

Being Aware of His Presence

Psalm 46:1-3, 10–11; 1 Kings 19:9–13; Acts 10:9–13,34

Everton Hills

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In his book, “The Reflective Life”, Ken Gire writes...

“Week after week we file into church where we nestle into our pews and dutifully go about the routines of the religious. We sing a few historic hymns, say one of the age-honoured creeds, then settle back for the Sunday sermon.

If we’re honest, we know we can almost do these thing in our sleep. Sometimes we do.

We hear the stalwart lyrics of a bygone era, but so often they seem to lose momentum with each century they traverse. We hear the robust statements of some Reformer’s faith, but they seem hollow, like faraway footsteps echoing off a cathedral floor. We hear the very words of God, but so often those words simply saunter around in our minds, kicking up nothing but a little intellectual dust.”

I don’t know about you, but sometimes, I feel that way. Like a boring system of mindless routines, whether it be at church – rotely reciting the apostles creed or the Lord’s Prayer, or at home – mindlessly saying ‘I love you’ in response to an expression of love from one of my family; the modern tyranny of business and endless noise, has impacted my ability to ‘live in the moment’.

Many years ago, as Anne-Marie and I were climbing a ridiculously steep hill on the way to the **Hilltribe Villages in North Thailand**, our Turkish guide, Gursel, told us not to forget to take time to ‘stop and smell the cappuccino’. That was exciting. For two reasons. One, we were on, what seemed like a 10,000 foot climb, and we had simply gotten into the motion of focussing on placing one step after the other. Second, we thought that there might have been a coffee shop at the top of the climb.

What Gursel was trying to get us to understand – especially his clients who were all from the Western world, - is that when we become so busy doing, we forget to be.

That’s the emphasis I want you to understand as we continue on this series of ‘How do you see?’” As we look at **‘how do you see LIFE’**, I want you to understand that **God is inviting you to participate in his world, to see his presence in all that you do** – in your work, in your play, in those intimate moments you have with your wife or husband, in the frustrations you might have with your children or your workmates, in your house cleaning, during your ablutions, and in your rest. God’s heart is for you to recognise his presence in all of your life.

Modern psychology and work place movements calls it mindfulness. Learning to appreciate the moment. But God wants to take you one step deeper into your soul. He wants you to learn to appreciate him, or to notice him, at the moment, in the moment, for the moment.

“God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!... Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.” The

LORD of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress." (Psalm 46:1-3, 10-11, NLT)

I'm curious. If you know anything about King David, or about the Israelites history, how can they live with such confidence - 'therefore we will not fear'. It is because they are aware of God's presence.

That's the context of the Psalm. Written during the reign of Jehoshaphat when the enemies of Moab, Ammon, and Edom came against Israel, the Psalm was written in response to an awareness that God arose as their strength and helped them.

Indeed, this was the Psalm which inspired Luther's 'A Mighty Fortress'. As Luther says, ***"We sing this psalm to the praise of God because God is with us and powerfully and miraculously preserves and defends his church and his word against all fanatical spirits, against the gates of hell, against the implacable hatred of the devil and against all the assaults of the world, the flesh and sin."***

This morning I want to share with you three habits of the heart that will help nurture this life of Christian mindfulness, so that you too can be confident of God's presence in all circumstances.

The three habits are

- 1/ Reading the moment.**
- 2/ Reflecting on the moment.**
- 3/ Responding to the moment.**

Reading, reflecting and responding are equally important as we learn to walk more passionately with our God.

Reading the moment.

Guigo writes...

"Reading without meditation is arid, meditation without reading is erroneous; Prayer without meditation is tepid, meditation without prayer is fruitless."

To read the moment is to be mindful of where we might see God's hand at any given point in time.

A dad was driving home with his children in his car. The dad's mind was far away, thinking about his day, about some of the problems that he was having at work, about other pressing problems in his life.

Suddenly, his youngest son, 6 year old Ethan, called out at the top of his voice... **"Dad, stop the car."**

Dad stopped. Unsure of what was going on, and with heightened alert, he looked around – but could see no problem. He asked Ethan, "What's the problem?"

Ethan, simply smiled.

"Nothing's wrong dad. **God has just painted you a picture"**.

Puzzled, Ethan's dad asked, "What do you mean?"

"Look at the sunset, dad. God has painted that picture just for you!"

To read the moment is to see what is happening around you.

The bible is full of people who cultivated the habit of reading the moment. They were sensitive to hearing God, not only in His Word, but also seeing him in nature, in history, and in the circumstances of their lives.

After smashing the false prophets of Jezebel by calling on God to rain fire on his sacrifice, Elijah suddenly became fearful of Jezebel's threat. Elijah ran. He found himself hiding in a cave on Mt Sinai.

*"There he came to a cave, where he spent the night. But the LORD said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah replied, "I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too." "Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the LORD told him. And as Elijah stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. **And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper.**" (1 Kings 19:9–12, NLT)*

God was not in the powerful. He was in the still small voice. God's invitation is to us to be still to see him in the 'still small voice'.

Reflecting on the moment is to engage our mind to see what is beneath the surface.

To dig deeper into the story of Elijah, we notice that Elijah reflected on the moment. Noticing the still, gentle voice,

"When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And a voice said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"" (1 Kings 19:13, NLT)

Elijah is attentive. But he is also reflective. He ponders what he has seen.

Like Mary. When greeted by the angel at the announcement of the promise of Jesus' birth, and then greeted by the Shepherds, the bible says that

"but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often." (Luke 2:19, NLT)

Finally, we are to **respond to the moment**.

God doesn't just give us amazing experiences for our own gratification. He doesn't just paint a sunset, or come to us in a still small voice, or greet us through shepherds, so that we can feel good about ourselves. He does it so that we can respond to the moment.

To respond to the moment is to give what we have seen a place to live in our heart, allowing it to grow there, upward to God and outward towards other people. As one author has said, God doesn't waste any experiences.

Think about the apostle Peter.

Jesus let him know that by the time the rooster crowed, Peter would have denied him three times.

Why?

Not to make him feel bad.

Not to be a supernatural "I told you so".

He did it so that Peter could reflect on that moment of personal brokenness, and respond to it in grace and love towards others. Sometime later Peter had a vision,

*"The next day as Cornelius's messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, and he was hungry. **But while a meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the sky open, and something like a large sheet was let down by its four corners. In the sheet were all sorts of animals, reptiles, and birds. Then a voice said to him, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat them."**" (Acts 10:9–13, NLT)*

This was the start of Peter's support for the sharing of the gospel to the Gentiles...

"Then Peter replied, "I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism." (Acts 10:34, NLT)

God invites us to be aware of his presence – to be mindful of him in all of our lives, to see his presence in all that you do – in your work, in your play, in those intimate moments you have with your wife or husband, in the frustrations you might have with your children or your workmates, in your house cleaning, during your ablutions, and in your rest. God's heart is for you to recognise his presence in all of your life.

This morning, to help you become more aware, you are receiving a reflection journal. Use this journal to help you read the moment, reflect the moment and then respond to the moment.

Blue poles – what do you see in the picture that the children have drawn. Where do you see God in it?