

## The presence of God. Connect Group notes for December 2020

In my talk I mentioned three different ways of thinking about God's presence:

He is always with us,  
He is omnipresent (everywhere)  
and His manifest presence.

I have divided these notes for the connect group into those three sections, so if you want you can use one section a week, or just choose the one that most interests you.

In the bible the most common word for God's presence is *panim* which is also translated face and implies a personal encounter with God - so if you are reading anything about God's face think about it as his presence

*The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:  
The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:  
The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.* "Numbers 6:24

### He is always with us (wk1).

The bible has many scriptures that remind us of God's abiding presence. Read some together, can you think of others?

*I am always with you* - Matt 28:20

*I will never leave you or forsake you* - Heb 13:5

*For in him we live and move and have our being.* 'As some of your own poets have said,  
'We are his offspring.' – Acts 17:28

*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*  
- Matt 18:20

This abiding presence is The Holy Spirit who dwells in us. *Christ in you the hope of glory*  
- Col 1:27. The Holy Spirit within us makes us the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16, 6:9) .

It is a faith based not a feelings based presence.

*For we live by faith, not by sight.* - 2 Cor 5:7

Reinhard Bonke "prayer doesn't create God's presence, we pray because he is present."

Although God is present continuously, we don't always feel as if he is present. Graham Cooke talks about this as the hiddenness of God. He argues that scripture would not tell us to seek God if he was manifest all the time ( Psalm 105:4; 1 Chronicles 22:19; Colossians 3:1-2). Hiddenness seems to be a time of silence - our response needs to be rest and peace in these times. Faith says God has not left me here - He is here in a different way to what I have known.

### **Questions:**

What does it mean to you to be the temple of God - the place where God dwells?  
How do we experience the sense of God with us in our twos and threes? How can we recognise God in the midst of these times?  
Can we think about times when it has felt as if God has been hidden, how have we responded to these times?

### **Practicing the presence**

Christian mystics and the desert fathers talk about how we can cultivate the awareness of the God who is within through practicing his presence. One of the tools for this is contemplation. (You might like to watch this video by Richard Rohr talking about contemplative prayer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0o5J0-8OA0> ) .

Why don't you take five minutes just to put aside everything that is going on in the world and acknowledge God within you by sitting quietly and focusing on the Holy Spirit within. (If you are not used to this type of activity thoughts will crowd in, but gently acknowledge them and let them go and refocus on God). The aim of contemplation is not some great revelation, it's just being with God.

## **God is omnipresent (everywhere) Wk 2**

The doctrine of God's omnipresence says He is everywhere - not that He is the universe. He is not bound by space or time. It's a difficult concept because we can't experience it.

Read Psalm 139

*Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there; if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide*

*me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you (Psalm 139:7-12).*

“He is the creator of the heavens and the earth, and so he is in every location. He is also the creator of time, the one without beginning or end. So he has been present in the world since its creation, and there will never be a time from which he is absent. In Scripture, he freely enters history and interacts with creatures.”

Look at how God’s omnipresence is described in the following scriptures;

*‘Am I a God near at hand,’ says the Lord, ‘and not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?’ . . . ‘do I not fill heaven and earth?’ says the Lord? (Jeremiah 23:23,24).*

*Thus says the Lord, "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool. Where then is a house you could build for me? And where is a place that I may rest?" (Isaiah 66:1).*

He *“inhabits eternity.” (Isaiah 57:15)* He dwells there! He occupies from eternity past to eternity future.

## **Discussion**

How do you think about God who is everywhere?

What does it make you think when you read verses that talk about how God can see you all the time?

The Bible says His presence is so great, He cannot be “contained” in our holy places, for His glory is above the heavens (Psalm 113:4-6). How might thinking about God in this way impact how we live and how we meet as church?

## **Manifest presence (experiential): He reveals his glory, His goodness and His Holiness. (Wk 3)**

God appears in different ways consistently throughout scripture from Genesis to Revelation. A manifestation in the bible is something that is tangible to the human senses. The following are examples from the bible;

- Fire, flames, cloud, (Ex 3:3 burning bush, Ex 33:9 pillar of cloud)

- Physical form (Gen 3:8, Gen 18:1(Abraham) ; Gen 32, (Jacob at Peniel) Ex 24:9-11 Moses on mountain )
- Voice (Matt 3:6 Job 38-42 )
- His glory displayed ( Ex16:9, Ex24:15-18, 1 Kings 8:10-12 )

Do you have any testimonies of times when you have experienced God's manifest presence? What did they show you about God's nature?

Now let's turn our focus to the most wonderful manifestation of God. Jesus who became Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22-23).

Watch this video from the bible project and talk about anything that strikes you from it.  
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/image-god/>

### **Finish with this biblical contemplation**

Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your time together.

Read the following passage through slowly several times out loud. (You could have different people read it from different translations). What words or phrases jump out at you? Savour them, thinking about them for a few moments . Share your thoughts if you wish to.

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross ( Col 1:15-19).*