

Presence of God

by David Ravenhill

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God's presence and remembering His promises, and warns against the danger of focusing on parts rather than the whole.

Duration: 1:04:21

Scripture: Exodus 33:15, Job 26:14, Psalm 16:11, Psalm 27:4, Psalm 63:1, Psalm 132:1-5, Song of Solomon 1:2-4, Philippians 3:10, Colossians 1:17, Revelation 3:20

Topics: "Presence of God", "Intimacy With God", "Longing for God's Presence"

Description

David Ravenhill emphasizes the profound longing for the presence of God, drawing parallels between the experiences of Moses and David in their pursuit of divine intimacy. He highlights the dangers of focusing on individual doctrines or parts of faith rather than the whole essence of God, which is found in His presence. Ravenhill illustrates this through the metaphor of a bride and bridegroom, showcasing how true love for God transcends mere religious practices and seeks a deep, personal relationship. He urges the congregation to prioritize God's presence above all earthly desires, echoing the sentiments of David who yearned for closeness with God. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a return to a passionate pursuit of God's presence, emphasizing that it is the distinguishing factor of a true believer.

Transcript

Old stone building right in the heart of the city and all the streets sort of radiate out from that like the spokes on a wheel. And about two blocks away from that old church, there is a museum called the Canterbury Museum. And over the entranceway, as you go into that museum, it was built around the turn of the century.

Again, a beautiful old stone building. But over the entranceway, there is a verse of scripture in the relief work. It's taken from the book of Job, Job chapter 26 and verse 14.

And it says these words, Lo, these are a part of his ways, but how little a portion do we hear of him? Let me say that again. Lo, these are a part of his ways, but how little a portion do we hear of him? I've often wanted to find out who is responsible for that verse of scripture being there. Again, taken from a very obscure portion of scripture and yet a very fitting verse for a museum.

I spent hours in that museum when the kids were younger, walking down the various corridors. And on either side of those corridors would be all sorts of display cabinets with all types of animals, reptiles, birds,

mammals, all stuffed and mounted. And I've seen kids grab the hand of a parent and say, what's that? Or look at this, and stand in amazement at part of God's handiwork.

And yet in all the hours that I've spent in that museum, I don't ever recall anybody attributing all of those things to God himself. So that verse again is a very pertinent verse. Lo, these are a part of his ways, but how little a portion do we hear of him? And while that's a good verse for the museum, it's a tragic verse to put over the house of God.

And yet I think we could write it over the doorway of most congregations. These are a part of his ways, but we don't hear very much about him. I picked up a book many years ago, a book on the Sermon on the Mount by Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, a great British writer.

And in the preface of the introduction of that book, he makes a statement. And I've told Bible school students, I said this is worth one semester in any Bible school you can name. It's quite a statement.

This is what he says, there is nothing so likely to lead to error or to heresy as to begin with the parts rather than the whole. Let me say that again, there is nothing so likely to lead to error or to heresy as to begin with the parts rather than the whole. Let me illustrate that.

I know I've been using car illustrations, but you'll have to forgive me if I use another one. I was in India about 12 years ago now, ministering in a Bible school just outside the city of Hyderabad. And in the compound of that Bible school, there was a jeep.

And I saw the students sort of looking at it and eyeing it. Most of them were from poor homes. Most of them didn't even have shoes to wear, didn't have bicycles to ride.

And I assumed that they knew very little really about how a car functions, how the engine functions. And I said to them, suppose I came as a lecturer to this Bible school. And every day for the year that I'm there, hour after hour after hour, I speak to you about the importance of the carburetor.

I tell you about the carburetor, its function. Talk about the different types of carburetors, single barrel, two barrel, four barrel, six barrel, if you're into drag racing. I talk about the components that make up the carburetor.

Talk again about what the carburetor does. I have an overhead projector and I project up onto the screen again the various types of carburetors. I talk about the evolution of the carburetor into fuel injection.

I talk about the Hebrew word for carburetor and the Greek word for carburetor. And hour after hour after hour, they get one diet, if you like, of carburetor theology. That's all they know about the car engine.

They are convinced that when you lift up the hood of that car, there is only one thing that drives that car and it is a carburetor. Because they have been convinced by the professor, if you like, that the carburetor is the most important part of a car engine. And so at the end of that year, you have a graduating class, spreads out all over India, establishing carburetor churches.

Another lecturer comes to town and he has a revelation on the distributor. And he does the same thing that the carburetor man does. He again has his overhead projector.

He talks about what the distributor does, the function of the distributor. He even makes statements like this, you know, there are some people that think that the most important part of a car engine is the

carburetor. But we know for a fact that what God is saying to the church today, you know, is the distributor.

And he tells again what the distributor does, its function, and you would be amazed again at those students that you talk to them about a car and the first thing they will tell you, and great eloquence, is all about the distributor. But why? Because hour after hour after hour after hour, that's all they've heard. Again at the end of the year, you have a new batch of students that go out and you now have distributor churches all over the nation.

Another lecturer comes and he takes out of his pocket a little thing about three inches long. It's white at the top, black at the bottom, and he says, he says, without this it's impossible to please God. Let me start the car.

And he says, you can have a 200 or 300,000 dollar Ferrari, and if you take this little thing out of it, that car won't even go. That's how important this thing is. And there are some people again that talk about the distributor being the most important thing, and some say the carburetor.

But I'm here to tell you that what God is saying to the church right now is this. Of course he's fresh from Detroit, Tulsa, not Detroit. And so again at the end of the year, you have now a new batch of students and all over India now you have spark plug churches.

