' my feet may join the throng,  
My soul can enter in and pray.**

**One hearkening even cannot know  
When I have crossed the threshold o'er  
For He alone who hears my prayers  
Has heard the shutting of the door.**

**- Dohnavur -**

**“Her feet in the throng, but her soul stealing quickly up the secret places of the stairs - that is how the little stone of fire (Mary) endured...She was allowing her soul to be tried in the fire, that it might come out pure, with only the image of the Master stamped upon it. After descending that secret stairway of prayer she opened her eyes with a resolute focusing of her attention upon the Scripture exposition, or the hymn words, and she kept them there, refusing to let them wander. Thus she grew in sweetness and power. At least two other young girls were won by Mary and nurtured in faith during that time...Those many journeys up the secret stairway for Mary had not been in vain.”**

**Doesn't that Biblical phrase - “the secret places of the stairs” - incite your soul to climb those stairs? We as individuals must climb those stairs for the sheer delight of communion with God; for retention of personal victory over the little annoyances of each day; for intervention in behalf of our friends who need to sense the assurance of inward conquest.**

**The following Sonnet on Prayer by Betty Scott Stam reveals the development of the depth and sincerity of her prayer life. It is based on Jeremiah 31: 12 - “Their soul shall be as a watered garden.” (KJV)**

**I passed a thorny desert soul one day,  
A soul as guiltless as a painted mast-  
So harsh and hard and dry I stood aghast,  
And would have helped, but had no time to stay,  
Yet, half in doubtfulness, began to pray  
To Him the Source of living streams. At last,  
Returning, I beheld a velvet-grassed,  
Abundant garden; saw the rainbow spray  
Of fountains, shimm’ring high against the trees;  
Saw old-time flowers, pansies, and sweet peas,  
Pink-hearted phloxes, heliotrope, heartsease.  
Clustering roses hung from arches there;  
The scent of hidden orchards filled the air,  
And there were children’s voices everywhere.**

**“O Lord, help us to find the stairway; give us courage to climb it; and then, O Lord, teach us its secrets! Amen.”**

**AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Dryness of the inner being, spiritually, often comes from our failure to climb the stairway to prayer. Today, God enabling me, I will cling that stairway to the secret place.**

**- Floyd Cooper -**

**NOTES:**

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1. In our modern-day world, which is filled with loud and distracting noises, do you find it difficult to “be still” (quiet) and to “be alone” in a meditative mood, ready to listen to the “still and small voice of God”? What specific steps have you taken to guard your “Quiet Time” (short or long), in order that you might daily be alone in the quiet presence of God? Following the example of Jesus (who often rose before dawn to spend time alone with His Heavenly Father), have you yet developed the “holy discipline and habit” of rising early in the morning to be alone in meditation and prayer with your loving Heavenly Father?**
  
- 2. Share your personal response (or reaction) to the following statements: “Elijah’s God is still with us today. His still, small voice echoes across our noisy world. The God of the miraculous is also the God of the mundane. And you will more often than not find the God of stereophonic sound wrapped in stillness.”**
  
- 3. Because Jesus is the “Good Shepherd” and believers are the “Sheep of His pasture” who listen for the voice of the Shepherd (John 10: 45), how would you describe and discern the voice of the Shepherd?**

**Put a check beside the following statements which you believe properly and truly describe the voice of the Lord (in contrast to the voice of the Evil One or of some other ‘false personage’ or force):**

- a. Is loud clamorous, feverish, strong.**
- b. Is quiet, persuasive.**
- c. Deals in generalities.**
- d. Deals in specifics.**
- e. Is driving and demanding.**
- f. Is leading and inviting and gentle.**
- g. Demands immediate decision, and is impulsive.**
- h. Gives time for decision and is reasoning.**
- i. Perplexes, roils the emotions, creates turmoil.**
- j. Brings a rest of certainty and calm.**
- k. Brings depression, discouragement, and guilty feelings.**
- l. Brings enlightenment, encouragement, and renewed confidence.**
- m. Appeals to the lower instincts of human selfishness.**
- n. Appeals to the higher instincts of human responsibility.**
- o. Disappears if no heed is given to it.**
- p. Ripens and grows stronger with time.**

- 4. Share a time (occasion) in your personal life and experience when you believed that God gave you specific guidance, giving you wisdom in the making of a ‘right’ decision and leadership in the following of a definite direction.**
- 5. Share what you have done (or what you can do) to become more sensitive to discern the “currents” of God’s guidance in your life.**
- 6. Share a time (occasion) in your personal life when you received an inner confirmation that a certain “course of action” was God’s will for you as a result of reading Scripture, or of counsel with a friend, or of your believing prayer.**
- 7. As you “go about” your daily and routine tasks, share how you have learned to keep “in touch” with God - to commune with Him in love and to reflect His character to others. What “aids” have you found helpful, as you are learning to “practice the presence of God” in your daily life?**
- 8. Are you forming “new habits” that go with your full commitment to God? If so, what are some of those “habits” which have greatly stimulated increased spiritual growth in your life?**
- 9. Have you ever experimented with “positive self-talk” (i.e., speaking to yourself), by quoting to yourself Bible verses or words from hymns, to remind yourself of God’s power and presence and provisions and promises?**
- 10. Amidst the “hustle and bussel” of your busy schedule (with all the challenges and pressures of daily demands), have you discovered “the secret places of the stairs”?**