

Not Without Your Presence

by Erlo Stegen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God's presence and keeping promises to Him, as a life of obedience and holiness is essential for a Christian.

Scripture: Exodus 33:15

Topics: "Presence of God", "Commitment to God", "God's Presence"

Description

Erlo Stegen emphasizes the necessity of God's presence in our lives, drawing from Moses' plea in Exodus 33. He highlights that true success and fulfillment come not from blessings or victories, but from being in God's presence. Stegen warns against the dangers of forgetting our commitments to God, using poignant examples to illustrate the consequences of failing to keep our promises. He encourages the bridal couple, Gert and Jennifer, to prioritize God's presence in their marriage, ensuring that their relationship reflects holiness and righteousness. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a life that is distinct and well-pleasing to God, urging all to remember their vows and commitments to Him.

Transcript

Shall we pray once again? We ask you, dear Lord, to presence yourself, be in our midst. Bless the bridal couple and all those that are here with them. Bless the reading of your Holy Word.

May it touch every heart and may this hour be well pleasing to you. Amen. When I asked Gert, I don't even remember when, whether it was yesterday, I said, Gert, do you have a word on your heart for this day? And he said, yes, there's a word that has been on his heart for some time.

And we find that word in Exodus 33. Exodus chapter 33 verse 15 to 17. I said, oh Gert, I remember preaching on this text a bit over 30 years ago.

And if I'm not mistaken, it was at a wedding at Claridge where I spoke on these words. Shall we turn to our text? Exodus 33 verses 15 to 17. Then Moses said to him, if your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.

How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? And the Lord said to Moses, I will do the very thing you have asked because I'm pleased with you and I know you by name. Just a few thoughts about this word. I'm always surprised and marvelled when married young

people have words on their heart concerning their marriage.

They have marvellous words, wonderful words. And if you go according to those words, then the marriage every day of their lives should be heavenly, holy, sanctified and righteous. They can't but be a foretaste of heaven.

But it is a tragedy that so many people forget the marriage text. I suppose you remember your text, the text you had chosen. And if you didn't choose it, the text that was used when you got married.

It's good if the Word of lives within us. May this Word be always close to you and live within you and you Jennifer as well. The curse of this time is that we so easily forget what God has told us.

This word was a decision and a commitment Moses made. Moses said to God, God, if you do not go with us, do not send us up from here. A very, very short time before this happened and this promise that God would be with them was given, the children of Israel, the Israelites, had greatly sinned and grieved God.

They set up a image. You remember the golden calf? And they bowed and worshipped that calf. And they said, these are your gods.

This is your left foot, Israel. They had seen the greatness of God. They had seen his glory as they passed the Red Sea over and over again along their way.

God revealed himself to them, but it seemed as if it didn't mean a thing to them. They turned around, made a golden calf and worshipped it and said, Israel, this is your God. Oh, the promises they had made, how they sang and how they praised God when they had crossed the Red Sea and saw the enemy Pharaoh and all his legions die in the Red Sea.

But within a short time, they sang so low that they forgot all about it. And they just did the opposite and bowed to a golden calf. And naturally, God got very, very angry with them.

Always remember, when you sin, God gets angry with you. God is a God of love and righteousness. And that's why if we turn our backs on him with our deeds or with our words, he can't stand it.

And he told Moses, you take the children of Israel, go up. I'll give you an angel and the angel will go with you. You will be prosperous.

You will be victorious. You will receive the blessing. But don't expect me to go with you.

But I'll send you a great angel and he will be with you and he will keep you. And Moses said, No. If you, God, don't go up with us, if your presence is not with us, don't lead us up from here.

We stay put. We don't go. Moses was a great man of God.

And I can understand when the Lord was on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses was one of the two who was there. When our Lord was transfigured and glorified on the mountain. This is the secret of Moses' success.

This is what made a man of him. He wanted God's blessing. No, he wanted God's presence.