And spark plug churches bring in spark plug speakers. And they have their conferences, their spark plug conferences. And across town you have distributor conferences.

And on the other end of town you have carburetor conferences. And they bring in the heavies that speak about carburetors and so on. And everybody's eyeing everybody else for suspicion, because we know that we are in the latest move of God.

We are, I've got derevelation of what God wants. You see there's nothing so likely to lead to error or to heresy as to begin with the parts rather than the whole. All of those things are important.

But when we begin to isolate, when we begin to build a movement around one, so again you have the distributor movement, the carburetor movement, the spark plug movement, then you get into error. I have read over the years numerous books of great men, great women of God, as well as the Word of God. And I've come to this conclusion that every great man or woman of God had one, they all had one common denominator.

And that was an insatiable longing for the presence of God. And Paul says, as he expresses his longing for God, that I may know Him, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His suffering. This one thing I do, he says, not two or three or four, but this one thing I do, forgetting all those things which are behind, I press on.

Writing to the Colossians, he says that Jesus Christ is not only to be present and prominent but preeminent in all things, that He might have preeminence in all things. He goes on to say and we are complete in Him. You see the totality, when you put all those parts together, the totality, the sum of all those parts is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He has made unto us wisdom. He's made unto us righteousness. He's made unto us faith or whatever it may be.

He is truth. And in truth is a person. I am the way, the truth, and the life.

And once we begin to isolate and separate and divide and so on, we lose again the essence, the presence of God Himself. And we end up camping around a particular aspect of truth, but our focus is no longer on a person. It's on a doctrine.

And that doctrine may be wonderful. Maybe the doctrine of faith, the doctrine of holiness, the doctrine of whatever it is, evangelism, righteousness and so on. But once we isolate it from an individual, that individual being the very presence of God, then we run into error.

We build movements around doctrines and we begin to almost to worship doctrines and we get into tremendous error. And so there's this longing that I see all the way through the Word of God, the longing for God's presence. We go into the life of David.

David over and over and over again speaks about his longing for the presence of God. Psalm 132 where he says, I'm not going to rest. I won't sleep.

I won't settle down until I restore the ark of God to its rightful place. Why? Because the previous king Saul had spent 40 years and his life is summarized there in 1 Chronicles chapter 13 when David says, let us bring back the ark of God, the presence of God, for we did not seek it all the days of Saul. What a tragedy.

An entire generation, 40 years, in which the nation of Israel never once sought the presence of God. And David ascends the throne and he says, I have one priority. I'm not going to sleep or rest or do anything else until I bring back the ark.

And over and over again he expresses again his cry for more of God. Again, one thing of I desire to the Lord, he says, and that will I seek after that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life simply to behold the beauty of the Lord. David says, there's only one thing that I'm pursuing.

It's the presence of God. Only one thing that I want. Just to sit in the presence of God and just behold the presence of God.

Another place he says, who have I in heaven but thee? Then he goes on to say, and there is nothing on earth that I desire beside thee. That's one of the most challenging verses, I think, in the Bible. See the first part of that verse is pretty easy to quote.

Who have I in heaven but thee? You know some of us have got loved ones there. You know, pastor myself and Frank got fathers up there. But in another sense, you know, who have I in heaven but thee? Easy to say that.

But the second part of that verse is this, and there is nothing on earth, not one single thing on this earth that I desire beside thee. That's quite a statement. It's not that house.

It's not that car. It's not that bit of jewelry. It's not that dress.

It's not that promotion. It's not that vocation. David, king of Israel, could have had anything he wanted and he said, Lord, there's not one single desire that I've got apart from you.

I've got one single focus and it's to know you. Another place, and we sing it so often, is the heart panteth after the water brook. He says, so panteth my soul after thee, O Lord.

I was in a conference a number of years ago now. A brother by the name of David Minor was elaborating on that verse and he had an interesting viewpoint that I hadn't heard before. He said, the heart or the deer, the reason it's panting is because it's being pursued.

And he said, normally David would be out there looking after the flock and he would see in the, you know, the day break, the deer make its way down to the water brook and drink its fill and then disappear maybe in a thicket, lie down, hide itself. But he says, on this occasion, the heart is panting, meaning that somebody is pursuing the heart and he's driven and he knows instinctively that heart, that deer knows instinctively that the only place of safety is in the water brook. If I can get into the water brook, I can shake off the scent and the one that is pursuing me, the adversary, cannot touch me in the water brook.

And he says, not only is it the place of satisfaction or the place of protection, but it's a place of satisfaction because there he can replenish his strength. He can drink in and David again is lightening himself to the heart. He's being pursued by Saul.

He doesn't know when Saul and his men are going to catch up with him. And he said, God, there's only one place of safety. It's in your presence.

Again, in your presence is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. It's a place of safety.

It's a place of satisfaction. And Lord, as the heart runs and pants after the water brook, that's the pursuit that I have for you. That's my longing.

That's the thing that drives me, is to find my way back into your presence, Lord. And David had this deep, deep longing for the presence of God. Again, after his sin with Bathsheba, what is his thing that he's crying out for more than anything else to God? Lord, whatever you do, don't take your presence from me.

You ever thought why David said that? Because as a young man, he went into the presence of the king. A king that because of his rebellion, because of his sin, because of his stubbornness, God allowed an evil spirit to torment him. And David maybe had heard of this king or even seen him when the Spirit of God rested upon him at the beginning of his, well, maybe not at the beginning of his reign, but heard again, here was a king to prophesy.

