

A Series on Ephesians
“Practicing the Presence of God” (Ephesians 3:14-19)
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City!

We are in the middle of a series on Ephesians.

Let's read Ephesians 3:14-19.

¹⁴For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom his whole family^a in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

We are in the middle of the letter. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 are about what God has done for us and Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are about what we are called to do. At the end of Chapters 1, 2, and 3, Paul prays that we would really really know and experience and soak in what he has been talking about in Chapters 1, 2, 3:

- That in our inner being we would know His love which surpasses knowledge.
- That in our inner being, we would experience his presence.
- That in our inner being, we would experience his power through the Holy Spirit.

He's essentially saying: soak in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He has done everything for us. He's with us. He's chosen us. He's adopted us as his children. He's redeemed us. He's given us the Holy Spirit. He's give us life and freedom! He loves us more than we can ever imagine. Now, if we soak in his presence, his love, his Spirit, we will be able to do what he is going to talk about in Chapters 4, 5, and 6—which is about living out our new life in purity, power, free from addiction to idols, filled with love, doing the work of God, serving other people with love, and living our lives with the mission of Christ!

^a Or *whom all fatherhood*

You see, your outer life (how you live) has to flow out of your inner life. If you have problems in your inner being, it's going to come out. Transformation has to be inside-out. Being comes before doing.

We talked last Sunday about how we can't really change our lives unless God changes our inner being. We also talked about how we can't do God's work or live godly lives unless we are being filled in our inner life.

Paul is praying that your tank would be full (3:19): **“and to know his love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all fullness of God.”** I love this!

The question I didn't talk about last Sunday was ***HOW***. How can we fill our tank?

I think there are several answers to this question. Spiritual practices that help us be close to God—like meditation—it's not emptying yourself but filling yourself with Christ, like prayer—Holy Spirit empowered prayer, like Bible study—to help us know His love that surpasses knowledge, like confession—to dig into your life and see what sins you have, and what sins are behind your sins, like fasting—to give us space to hear God's love for us, like worship—just to soak in his love. You don't fill your tank by running away from these things, you fill your tank by engaging in these things.

The essence of all of these spiritual practices is getting closer to God, to experience His presences in our heart every moment of our lives.

How can we be with God in ordinary moments, in everyday places, all the time—from one moment to the next?

- This is the heartbeat of God—I want to be with you. I want to be with you.
- It is why we exist. You know, this is the most important thing. It's not what you do that's the most important, it is our being with God. Remember what Jesus said to Martha in Luke 10:41-42: **“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”**
- In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 exhorts us to pray continually, pray without ceasing. How do you do that? How do you converse with God every moment every day?

I've been significantly influenced by Brother Lawrence, a 17th Century monk who was a cook in his monastery's kitchen. He taught me about practicing the presence of God even when we are doing ordinary things.

In the time left in this message, all I want to talk about is *how* to practice the presence of God in our ordinary day—how to spend an ordinary day with Jesus.

- So for all of us, whatever else we have to do on Monday, let's make it our primary goal that day to be with Jesus.
- It doesn't mean that you will do anything different. You don't have to go to a prayer mountain, a monastery, or become a monk.
- You don't have to do anything heroic or noble. Do what you normally do, but for just one day, do those things with Jesus.
- When most people think about God, they think about church, reading the Bible, maybe a religious activity. We don't think about Him having to do with largest portions of our lives—our work, our chores, our routines. What we're going to talk about today is that at the absolute heart of spiritual life is finding God in the ordinary moments, because God wants to be with us.
- **I have some props to help us along.**

Let's Start with Waking Up (Alarm Clock):

- For some of us, the first word that comes out of our mouth when the alarm goes off is an expletive. Then, slamming our hand on the alarm clock's snooze button. Then, after awhile, we say our second expletive as we jump out of bed a little later than we're supposed to.

Instead of this usual routine, I'd like our first thought after we wake up to be a prayer to God. I heard of one guy who decided that the first thing that's going to touch the floor when he gets out of his bed is his knees.

- God, You've given me another day! My eyes are open again, and I get to live! And You will be with me!
- I'd like for our first thought to be one of hope and optimism for the day.

- When you wake up, as soon as possible, try to get alone for just a few minutes. Don't try to be heroic about this. Don't try to make it be an hour, if that's *not* what you usually do. Just make it a few moments.
 - Invite Him to be with you when you first wake up.
 - Thank him, praise him, and invite him

Just this Monday...our first thought and first words belong to God.

Then, most of us wash and shower (Here's a Soap to symbolize this):

- Now, how many of you used soap or deodorant or some kind of cleaning agent this morning? Raise your hand up high. Those of you who didn't, don't raise your hand at all!
- Many of us think about washing our bodies because that's what people see and smell.
- But, we also need to wash our minds and hearts every morning.
- Paul says that Jesus wants to make us holy by the washing of the water of the Word and to present us before God one day without stain or wrinkle or blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-27)
- Just for Monday, when you're washing your face or taking a shower, say, "God, just as this soap and water are cleansing my body, may Your Word and Your Spirit cleanse my mind and my heart. Any impurities, any wrong intentions, any destructive desires, any thoughts that would lead me away from love and joy, any bitterness that could choke life out of me...Just cleanse them away."
- You have to wash anyway. Why not do it with Jesus?