God promised him blessing. God promised him victory over all the enemies. God promised him the land of where milk and honey flows.

He says, I don't want to have anything to do with it if you are not with us. God meant more to him than heaven. God meant more to him than silver or gold.

God meant more to him than success, fame, or whatever it is. Whatever the world can promise us. Not even the presence of angels.

An angel sent by God. You get people that speak of an angel that is with them, leading them. But Moses was not of that kind.

He says, I'm not satisfied with anything less than God's presence. Moses made that decision. He made that commitment.

When we speak of the decisions Moses made, we immediately ask ourselves, what decisions have we made in our past? What commitment? What have we promised God in our past? Have you ever promised God, I will serve you? God, I'll follow you to the end. God, you are worth more to me than anything else in the world. And I want you to know this and understand it clearly.

If you don't keep that promise, you are cursed and you are damned. If you should die now, you'll go to hell. I'll never forget a young man who promised that he'd serve God.

And he said, when I'm grown up, I'll preach the gospel with you. When he had finished schooling, his father said, no, you can't go that way. You've got to work and earn some money.

And he did that. And then slowly but surely, he drifted away from God, where he didn't take God so seriously anymore. It wasn't long after that I received the news that he was imprisoned.

And then I heard the news that he got the death sentence. He was hanged. And he wrote me a letter, a letter that got lost.

And I regret it to this very day. One couldn't read his letter without being moved and touched to the deepest depths of the heart. And he says, oh, please go around in the world to have all the congregations, wherever you can go to, and tell them if they've ever made a commitment or a decision, promising God something, see to it that they keep it.

Because if not, they are guilty before God. And they must learn this lesson from me. I'm hanged.

I'm going to be hanged as a young man, because I promised God something. But my father said no. And I listened to him instead of listening to God.

We've got to listen to God more than to anybody else in this world. But make sure that it is God. And that's the heartbreaking thing, that we forgive, forget what we promised God.

Maybe your child was sick. Maybe you were sick. You made a promise, oh God, if you help me, if you save my child or save me out of this situation, I will serve you.

You don't abide by it. My. Just a few hours before this service, Dorothy Newlands was with me.

And she told me about yesterday morning at assembly, when she spoke to the children. She told them the story. And I said, oh, Dorothy, do me a favor, photocopy that and bring it to me.

I want to share that with the people at the marriage. And she kindly did so. And I said, look, I'll even tell them that it's Miss Dorothy Newlands who gave me this.

It's a feather in your head. It's a story of an orthopedic surgeon. Jason Withers was a 36-year-old carpenter.

And as he was working with a circular saw, our brother Owen Schroeder, he works with saws as well. He got his hand into it. And four fingers of his right hand were cut off.

He immediately went to hospital. I was told years ago when I was in America, that it's one of the best hospitals in America. Billy Graham's right hand man, or his organizer, he told me he had a lung problem.

His lungs were giving in. And they wanted to transplant his lungs at this very hospital. But he died before he got that transplant.

The people who were with him, Jason Withers, quickly picked up all the fingers. They were neatly cut off, put them on ice and into ice, and rushed to the hospital and said maybe they could transplant those fingers. And this doctor immediately spoke to his senior and said, could we do that for this man? Because he said, is there something that you guys can do for me? Says Withers, eyes teared up.

Can you put my fingers back on? When the doctor, the surgeon spoke to his senior, says find out, does he smoke? And when he was asked, do you smoke? He said yes. And his senior said, look, I'm not going to waste my time on that man. I won't do that op.

This doctor felt sorry for him, because he begged him, please, please help me. This is my right hand. I lost my four fingers.

I've got two little children. He took his cigarettes out of his pocket and threw them away. Says, I promise I'll never smoke again.

The doctor phoned his senior, because he was only a surgeon for two years. And he spoke to his senior and said, he is a smoker, but he promises he'll stop it. He'll never smoke again.