And David as a young man now is escorted into play. And he sees this man devoid of the Spirit of God. And he sees a man given again to madness and delusion.

He sees a man tormented in his mind. He said, God, I can't stand the thought of you ever taking your Holy Spirit from me. I don't know, I don't ever want to end up like Saul.

And he longs for God's presence. A day in thy courts, he says, is better than a thousand outside. I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

And over and over and over again, all the way through the Psalms, all you got to do is almost turn to any one Psalm. And David has this deep hunger for God. And it becomes the sort of again, the thing that drives all these men and women of God in the Word of God was this longing for God's presence.

If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn to the book of Exodus. And I want to look at another man again that had a longing for God's presence. We know him, of course, Moses.

Let me just pick up the story here in Exodus chapter 32. Moses is up on the mountain. God is speaking to him.

The children of Israel have been left in the, in the hands of Moses' brother Aaron. And during this time when Moses is away, they have put pressure on Aaron. They said, listen, we don't know what's happened to Moses.

We want a God that is a little more tangible. We want a God that again, like the nations around about us and so on. And Aaron bows to the pressures of the people and he creates the golden calf.

And around that golden calf, there is obviously idolatry, but also immorality. It was basically nothing less than a sexual orgy. Again, that's what the nations were given to in those days.

Most of their gods were fertility gods. And here they are again, they've abandoned themselves to the lusts of the flesh and they've stripped themselves naked. They're out of control.

And God says to Moses, Moses, you better get down there quick. And God divorces himself at least momentarily from the people. And he says, the people that you brought out of Egypt have corrupted themselves.

Not the people that I brought out of Egypt. I don't want to have anything to do with them. Notice in verse seven, verse chapter 32, and the Lord spoke to Moses, go down at once for your people, who you brought up from the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.

They quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They've made for themselves a molten calf. They've worshiped it, sacrificed to it.

And they've said, this is your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. The Bible says God is a jealous God. Imagine what it's, what it must have felt like to attribute all of those signs and wonders and miracles, that incredible deliverance to an idol and says, this is the one that's responsible for delivering you.

And God is angry. And he says to Moses, Moses, let me alone. Notice in verse 10, let me alone, that my anger may burn against them, that I may destroy them, and I will make of you a great nation.

Now you would have to be a pastor to appreciate how excited you could get if God came to you on a Friday night, Saturday night, you're preparing the message, and you've had a rough week, people have been complaining. God says, pastor, I know exactly how you feel, and I've got a brilliant idea. Just leave it to me, let me alone, and I will just wipe every single one of them out.

You won't have a single problem. And then I will make of you a great nation. See, if everybody was like us, wouldn't it be wonderful? You see, we'd all think alike, there'd be no arguments about the sound being too loud or too soft, or this message being too long or too short, or the color of the carpet, or the, you know, because we'd all be on the same wavelength.

You see, God was in the cloning back then. I will make of you a great nation. Somebody said to live above with the saints we love, that will be glory.

To live below with the saints we know, that's another story. And Moses says, God, you can't do that. Again, he's a shepherd, and he cries out on behalf of his people, and there in verse 13, he says,

remember Abraham and Isaac and Israel, thy servants to whom thou did swear by thyself, and did say to them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, all the land which I've spoken I will give to your seed, and they shall inherit it forever.

In other words, Moses here is pleading with God, and as he's praying, he remembers something. God, you are a covenant keeping God. You have given us promise.

You're a promise keeper, and your promises were given to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to our forefathers, and you promised us our own land. You promised us, promised us freedom, and liberty, and blessing. God, what are you going to do about that? Are you going to break your promises? Is that the sort of man that you are, the sort of God that you are, that you would tell us one thing, and then go another direction? And notice God says, well, you've got me, Moses.

Verse 14, the Lord changed his mind about the harm that he said he would do to his people. And then we go over into the next chapter, and apparently this takes place the next day, according to verse 30 of the previous chapter. It says, it came about the next day, but in verse one, the Lord speaks to Moses, and he said, depart from here, you and the people who you've brought up from the land of Egypt, to a land that I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, to your descendants I will give it.

So now it's God's turn, to remind Moses that he is a promise keeper, a covenant keeper. And he says, Moses, I did make a promise to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to your forefathers, saying that I would give you your own land, the land that flows with milk and honey. And Moses, I want you to get the people together, and I want you to lead them into the promised land.

This is the time. Can you imagine the excitement? This is something that kept the nation of Israel going, during the years of bondage and servitude and so on. It was the fact that one day, we're going to have our own land, free at last.

Our own houses, our own vineyards, our own olive trees, our own cities, all of these things that we've never had to build, we've never had to plant. There's a land of prosperity, a land of plenty, a land where the rain comes down, you don't have to water it like you have in Egypt. All of this blessing is yours.

That's the thing that kept the nation of Israel going. Here were slaves, again, that have been deprived of all these privileges. And God says, listen, one day, I promise you, you're going to have everything you've ever wanted, everything you've ever dreamed of.

It's yours. And the Bible says there, in verse two, I'll send an angel before you. I'll drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite.

Go up to this land that flows with milk and honey. Again, the milk and honey is just simply descriptive of all the blessing, all the prosperity of the land. They weren't literally wading through rivers of honey and water and milk and so on, but it was God's way of saying, listen, there is an abundance.

Everything that you've lacked is now going to be made up to you. I have blessed you with every blessing conceivable. And now I want you to go in.

This is the time. I mean, how exciting that must have been. And then God says, P.S., verse three, I don't plan on going with you.

