

## **FEAR – FAMILY – FAITH 5**

### **“Fear of Being Alone”**

*Whenever they turn to face God as Moses did, God removes the veil and there they are—face-to-face! They suddenly recognize that God is a living, personal presence, not a piece of chiseled stone. 2 Cor. 3:16 (The Message)*

We continue the series dealing with 7 common fears, by today considering the Fear of Being Alone; sometimes called Loneliness. Many of us, with our overly busy and people-filled lives...often pine for a bit of loneliness...but many others of us know first hand and full well, the real fear of being alone. Being lonely is different than being alone. Loneliness is a state of mind, a feeling; being alone is a state of being, a reality. You can feel lonely surrounded by thousands of people. And you can be completely content and satisfied and happy while totally isolated from any people. Loneliness is a state of mind, being alone is a state of being.

The fear of being alone is real for many people. People who have lost their most precious loved ones often feel lonely, and fear being alone. People who have become estranged from family or friends, sometimes fear being alone. Children who have abandoned their families, or been abandoned by their families often feel, and sometimes are, completely alone. I see it frequently on the faces of some of the friends I'm making in the penitentiary. They feel lonely, and they fear being alone.

I have only one answer to offer for dealing with either the feeling of loneliness or the fear of being alone. I have only one, because there is only one. As helpful and necessary as family and friends are to addressing our loneliness or our natural aloneness; there is only one spiritual antidote for dealing with either the feeling or the reality; it is the Presence of God. (text) I'd offer to you this day that dealing with feelings of loneliness, or the realities of being alone, can most adequately and abundantly be realized by Practicing the Presence of God. You're going to be hearing more about Practicing in the future but I want to introduce it to you know.

Ever watch a little league baseball practice? What do the coaches do with those young, learning bb players? They practice fielding grounders and practice catching fly balls, and practice running bases, and practice sliding into home plate. They practice swinging and practice batting and they practice bunting. They practice throwing and they practice catching the ball.

Ever go to a professional baseball game and arrive early? What are they doing? They are practicing fielding grounders, and they practice catching fly balls. They practice rounding the bases, and sometimes sliding into the dirt. They practice hitting and bunting, they practice throwing and catching...even at the professional level. What is my point? Being a faithful follower of Jesus is ultimately a matter of practicing. No matter if we are in little league or the Major League of our walk with God, we'll always have stuff to practice...none more important than Practicing the Presence of God.

It's more than singing songs, or praying prayers, or studying bibles, or fellowshiping together. It's more than abstaining during Lent from meat or something else. It's more than memorizing scriptures, or witnessing to our neighbors. It's even more than helping the poor, and feeding the hungry. Practicing the Presence of God is ALL those things...and it is more. I want to explore the 3 essential, initial steps to Practicing the Presence of God. In the 139<sup>th</sup> Psalm, David reminds us that to remain in the perpetual presence of God...to practice the Presence of God; we must remember three things:

What does it mean to Practice the presence of God?

### **1. REMEMBER THAT GOD KNOWS US**

*O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, to great for me to understand! Ps. 139:1-6*

In the middle of our lonely lives; what a comfort to know that God knows us! Whether feeling lonely, or actually being alone; knowing that God INTIMATELY knows ALL about us...ought to comfort and assure us that we are indeed not alone! God doesn't just know us as some random creature inhabiting His planet like some rent-paying tenant. No, God knows us more deeply than any family member or trusted friend.

God knows the inner workings of our hearts, because he intentionally examines them! God knows when we sit or stand, and the attitudes that accompany each. God sees when we travel, or when we rest at home. God knows everything about us. God knows what we are going to say before we form the words in our minds...long before they roll off our tongues. God hems us in with His personal presence, like a hedge about us, like a personal, armor-toting troop of body-guards escorting us through life. God places his hand on our heads like a father guiding a rambunctious son who wants to run ahead, or lag behind. And as long as God has his hand on our head...he blesses us for good measure.

I can think of nothing more comforting while enduring some depth of lonely existence, than to remember that God knows us; that God chooses to know us; and does so with a depth and intimacy that few married couples enjoy. Our feelings of loneliness seem less oppressive when we can remember that we are known by God, and not in some generic, impersonal, insensitive way. Not like your dental receptionist knows who you are by looking at your chart; but like your personal family doctor who has looked at you (maybe) from inside and out! God knows you...you are not alone. To practice the Presence of God we must:

## **2. REMEMBER THAT GOD FINDS US**

*I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night – but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to you. Ps. 139:7-12*

I am not sure of David's motivation to escape from God's Spirit, and that is not really the point of these verses. Maybe he was embarrassed and running away with intention, or maybe, he found himself dining with pigs, and realized he's been lost from His father's house.