And his senior said, look, that's what they all say. They all say that. But they are liars.

After time, they smoke again. Well, that's what his senior said. He says, I won't waste my time on him.

And this young man, he says, I was as young as this young man was. And I had two children as well. And I felt sorry for him.

And I said, let's help him. He promised he'll never smoke again. And his senior said, that's what they all say, and they don't keep it.

Oh, may God grant that not one of us here is found in that category. And if you've made a promise in the past, you didn't keep it, repent today at this wedding day. Jesus made wine at the marriage feast.

And you'll repent on this day. Otherwise, you'll leave this place being cursed and damned. And these aren't empty words, I'm telling you.

This young man said, I was so upset by his fingers. He says, will you stop smoking? And the man said, yes. The doctor said, it's about the worst thing a man can do to harm his body, to smoke.

It's about the worst thing you can do to your body, to smoke. And then if you hear God's word, your body is my temple. Your body is the body of the Holy Spirit.

That's where God dwells. He says, firstly, it's one of the worst things a person can do is to harm his body. To smoke.

Secondly, it constricts blood vessels. He says, even if we should be able to reattach your fingers and get the adequate blood flow to them, all that work would go down the drain. If you smoked even one cigarette again, the vessels would constrict and the fingers would die.

He says, sitting there looking at me, Jason dug a pack of cigarettes out of his shirt pocket. He threw them on the floor. Doc, if you guys put my fingers back on, I'll never smoke again, ever.

And I believed him that many a counselor and a preacher believes people when they say, we're going to follow the Lord. We're going to go God's way. And if Herod says, this is my word, then I believe that Herod from now on will walk with God every day of his life.

And if Jennifer is his true wife, she won't be so foolish and so stupid as turn her back on that. He says, I called Wilk, that's the senior doctor, laid out Jason's scenario, working hard to convince him we should do the surgery. Jason says he will quit smoking.

He says he'll never take another puff again. And Wilk said, that's what they all say. It's a pity that mankind has sunk so low that they don't keep their word.

They say something and before the sun sets, a week has passed. They do the opposite thing. They did the operation.

The senior said, all right then. For hours and hours and hours they sat there. He worked all night, his senior.

And he says, man, I'm damned if I given all my strength, energy, wisdom in sewing on these fingers, if he should smoke again. They did it. And the fingers, the first two, three days didn't look very promising.

But then after the third, the fourth day, they noticed a change of color. And the doctor says, hey, the blood is going through and they're growing on. And it turned out to be a successful operation that cost many, many thousands of dollars and much energy of the doctors.

And then about the 10th day after the op, he could go home. And he went home. Didn't take long.

His wife phoned the young doctor and said, something has gone wrong. Something has gone wrong. His fingers are turning black.

They don't look well at all. He says, let him come immediately. He came.

He looked at them. He could see how they had deteriorated. He says, let me ask you, Jason, have you smoked again? Tell me the truth.

He said, yes, I had a cigarette. Can you understand now that I say, cursed and damned is the man who doesn't keep his vow and his promise. He says, well, what shall I do? I can't phone my senior.

What will he say? What will he think of me? He says he went through agony. They tried to save those fingers. But within a few days, everything was lost.

And he had just the short stumps left. He says, look, young man, you'll have to go through life like this and bear the consequences. You've wasted your life.

You promised and you didn't keep that promise. So it will be with everyone, not only Hirt and Jennifer, every one of us who's made a promise to God and doesn't keep it. Said, oh, God, we'll serve you.

There's nobody like you. It didn't take long. And then they bowed to a calf.

It wasn't even alive, but it was golden. And gold speaks to us, appeals to us. And the image of an ox which eateth grass.

Can a child of God being saved sink so low? We've sung, we're pressing on, on higher ground. May that prayer be answered. That's why God got angry with them.

And he said, Moses, I'll send an angel. He can accompany you. He can be with you.

He'll bless you. You'll have a land flowing with milk and honey. Moses said, I don't want it.