Read it there. Go up to land flowing with milk and honey, for I will not go in your midst, because you're an obstinate people, and lest I destroy you along the way. God's still angry.

God says, I'm not going. I'm convinced this has to be one of the greatest crisis that Moses ever faced. What would you do? You've got a million to three million people that have longed to one day again go in and possess the land.

It's the thing again that has energized them, the vision that has kept them going, the carrot, if you like, that's been there. The promise that we'll, you know, they've been telling their kids about. Listen, it's not too long.

We're going to have our own house. I promise you. Great big backyard with olive groves and vineyards and so on and so forth.

Milk and honey and rain and everything you can imagine. We're going to be free. No longer is there going to be slaves or taskmasters over us.

No more pain and suffering and sorrow and so on and so forth. And then God says, but I'm not going. And so Moses here is faced again with some choices.

We know, of course, as a young man, he faced a choice and that was, do I identify with the Egyptians? After all, I've been raised the son of Pharaoh's daughter. I've got everything going for me. I may be the next Pharaoh.

Bible says he was eloquent in word and deed. He was groomed again to take over some great position. He had all the wealth, all the prestige, everything else of royalty.

And yet he chose to reject all of that and identify with his own people. The Bible says he chose to suffer affliction and he gave up all the pleasures and treasures of Egypt. But this has got to be the next crisis, I think, in his life.

What do I do now? I've got two choices. Choice number one, according to God is, Moses, you can rally the people and take them into the promised land. There it is.

Everything you've ever wanted. Every material blessing you've ever wanted. You know, I've often thought under the old covenant, sometimes there seems to be some of the promises that are better than the new.

I know that's not true, but in this case, can you imagine that we're the nation of Israel tonight? And there's a certain area of Kingman, Arizona. Let's say out on the golf course. That looked pretty nice when we're driving in.

And that represents the promised land. And we've been in slavery. We've been in servitude and all these things.

And God's promises, you know that golf course, that whole area is going to be given to you guys. And I realize it's inhabited now. There's some millionaires out there and some rich people.

And they've got all the fancy cars, swimming pools, beautiful homes and so on and so forth. But don't worry, because I'm going to let you have it. It's going to be yours.

And you can go in and you can possess it. All you do, you knock on the door. And you say, you got two minutes to get out of it.

God said that house is mine. Well, you can imagine the reaction. No way.

Who do you think you are? And I can imagine, you know, the verbiage that would be said and so on. And you know, no doubt the door slammed in your face or the 911 number called or something. But you see, when that happens, God said, I'll send an angel before you.

In other words, if you run into problems, there's an angel that will drive out the inhabitants of the golf course up there. And you can go in, pick out the house you want, no mortgage, don't have to qualify. You may be flipping burgers down at Sonic, but now you can have the biggest house in town.

I mean, you know, this, this is really what God said. Here is an entire nation, with cities already established, vineyards already established, olive groves already established. And all you've got to go in is dispossess the inhabitants and take over.

That's pretty good, isn't it? And so that's the choice, at least the first choice that Moses had. The house of your dreams, the land you've always wanted. Now, the other choice is to stay where you are.

And where you are, let me describe it to you, because the Bible gives us a description. It's called a waste-howling wilderness. Waste, meaning that nothing grows there, absolutely barren.

Not a single thing will grow. Howling, because the winds would just stir up the sand. I was in the Canary Islands earlier this year.

There was a little group of islands off the northwest coast of Africa, speaking of Spain. And they flew me down to those islands. And they're about 150 miles off the coast of Africa.

And the missionaries were, was telling me, that there are times when the winds from the Sahara Desert, which are opposite, would be picked up. And the, the sand rather, would be picked up by the wind and brought 150 miles out to these islands off the coast. And the, the sand would get everywhere.

The lady said, you can vacuum and clean the house. And the sand just seems to get in everywhere. Can you imagine living in the middle of that? Not 150 miles away, but right in the midst of that waste-howling wilderness.

Now, that's choice number two. Now, be honest. If you were faced with those two choices, what would you choose? Now, you see, with the, with the golf course, you get every material thing that you've ever dreamed of.

All the blessings of God. Now, again, that's very carnal, isn't it? And this is a, you know, spiritual series of meetings, and so on. So, let me, let me sweeten the deal a little bit here.

Because along with all the carnality, the houses, the lands, the material goods, and so on, there's going to be an angel. Not a big demon, an angel. So, there's going to be signs, and wonders, and miracles.

Now, that doesn't sound too bad, does it? I mean, we all want signs, wonders, miracles. We want to see the supernatural. We want to see amazing exploits done, and so on.

So, it's not just houses, and lands, and vineyards, and no demons. An angel will go before. So, that's, that's choice A. Choice B, again, is this waste howling wilderness.

Absolutely nothing. Oh, but the presence of God. Now, honestly, I mean, what do we live for? I mean, what is it that we put all our energy, and our time into? Isn't it the house of our dreams? A little bit of land, you know, a nice backyard, and so on.

Clothes, cars, swimming pools, jewelry. I mean, really, isn't that the thing that sort of drives us? Isn't that the reason we put so many hours a week in? We get extra jobs, and so on, to, in order to have the houses, and lands, and the vineyards, and the olive groves, and so on. Or are we pursuing God? And Moses does what Moses does so well.

He begins to pray. And notice his prayer in verse 13. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I found favor in thy sight, let me know thy ways, that I may know thee.

What a strange prayer. Why do I say it's a strange prayer? Because under the circumstances, my prayer would not have been like that. See, if I was Moses, and Moses, like any other man, he was a man of like passions as we are, just like Elijah, and anybody else.