Some of our loneliness and fear of being alone arises from our own waywardness...and I won't make a judgment about that today either...it serves no purpose today (hardly ever does). The reality is that most of us have found ourselves away from God at some point or time in our lives. Whether by intention or by default, whether by accident or with malice...whether through neglect, laziness, or apathy; there are times in our lives when it feels like we are in hell, surrounded by darkness, all alone. These were some of the emotions David used to describe his reality, undoubtedly reflecting back on his debacle with Bathsheba and Uriah.

My friends, especially those who feel uneasily lonely because of some past decisions...hear God's message from David: You can never escape from God's Spirit! No matter where you go, no matter what you've done, no matter who you have become...There is no way you can ever get away from God's presence. It's not that God will find you to commiserate and wallow with you. It's not that God will find you, judge you and condemn you. It's not that God is looking to find you to whip you into some kind of spiritual being that neither of you would recognize; no, God is looking to find you to love you and forgive you, and help you begin again, to practice His Presence.

We are not alone, at the heights of our spiritual heaven, or at the depths of our sinful hell! We are not alone; we can't pull the darkness around us and hide from God. We cannot end God's pursuit of us by flying away on the wings of the morning, or flinging ourselves into the ocean depths of rebellion. God won't let us get away! To Practice the Presence of God we must:

### **3. REMEMBER THAT GOD MADE US**

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous – how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day passed. How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! Ps. 139:13-17*

Do you remember the first time you saw a Model Ship constructed in a bottle? I still marvel at how that is done? I honestly don't know how it's done...and don't really want to know. But just imagine this. Imagine building a model ship inside a bottle in complete darkness, no light at all. This reminder from David says that God made all the intricate, delicate, inner parts of our being...while we were inside our mother's womb. I doubt David is trying to have us imagine God's fingers actually sewing our cells together...but that is the impression he makes. God is able to knit us together, is able to watch us being formed, is able to weave us together in the darkness of our mother's womb!

The point of this remembrance is vast. God knew us, made us, saw us...in all our wonderful complexity...while we developed in the darkness of our mother's womb. God saw us before we were born. Actually, God recorded the number of our days, before our birth-day. God has laid out a plan for every single moment of every single day of our life...how can we ever feel alone when we remember we are so fearfully and wonderfully and purposefully made?

Our lives and existence are no accident. We are not the product of some overheated primordial soup, boiling over and mixing with some smelly ooze that mystically evolves over eons to become some hairy primates who eventually stand upright! No, God made us...and we are therefore not worthless, but worthy!

More than all this, more than all these wonders of our hand-blown creation, there is within this reminder a sense that not only did God fashion us; God fashioned within us...part of God's own character. God has planted, sown, woven into the fabric of our DNA...a cell, a strain, a molecule, an atom...of spirituality. We are not freaks of nature, we are children of God. We are not evolutionary byproducts; we are made in the image of God. We are not test tube experiments; we are the spiritual off-spring of THEE God of the universe. We are not blobs of random cells; we are loved, atoms and molecules destined by God to belong to God!

What does it do for you to remember that God knows you, that God finds you, that God made you? For me, when in moments of loneliness or actually being alone...I remember I am not! God is with me, and my life (and yours) is nothing more than perpetual practicing...Practicing the Presence of God. We remember that God is a living, personal, presence...not some piece of chiseled stone.

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#### This weeks: “Action Steps”

Obviously Practicing the Presence of God is a very personal and private endeavor. What might be helpful for me to practice God’s presence might not be for you, but here are some suggestions you might find helpful this week.

1. At the beginning or shortly after arising **each day this week**, declare to God that you want to be more intentional about Practicing His Presence. State out loud and with confidence that you appreciate the fact that God Knows you, Finds you, and Created you.
2. Try to keep track of any moments you feel lonely this week. What made you feel that way? What circumstances contributed to those feelings? What might you have done differently to avoid such feelings?
3. Each day of the week ask God to reveal His presence with you in some unordinary way. Maybe one day you might see God in the face of a child, or in some cloud formation, or something that happens to you. Make note of your reaction when you sense God’s presence with you. Measure if your intention to notice God’s presence, doesn’t make it easier to actually experience God’s presence.
4. Be ‘God’ to someone, sometime this week. Do a kind deed without being asked or even expected to do it. Don’t seek ‘thanks’ just do the deed, smile and know that God is pleased with your attempt.
5. Read Psalm 139 each day, in a different translation if possible. Use [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) for many different translations. Record any new insights from reading it each day.