I don't want luxury. I don't want money. I don't want a good life.

I want God. I want God. But Moses, being a man of God, stood and said, God, think of these people.

Think of me. You chose me. You called this people.

What are the enemies going to say if they see that you are not well-pleased with us, that you are not well-pleased with us? See, Moses, he wanted to live a life that's well-pleasing to God. He wanted to bring joy to God's heart. And that's why he wanted to abide in his presence like, not like the prodigal son.

Bless me, God. Fill my wagon. Give me all that you've got in store for me, my inheritance.

And he left, went with the world, with immoral girls, with drunkards, with the smokers. Where did he end? With the pigs. And you know that in the Greek language, he went to a man and he clung to him, is the same word as you find in Corinthians.

If a man clings to a prostitute, he's one body with her. So he went from bad to worse. He turned to be a homosexual.

That's how far he went. Turn your back on God. Don't worship him as God.

He'll let you go. And you'll land where you never expected where you could land. And in the text Moses said, Lord, what will the people say if you are not pleased, well-pleased with us? Wherever we are, whatever we do, whatever we say, whatever we think, we've always got to ask ourselves, is this well-pleasing to God or not? The Lord Jesus said in John 8 verse 29, I only do that which is well-pleasing to God.

You can ask yourself, Lord, you can say, my parents are well-pleased, my in-laws are well-pleased, but the question is, is God well-pleased with your life? I remember in 52 and when I was in Pretoria, I walked on the streets and there was a cinema. Very big, big entrance and I just walked slightly toward the

entrance and I looked at those pictures. I'll never forget that time.

This is not the place for a child of God or a man who walks with God. I turned around like that and left. Since that day, I've never, never faced a bioscope, never.

Nowadays, we don't have bioscopes, we've got TV. The bioscope is right in our house. I remember a young man, he lived with his widow mother.

She sweated to bring him up. She gave his life for him. Then he'd be with his friends and he came back and he says, oh mom, there's a wonderful, a wonderful film this evening.

It is so educational and so good. Come with me. And his mother said, and he begged and begged and begged and begged until eventually his old mother agreed.

She got dressed, she went with him to see that film. Today we'd say that video. And as they sat down, she bowed her head and she prayed, asking the Lord to be with her right there.

And a boy did this to his mother. There are many places you won't be able to go. If you want to go with God's presence, many places.

You'll have to keep your promises and every promise of God has got a condition and you'll have to fulfill the condition. There are people who live in a fool's paradise who say, well, I walk with God. I'm with God.

Samson did the same. And God said, as long as you've got long hair, I'll be with you. We haven't got time to speak about that.

It's just the marriage service now. That has got a special significance and meaning. And when the enemy came, he says, I'll arise and be victorious.

And he didn't know that God had left him. That's a terrible thing. Here in our province, today it's KwaZulu-Natal.

Before it was Natale. And there was a lady. And she could speak so piously about her Jesus, about God.

And when she was on her deathbed, I won't mention her name and the place. Maybe some even know her or will know who I'm talking about. She said, my Jesus is coming to fetch me.

Then after a while she said to the family, I can hear his footsteps. He's round the corner. And when he came into the door, she was shocked to the very core of her being.

She turned around and she says, oh, not you. I don't want you. It was the devil that came.

Just imagine a woman, a Christian woman, going through her life, walking with God, and her God is the devil. You can say, oh, that's a stunning thing, but that's out of the ordinary. No, it's not out of the ordinary.

Have you ever told a lie? Or are you spreading lies and believing lies? The Bible says the devil is the father of lies and the father of liars. That's the naked truth. That's what the Bible says.

If you have believed a lie and spread a lie, you know who your father is, the devil. That's what his word says. So make sure that if you claim you walk in the presence of God, that it's the right God, not a golden calf, not the devil.