He, you know, he had his aspirations, and his dreams, his likes, and so on. My prayer would have been something like this. God, I know you're still mad.

I've never seen you as mad as you were yesterday. I mean, you were talking about obliterating the entire nation. I mean, you were talking about wiping out your own kids.

One million people, three million people destroyed totally. I mean, man, I've never seen you that mad. But now that you've, you know, 24 hours have gone by, and I know, you know, sometimes we lose it in the midst of, you know, but let's reason together.

If you don't want to go with us all the time, why don't you just show up every once in a while, like on the Sabbath from 10 to 12. Sunday night, Wednesday night, you know, the feast, Passover, Pentecost, tabernacles, when a guest speaker comes to town. See, my prayer would have been something like that.

Let's reason, Lord. I know you don't, I know you're still upset. I can see the body language there.

You're agitated. You're still, you know, and you're talking about us being stubborn, and Lord, I think you're being a little stubborn on this. I mean, my prayer would have been along those lines.

I'd have been trying to compromise. I would have been saying, God, you know, I think this is, this isn't right, that you gave us all these promises, and then at the last minute, you sort of, this, you sort of fine-tuned it and said, okay, you can have all of that, but you can't have my presence. Instead, Moses isn't even talking about houses and lands and anything else.

All Moses says is, Lord, I want to know you. Let me know thy ways that I may know thee. And God says, verse 14, my presence will go with you.

You see, he touched the heart of God. God saw in this man a longing for his presence. Not a longing for all these other things, as good as those are, as wonderful as they are, and God himself provided them, but Moses said, Lord, it's you that I want.

And God says to you, I mean, you really want me, Moses? He said, yeah. He says, okay, I'll go with you. My presence will go with you.

And Moses says, if your presence does not go with us, do not lead us from here. In other words, he's already settled it. Maybe it wasn't a big issue to Moses, I don't know.

Maybe I'm projecting again my own life into that and saying, boy, you know, what would I do? See, maybe to Moses, God had already stripped him. He'd lived in the backside of the desert anyway. But he's able to say, if your presence doesn't go, don't take us.

God says, I'll go. And then Moses says this, verse 16, this is to me one of my favorite verses in the Bible. How can it be known that I found favor in thy side, I and thy people? Is it not by thy going with us, so that we, I and thy people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are on the face of the earth? Notice Moses said, there's only one thing that makes us unique.

Only one thing that distinguishes us. Only one thing that sets us apart. It's not the clothes that we wear.

It's not the food that we eat. It's not the fact that we've got a tabernacle, or we've got certain holidays or feast days. It's not the fact that we've got 10 commandments, as good as all those are.

We've got judicial laws and dietary laws and all of that. He said, God, there's only one thing that we have, that the other nations don't have. It's your presence.

The other nations have got their places of worship. The other nations have got their songs. The other nations have got their holy books.

The other nations have got their sacred days. The other nations have got their, you know, code of ethics. The other nations have got their form of religion.

The other nations have got their gods. The Lord, we're the only one that has your presence. And if you remove your presence from us, we're no different.

We're no different. No different than the church down the road. No different than the Mormon Church.

No different than this church, that cult. No different. The thing that makes us unique, God, is the fact that you dwell in our midst.

And if you don't go, we don't have anything. You see, this is what I mean. Here is a man, but he's not satisfied with the parts.

He wants the whole. I went to a conference a number of years ago, huge charismatic gathering, Pentecostal leaders from around the nation in Dallas. I got in on the afternoon session.

There was a brother well-known that was speaking about covenant. And his whole message, basically, was God is a covenant-keeping God. And the essence of his message was, all you've got to do is sort of twist God's arm, so to speak.

And by twisting God's arm, I mean remind him of his covenants, and you can extract from God whatever you want. And so you come to God, and you sort of find a scripture, and you twist his arm and say, God, you said you'd heal me. So I want you to heal me.

God, you said you'd prosper me. I want you to prosper me. You promised.

Let God be true, and every man a liar. And his whole message, really, was just extracting from God something. And there wasn't a single thing about the presence of God.

I sat there listening, and listening, and listening, and I thought, you know, this isn't really what covenant is all about. It's about a person. You see, it's possible to have houses, and lands, and vineyards, and olive groves, and not have the presence of God.

Possible to have angels, not have the presence of God. Did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not do this? Did we not do that? Said, I never knew. No relationship, no intimacy, no friendship, no companionship.

But Lord, I extracted a miracle, because you're a covenant-keeping God. And I saw healings, and I prophesied. I did this, and I did that.

Moses, again, said, God, it's you that I want. Your presence alone is the thing that makes us different. And if you withdraw your presence, Lord, we're no different than any other nation.

We've got a form of godliness, but we deny the power thereof. He goes on to say, Lord, show me your glory. He cries out again for the glory of God, the manifestation again of God himself.

Let's turn now over into the Song of Solomon, because we've looked at a man reaching up to God and saying, God, it's your presence that I want more than anything else. And many times, I think we tend to think that, you know, it's a one-sided thing. We're like Moses.

We're always begging God, please, please, please come down. I want your presence. But I want to look at the other side, if you like, the flip side of that coin, because it's not just the bride longing for the bridegroom.

The bridegroom longs for the bride. And in the Song of Solomon, this very beautiful book, again, that typifies the relationship of the bride and the bridegroom, the church, and the Lord Jesus Christ. It begins in verse 2, chapter 1, where the bride says, may he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine.

