

Draw Near 11

Awareness of God's Presence, May 12

Purpose

The practice of Awareness of God's Presence draws us nearer to God because it brings God to mind all day long, it helps us to focus our hearts and minds through the day and week on Jesus.

Sharing Time

Review Devotionals: Has everyone completed some devotionals from this past week? There is no penalty for not completing them. They are there to help you and guide you. Let's share for a minute what we have learned from those you have done.

Learning Experience

Introduction: Eyes Ahead (For the Teacher: You can use the example that Chris uses in the book concerning driver education and needing to keep the eyes on the road. I found the following example more relevant to me because of it's nearness in time.)

1. I recently had the privilege of watching the movie, "The Green Book." It is an excellent movie about two very different men developing a solid life-long friendship while driving across the south in the late 50s and enduring the dichotomy of black and white culture. But for our lesson, what I want you to notice is how the piano player, Dr. Donald Shirley, who was the celebrity, kept telling the driver, Tony Lip, to put his hands on the wheel and his eyes on the road. Tony would continually be turning around and talking to him while driving! This bothered Dr. Shirley immensely! Throughout the trip. In the movie the trip last eight weeks. In real life the trip was over a year! But when we drive, it is important to pay attention to where our eyes are focused.
2. As we have talked about drawing near to God, we have looked at piety and our own personal relationship with God. We have looked at people, and how we relate to people. Now we are talking about possessions and how we relate to them. Within the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus is quite concerned with where your eyes are focused.
 1. v. 22 - "The **eye** is the lamp of the body..."

2. v. 23 - "But if your **eye** is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.... Then right after this he makes his statement about choosing between two masters - God or Money. Which way are we looking?"
3. v. 26 - "**Look** at the birds of the air..."
4. v. 28 - "**See** how the flowers of the field grow.... Both of these examples are pointed out by using one's eyes. Jesus is forcing them to look first and see what God does already, so they have proof of what God will do."
3. Jesus is concerned with where our focus is - whether on God or money.
4. So where are we focused? We need a spiritual practice that can help direct our focus and make sure it is on God and not money. There is a spiritual practice that is Biblical and has been illustrated well by two different individuals. It is called "Practicing the Presence of God."

Brother Lawrence

1. Brother Lawrence was born Nicolas Hermon in 1611 in France and was born poor. When he was fifty-five he entered a religious community called the Carmelites in Paris and worked as a lay brother, not as a monk or priest. There he took the name "Brother Lawrence", which is how we refer to him today. He lived till 1691, when he was 80 years old.
2. What we know of him is mainly through letters and several conversations he had with a few others that were written down afterwards. What is striking about all these writings is how Brother Lawrence focused on the presence of God all during the day. "I made it my business to be in the Lord's presence just as much throughout the day as I did when I came to my appointed time of prayer." Now you need to understand, most of the day he spent in the kitchen cooking and cleaning or out in the field tending the crops. So when he writes, "be in the Lord's presence," he is talking about when he is washing dishes or cooking or farming.
3. His goal was to remember God the same during the day as he did during his quiet times of reading and prayer. "My set times for prayer are exactly like the rest of the day to me. They are but a continuation of the same exercise of being in God's presence."
4. But this is not and was not easy for him. He writes that it took him literally years to develop this practice. We are easily distracted, we easily forget God.
5. Since he lived, many have taken his example and worked to live it out, working to practice the presence of God constantly.

God is Everywhere Engaged

1. Read Acts 17:22-31. This is the great sermon by Paul at the Areopagus in Athens. He is talking to men who are more philosophers than common men. Here he points out three important aspects of God's nature:
 1. Contrary to the ancient pagan assumption that gods rule only over a particular domain - such as Neptune ruling over the sea - Paul states that God is "Lord of heaven and earth." God is king in all domains. He is not impotent and just Lord of one domain, he is Lord of all things, all domains.
 2. In opposition to the polytheistic ideas of the day where the gods have needs which must be met by humans, God Almighty "is not served by human hands, as though he needed anything." Paul is stressing how God doesn't need us, but is still connected to us.
 3. Though God is holy and separate from us, Almighty and Creator, he is also close to us and imminent (or nearby). God "is not far from each one of us." God longs to be connected, in relationship with us. This is the amazing point of this sermon - God is close to us!
2. Paul is making an argument about God Almighty, who is over and above all the other pagan gods worshipped in the Agora. He is not constrained by geography, he is everywhere, but he is also very much close to us. He is not deistic - which means that he created the world and then left. He is imminent - which means he created the world and then stayed engaged. God knows about our daily grind, he knows our pain and anguish, our frustrations, and our joys.
3. Essentially, God is everywhere engaged. And so when we take the time, during our busy day, to engage with him, he will respond to us.
4. Read Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18
5. David sees God in front and behind and everywhere around him and so he wants to be connected to him.
6. This is the basis for Paul's admonition in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances. Paul is urging them and us to be in constant contact with God.

Frank Laubach

- Frank was born in the United States in 1884. In the 1930s he became a Christian missionary to the Muslims in the Philippines. He wrote several books and became a well-known educator and died in 1970.
- Starting about 1930, in his diary and other writings, we find evidence of him taking on this Awareness of God practice. "Can I bring the Lord back in my mind flow every few seconds so that God shall always be in my mind?" He devoted himself and kept a journal recording his successes and failures.

- Just like Brother Lawrence, he found this to be a great challenge to his mind - to think of God so often during the day, and get it to where you are always thinking of God.

So how do we do this? Let's talk for a few minutes here at the end of class about what this might look like in 2019. Here are ten recommendations (the first seven come from Laubach, the final three come from author Adele Calhoun).

- "Select a favorable hour, an easy, uncomplicated hour. See how many minutes of the hour you can remember, or touch, Christ at least once a minute; that is to say, bring Him to mind at least one second out of every sixty."
- "Keep humming to yourself (inaudibly) a favorite hymn—For example, 'Have Thine Own Way, Lord, Have Thine Own Way.'"
- "When reading, keep a running conversation with Him about the pages you are reading."
- [When considering some problem] "Instead of talking to yourself, form the habit of talking to Christ."
- "Make sure that your last thoughts are of Christ as you are falling asleep at night."
- "On waking in the morning, you may ask, 'Now, Lord, shall we get up?' Some of us whisper to Him in our every thought about washing and dressing in the morning."
- "We need the stimulus of believers who pursue what we pursue, the presence of Christ." (That is, find some others who are also attempting to practice the presence and spur one another on).
- With each task during the day, talk to God about the task before you begin and when you are finished.
- Set an alarm for several times throughout the day. At each alarm stop and pray.
- Memorize a short verse or short prayer and repeat it throughout the day.

Conclusion: Awareness of God's presence is one of those practices that is not really a 10 minute practice, but an all day practice in short spurts. Just moments in time. This can change your life, this can change your outlook. Use these moments sometimes to pray, sometimes to think of scripture, sometimes to sing, whatever helps you think of God.

Practice

1. I cannot emphasize enough that these practices are not to be done for God's approval - God already loves you as much as He will ever love you. These

practices are for you! They will help you come to love God more, love life more, love others more, and love your possessions less.

2. This week you have a devotional on the back of the sermon outline. It has instructions on how to do it four times this week. Next week, as we come to class let's talk about what we experienced this week with God.
3. We have been given a wonderful gift. We have four great opportunities to use this gift this week. Be sure to find the 10 minutes on four days this week to practice this marvelous gift. Start today and do it!