And then I get to the last point where Moses said, What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth? If you walk with God, you'll be distinguished as somebody who's not like the others. You'll be different. The word of Romans 12 verse 2 will be fulfilled in your life.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world. A Christian has got to be different, and we don't want to be different. I always said I'm so glad that I'm in Africa.

The blacks won't be like the whites because of TV. And how wrong I was. They show a certain hairstyle on TV, the next thing all the people have got it.

Or a haircut. Not only the young, even the grown-ups have it. We like to be like the world.

Certain fashion, it goes even through the Christians, young and old. The hair style, the kind of dress, and it's not only that. There are still 101 other things.

Moses says, oh God, how will the people distinguish us from all the other people? A Christian has got to be different. And if you're not prepared to be different to all the other rest in and out of church, you're not prepared to be different, you don't mean a thing. You please the world, you please sin, you please the enemies of God.

Oh friends, it's a small thing to speak about walking with God, and to say and claim, I'm a Christian. But you take the Bible, and make sure that you are one, lest you turn on your deathbed like that white woman here in Atteo. No, I wasn't expecting you.

We've got to be different. Gert, you've got to be different to other men and other people. And you, Jennifer, as well.

We know how the women of the world are, what they are like, but you be a woman, as the Bible says, in subjection to your husband, as unto the Lord. At the same time, if it's contrary to God's will, you're going to obey God more than men. But otherwise, you know what the standard is.

And you, Gert, you've got to give yourself lovingly as Jesus gave himself, for the church and to the church, to sanctify her, to make her holy, that when she dies and you sit at her corpse, God will be well pleased. Say, thank you, you've sanctified your wife. You made her holy.

And the same to you, Jennifer. You're supposed to be a help to your husband. Bring him closer to God.

Be a blessing to him. And then, God, you'll have his smile upon you at the end. And it will be worth it.

There's nothing in this world as important as that. You've chosen a wonderful word, Gert. Lord, if you, your presence doesn't go with me, I don't want an angel.

I don't want the victory over my enemies. I don't want to be successful. I want your presence to be with me.

And may you never forget it. I used some examples to make it real to you. And indelibly inscribe it to your mind, your heart, day or night.

Or on your honeymoon. That people will say, this man, this couple is different. This couple is different.

Once I rejoiced greatly when I heard of a certain woman. And the worldly people talking about her. Saying, that woman dresses very well.

Is that the woman that dresses so well? Unbelievers, noticing, she's different to the others. She dresses according to God's standard. I hope that not only Gert and Jennifer have heard what's being said, but you all.

Shall we pray then and ask God's blessing. Lord, there are good days and there are bad days. There are hot days and there are cold days.

There are beautiful days and there are stormy days. Whether it's good or bad, may they always be found to be well pleasing to you. Bringing on and glory to your name.

Bless Gert that he'll be a man according to the text he has chosen. In the presence of God. Watching God with him.

And he says, don't lead us up from here Lord, if you are not with us. Let them always go up, but with God. Like the marriage nowadays.

But may it be a marriage with a difference. Showing forth the beauty and the glory of our God. Gert showing us how you loved your church, gave yourself and sanctifies this church.

And she shows us how the church should bow to a master. This will be a blessing to him. May their relationship not be a dog and cat relationship.

May there never be anything be found in their married life. That shall not be holy and well pleasing to God. And according to his will.

So may your grace Lord Jesus be with them. It's only by your grace. That they can keep their vows and their promises.

Peter said I'll never forsake you and he did it. He denied you, he betrayed you. And may they never betray you because of your grace Lord Jesus.

And may the love of the Father flood their hearts and their souls. The divine love. Not the love of Ananias and Sapphira.

But the love of God. And may the presence, the very presence of the Holy Spirit. Be with them, leading them in all the truth.

According to the heavenly plan and eternal purpose of God. And may they be a dwelling place where God can dwell, where God can stay. Grant them Lord.

That this text will be written above and upon their marriage. And into the deepest depths of their hearts. Amen.

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