This is a very intimate book, very personal book. It's a love story. I've heard it said that the Orthodox Jews would not permit their young people to read this book until they were approaching the age of marriage, if not getting married.

They felt it was too revealing, too sacred, too intimate. But here she is, and she is in love, the bride and the bridegroom. And she says, would you just put your arms around me, kiss me again with the kisses of your mouth, for your love is better than wine.

Wine is what the world turns to, to get a lift. Wine is the world's way of drowning their sorrows, coping with life. Again, just a little sip of the bottle, and I'll feel better.

I feel depressed. I feel lonely. I feel afraid.

I feel this or that. And so, you know, a little bit of wine, and I'm gonna feel fine. I'm gonna get that buzz.

And she said, listen, I found something that exhilarates or satisfies far more than what the world has. That's the substitute for your presence. Just one kiss from your mouth is better than all the wine.

You see, God can be that real. She says, your oil has got such a beautiful fragrance about it. Verse 4, draw me, let us run together.

And so begins this beautiful relationship. They visit one another's homes. They skip around the hills together, and so on and so forth, and call each other darling and love.

And I mean, it's a very, very intimate book. He brings her into his banqueting table, and he says, listen, this banner represents the way I feel about you. Your banner, his banner over me is love.

And so, the relationship begins to deepen, and then we come to chapter 5. And in chapter 5 and verse 2, we have a little sort of a setback here. And it's the bride that is speaking. I was asleep, she said, but my heart was awake.

In other words, she's not quite in that deep sleep. She's in the sort of that twilight zone. Those of you who've got children know what it's like.

You never quite go into a deep sleep. You're always sort of, did I hear a cry? I, you know, every mother can relate. Fathers a little more.

Anyway, we'll leave that. I was asleep, but my heart was awake. A voice, my beloved was knocking.

So here he is, he comes, she's gone to bed. She's just about in this deep sleep, and she hears him knocking. She hears his voice, open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one.

My head is drenched with dew, my locks for the damp of the night. He's standing there again, the dew of the night has come down, he's soaking wet, his hair is damp, and he's wanting to come in, he's wanting to be with her, he's wanting to spend time with her. Again, wanting fellowship, and friendship, and companionship.

And she doesn't want to open up the door right now. Her problem is, she's comfortable the way she is. She's satisfied the way she is.

She's gone to bed, she's washed, notice, in verse 3, she responds, and I believe this is an internal response. I don't believe that she verbalizes this. I've taken off my dress, how can I put it on again? In other words, I don't want to put on my dress again.

I've already washed my feet, I don't want to get them dirty again. And so in her mind, she hears him knocking, my darling, my dove, my perfect one, open, I want to come in, I want to be with you. And she's in just about ready to go into this deep sleep, and she's thinking, not right now, not right now.

It means I'm gonna get up, have to get up, put my dress back on, get my feet dirty again. When you leave, I'm gonna have to take my dress off, wash my feet again, and it's just too much of a bother, and you know, just sort of go away, leave me alone. Verse 4, my beloved extended his hand through the openings, and my feelings were aroused for him.

He's still trying to get in, he knows she's in there, and he's wanting to be with her. Again, we've got this, this picture now of the bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ wanting to be with the bride. The Bible says very

clearly, the church is his bride, and he longs to be with us, and he's doing everything within his power to woo us, to draw us, to awaken us.

My darling, he says, my dove, notice the words, not one of rejection, not one of scorn, not one of anger, but one of wooing us, drawing us, my darling, my dove, my perfect one, come, open up, let me come in. And we don't know, of course, the timing here, whether it was a matter of seconds, whether it's a matter of minutes, maybe he knows that it's gonna take her a while to get up, and just come to the door, and so he's patient, he stands there, but there's nobody, and so he tries to reach in. And verse 5, I arose and I opened to my beloved.

My hands stripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt. I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had gone. Notice, my beloved had turned and had gone.

My heart went out to him as he spoke. I searched, I did not find him, I called, he did not answer me. What a tragic ending, so far.

You see, he's been hurt, he's been wounded. You know, the person that loves you the most is the person that's capable of hurting you most, isn't that right? And especially when you're in that relationship where maybe the marriage hasn't taken place yet, and you've been courting, and you've already expressed again your love for each other. There's been times of embracing and kissing, again, all of a sudden, you know, you arrange to meet, the person doesn't show up.

And you know what goes through your mind, what's going on? Is there somebody else? Things seem to be fine yesterday, you know, how your mind fills in all the blanks, and he's standing there, you know, she's never been like this before. And he's patient, tries to get in again. My darling, he calls her all the right things.

Finally, he's grieved, he's wounded, she doesn't respond, and he goes away. And when she gets there, finally, and opens the door, he's not there. You see, I'm convinced right now that this is a time, a season, if you like, where God is knocking.

The Bible talks about seasons of refreshing from the presence of God. There are seasons when God draws close to us, and I believe when we don't respond during those seasons, then God makes it more difficult to draw us out, to see how much we really are pursuing him. And he hides himself.

But the thing I love about this story is, she doesn't go back to bed. You see, she could have just said, well, if he really loves me, he'll call me in the morning, you know. But instead, she gets up in the middle of the night, and she begins to search.

I searched, but I did not find him. I called, and he did not answer me. The watchmen who make the rounds of the city found me.

They struck me, they wounded me. The very ones that are supposed to be protecting her don't understand what's going on. Maybe misunderstanding for a woman of the night or something, I don't know.

They beat her up. She's wounded, she's hurt, and I don't think the Bible here is trying to be overly graphic. It's saying, listen, she's seriously hurt.

The guardsmen on the wall took my shawl from me. See, they've taken away her protection. After all, he says, I stand there in the dew of the night.

My hair is drenched with the dew of the night. No doubt she had a shawl over, and she's out there shivering, and she's looking, she's searching, she's calling, there's no answer. And all of a sudden, they find her, they rough her up, and they grab her shawl, and now she's exposed to the elements.

And what could have been so easy, just a matter of minutes ago, to open the door and invite him in. Now, it's a totally different story. But she realizes something.

She realizes she's blown it. She realizes how much she's missing him. She realizes really what a fool she's been.

Instead of going back to bed and going back to that place of comfort, she said, I've got to find him. There's a relationship here that's been severed, and I've got to this relationship. Verse 8, it says, I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, as to what you will tell him, for I am lovesick.

In other words, she comes across the daughters of Jerusalem, who these women are, I'm not sure, but they're out there in the middle of night, seemingly three or four of them at least. And she says to them, listen, if you see my beloved, would you tell him something? Tell him I'm lovesick. And implied is that, implied in that statement is this, please let him know I'm searching for him.

Please let him know I'm sorry. Please let him know I blew it. Please tell him that I'm desperate to see him again.

Would you, would you let him know I can't live without him? Please pass that on. I'm going this way, and if I notice you're going that way, if you find him, please convey to him. And their response is this, in verse 9, what kind of beloved is your beloved? O most beautiful among women.

In other words, it seems to me that the, the question really, we've got it in this beautiful poetic language, it's more like, what sort of guy is this? I mean, you're a gorgeous woman. If you don't think you couldn't get another man, you're nuts lady. I mean, all you got to do is look in the mirror, you're a fabulous looking woman.

O most beautiful among women. I mean, what sort of guy is this? I mean, here you are, you're bruised, you're, you know, you're bleeding, your shawl has been taken from you, you know, your mascara's all over your face or whatever. I mean, you look a mess, but you're still beautiful.

I mean, you know, what sort of guy is worth pursuing like this? Why don't you just go back home to bed? I mean, that, that seems to be the inference here. So it says, O most beautiful among women. What kind of beloved is your beloved? That thus you adjure us.

In other words, that you're asking us, what sort of guy is this? And notice now what happens. Out of her innermost being, she begins to describe him. My beloved, she said, is dazzling and ruddy.

Outstanding among 10,000. She said, listen, if you were to take 10,000 men out of this city and put my beloved in the middle, you wouldn't even see the others. He's outstanding among 10,000.

We sing that song, he's the fairest of 10,000 of my soul. This is where it comes from. I mean, you've never, you've never, you've never seen somebody as wonderful as my beloved.

His head is like gold, like pure gold. His locks are like clusters of dates, as black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside streams of water.

His cheeks, his hands, his legs, his mouth. She goes on and on and on about it. Now notice what she's doing.

She's not describing his assets. She's describing him. You see, this is so important.

She's not in love with what she's going to derive from him. She's in love with him as a person. And the question is, listen, tell us about your beloved.

I mean, lady, I mean, this guy's got to be something. I mean, that you're out here, the middle of night, all alone. What sort of beloved is your beloved? She doesn't say, well, you know, you know as you drive out of town there on that bluff, that incredible big house there, that mansion, that's my beloved's house.

The cattle on a thousand hills, those are all his. You know, all the banks in this town, my beloved's the president of all those banks. You ever seen that beautiful carriage that comes in town periodically with those beautiful chestnut horses? That's my beloved's.

He's got a whole stable full of them. And you know, when we get married, I'm gonna have all the things I've ever dreamed of. I mean, he's got so much money, he can't even count it.

I mean, he makes Bill Gates look like a pauper. And I'm gonna have everything I've ever dreamed of. You know, that house, there's so many servants there, there's beautiful clothes and linen and silks, diamonds, sapphires.

See, she doesn't talk that way. She says, let me tell you about him. Let me describe him to you.

And then she says in verse 16, his mouth is full of sweetness. He is wholly desirable. In other words, everything about my beloved is desirable.

I've never found a single blemish, a single fault. I've never found a single thing that I don't like about him. This is my beloved, she said, and this is my friend.

Oh daughters of Jerusalem. You see, he's a friend. He's not a God who's a far-off.

He's a friend. He's a lover. He's one that I can share with intimately.

He's one that knows all about me. I've shared with him everything about my life. And he still accepts me.

He still loves me. He still kissed me. He still brought me to his banqueting table.

He's put a banner over me that he loves me. I mean, I've never had a friendship like this before. A genuine friendship.

I can tell him anything. He is so understanding, so patient, so kind, so loving. Again, he's wholly desirable.

His mouth is full of sweetness. And she gets through describing him. And notice what happens to these women.

Chapter 6 and verse 1. Where is your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where is your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you? Do you mind if we tag along? Quite a change. What sort of guy is this? She gets through describing. Listen, would it be all right with you? I mean, I don't want to embarrass you.

Could we join you? Could we seek him with you? See, that's what God's doing. God is bringing the church into a new relationship. So that all we talk about is our lover.

That we fall in in love. Again, not with a doctrine, not with a denomination, not with this, not with that. But we're in love with one that is wholly desirable.

That no longer calls us servants, but calls us a friend. And we can call him a friend. When the world asks us about what we believe and so on, we don't describe the new building, we don't describe this, we don't describe that, and so on.

We say, listen, let me tell you about my friend. The God that I worship is the best friend that I've ever had. He's wholly desirable.

I've never found a single thing wrong with him. He loves me with an everlasting love. His banner over me is love.

He's drawn us, we've run together. Oh, there's been times when I haven't responded like I should, but never again. I realize what it's like to be without him.

And the world then says, listen, I wish I could have a friend like that. I've been rejected, I've been thrown out of this church, that church, you know, my concept of God isn't the same that you've got. I would so love to have somebody that I could cast all my care on.

A care, really cares for me. Somebody that understands me. Somebody that could just put their arms around me and give me the security that I'm looking for.

Kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. See, that's what God is doing. He's coming back after all, the greatest climax of all human history.

He's not the rapture, it's the marriage supper of the Lamb. The bride makes herself ready. And you say, well, again, that's just a little story there in the Old Testament.

Well, let me give you the New Testament counterpart. It's in the book of Revelation, chapter 3, verse 20. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

It's the same bridegroom, it's the same bride. And he says, is there anybody in there? Anybody hear me knocking? Is anybody going to open the door? I want to come in. I want to be intimate.

I want to be in fellowship. I want to sit down with you. I want to share with you.

See, the most intimate time in the East was to sit down around a table. At the end of the day, there was no television, no newspapers in those days. It was the time of true fellowship, where you caught up on the events of the day and what was going on in the community.

And maybe a, you know, a runner had come through from a neighboring nation or something. And you would sit there and you would begin to share deeply. Again, just a little candle going, a meal to sit around, and it was a very beautiful time.

And the Lord says, listen, open to me, my darling, my darling. Anybody hear my voice? Would you open the door? I want to come in. I want to be with you.

I love you. The bride says, oh, we don't need you, Lord. We're rich.

We're increased with goods. We don't have need of you. We've got a reputation now that's booming.

Tapes are going out all over the nation. We're on television, you know. Don't need you anymore.

We've got it down to a fine art now. We know how to run the church without you. Some of us are like that, aren't we? We've sort of made it by ourselves.

And some of us are satisfied the way we are. We're washed. We can go back to a time when God washed us, so to speak.

We took off our dress. We got our feet washed. But we've settled down.

We're lying on a bed, and the Bible says, woe to those that are at ease in Zion. We've settled down. And God is saying, listen, I wake down at sleep.

Rise up. Rise up, my fair one. Come away.

He's wanting to woo us all over. He's wanting to draw us all over again. He wants us to honestly find him as a lover.

And all of a sudden, again, other things sort of lose their attraction. You know one thing about being in love in the natural? You may be into sports. You may be into hunting.

You may be in the golf. You may be into fishing. I mean, it may be the passion of your life.

And then all of a sudden, somebody comes along, and there's something that is awakened within you. And that thing that was once a passion is no longer a passion, because you're in love now. Isn't that true? And somehow you have all the time in the world, because love makes a way, doesn't it? And somehow golf just loses its interest now, because there's a young lady that I've got my eye on, or there's a young man that I've got my eye on.

And golf? I'm not that interested in golf. Oh, a week ago, it was the passion of your life. You couldn't wait.

Every spare minute, you were out there. But now, what? There's a love relationship. See, that is what God is wanting to do.

He wants to awaken again a fresh passion. And other things are gonna lose their attraction. And we're gonna say, Lord, it's just you.

One thing of my desire to love. And that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, just to behold the beauty of the Lord. And Lord, the houses and the vineyards and the olive groves, they don't have any hold on me, because if you don't go, Lord, I don't go.

It's your presence that I want more than anything else. Let's just bow in prayer. Just allow the Holy Spirit to have his way, because I know he's speaking to some of you.

Some of you just have not made time for him. You're too busy. Again, you're like Martha, cumbered about with so many other things, good things maybe, but Mary chose just to be with him.

Lovers love to be together. Lovers love to get alone. And spiritual lovers love to be together too.

I've never ever heard of any lovers that said, you know, it's so hard being with the one that I love. They don't ever call it legalism. They don't ever call it bondage or religion.

They're in love. And I think when we're in love with him, again, we'll spend time with him. We'll be where he is.

We'll be doing what he's doing. And he wants to awaken that love. And some of you, you're in that place.

You hear him knocking even now. Don't put it off. Some of you maybe have blown it.

But listen, start seeking again. Don't go back to bed. Say, Lord, I don't care how long it takes.

I want that relationship back, that first love that I used to have. Lord, there's been a cooling in my relationship. Father, draw me again tonight.

Draw me again. Draw me and I'll run after you. Holy Spirit, we ask you to come right now.

Lord, just settle over this congregation. Lord, we don't hear the voice of man. We hear the voice of your spirit.

We hear again that wooing, that calling. My darling, my love, my perfect one, come away. Open to me.

Open to me. I want to come in. I want to be with you.

See, it's not just a Moses that's reaching out to God. It's God reaching down, saying, I want to be with you as well. Don't be ashamed tonight to let the tears flow if that's what it takes.

Come back and say, Lord, I'm so sorry. There's been other lovers that, Lord, I've been involved with. The love of money.

The Bible says in the last days men will be lovers of money, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God. And ask God tonight just to wean again those other things from me. Lord, I lay those things aside.

And I'm going to return to you. I'm going to return to my first love. Let's just quietly stand, make room for people to come.

I'm going to suggest, again, you either kneel where you are or just find a place here. Just as Moses leads us, let's, again, just linger in the presence of God. Let, again, there's a, it's like the dew, if you like.

There's a saturation of God's presence. He just wants to come. We need to just open our heart tonight.

Let's renew our vows tonight. Renew our relationship.

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