Get dressed (belt):

When you get dressed, put on the full armor of God. When you put on your shirts, think of it as the breast plate of righteousness—That Jesus has clothed you with His righteousness. Talk to God to empower you and cloth you with His righteousness. When you put on your belt, think of it as the belt of truth—that you will acknowledge the truth of his holiness and the truth of love for you. Just talk to God.

Eating (Food):

Then you're going to eat. (Here's a box of cereal) Jesus said that we are to pray for our "daily bread."

- All food comes from God. It is a gift of God. It's an expression of how good God is.
- The Bible says to: "Eat your bread with joy." (Ecclesiastes 9:7)
- Every meal ought to be a celebration of God's goodness, because it's not something for us to take for granted.
- People can be so preoccupied, so rushed when they eat.
- Just for Monday—have breakfast with Jesus.
- Say: "Thank you Lord for the breakfast, thank you Lord for our family, etc."
- Make mealtime an exercise in gratitude. Stop and notice it, enjoy it, and remember what a good God He is. Remember that He has given you this food and all the other good things in your life—family, home, friends, a job, etc.
- You have to eat anyway, so, why not do it with Jesus?

Then, go on to a reading of the Word or a devotional (Bible):

- Remember, Jesus said:
 - **Men do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God.**
 - **(Matthew 4:4)**
- Just like our bodies are fed by food, our hearts are fed—for better or worse—BY thoughts, by words.
- When we immerse ourselves in the word of God and the presence of God in our lives, our hearts are fed and the Scripture tells us that "out of the overflow of his heart, his mouth speaks." It is out of the overflow of our hearts that we speak and we act. So, let's feed our hearts with good things—God's presence and word.
- Feed yourself words like this one from God:
 - **Ephesians 3:17-19: And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**

- Acknowledge to yourself that there is nothing more you can do to make God love you more or any less. Stop thinking of God's love like other people's love. We've got to know that his love is not like anything we've experienced. He will never forsake you. His love without any condition. Make a decision not to abuse his grace and love today.
- **Philippians 4:13: I can do all things (I can face anything that life throws at me) through Christ who strengthens me.**
- **Romans 8:38-39: For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Whatever happens this day, however much I mess up, nothing can separate me from God. Let the love of God soak into your heart. This love is not conditional. Let your spirit get strong.
- I don't want you to feel like you have to be extreme about this. Just a few minutes. Don't spend an hour doing this if you don't already do it. Start by spending 5 minutes and work up. Just start little and work up. If you can find a quiet place in your home to do it, that's the best place to do it. If not, find a quiet place somewhere else: at work, library, Starbucks, or in the car before you drive off. If you are a stay at home mom and it's difficult for you find a quiet time, do it when the kids are taking a nap.
- Create some intentional and focused time to soak in the love of God.

Watching or listening to the News or Reading the Paper or News on Internet (Newspaper):

Then, maybe you listen to the news in the morning or read the paper. Don't give that up if you normally do that. But read it with Jesus or just watch or listen to the news with Jesus.

- Do you ever read the paper or news on the web and find yourself becoming concerned for the world?
- As you read the news, just say to Jesus, "I'm really concerned about what's going on in Afghanistan, Haiti, China, Downtown, Iraq, Pakistan. Would you be with the family that's going through the difficulties from the bombing?"
- [Something about what was in the paper in the morning]

- Wouldn't it be great if all of us watched the news with Jesus and we prayed, God, you know, in those Islamic countries where there is so much unrest, would You pour out love and mercy?
- Who knows what might happen.

You're going to read the news anyhow. Why not go ahead and read it with Jesus? Let it prompt you to pray.

Driving (Car):

Some of you are going to drive from one point to another to get to work, school, an appointment, see friends and families, day care, or whatever.

- I know a lot of you spend a couple of hours a day in the car. That's almost 15 hours a week in the car.
- Continue to converse with him while driving. But, don't close your eyes. In fact, Jesus prayed with his eyes opened. Maybe you can ask God to take over the steering wheel of your life. "Lord, every time I drive my life, I seem to blow it. I mess it all up. Lord, I give you total control of my life. Lord, lead me and navigate me. Lord, you're my GPS system; I'd be lost without you."
- You can pray for various people you know that have a prayer need. Just raise that person up to the Lord. You might want to create a prayer card/notebook with a list and carry it around with you.
- It's also a great time to listen to some great Christian music. I think it puts you in a different mode of mind and heart when you get out the car after listening to great praise music. Get a CD of Chris Tomlin, Matt Redman or whomever you like. I love to sing along and dance in the car as I listen to some great Christian music. And I love it when I get to my destination in the middle of a song because the song then continues in my heart.
- If you're going to drive anyway, why not drive with Jesus?

Work (Laptop)

Then, most of you will do some sort of work. Here's a laptop to signify our work.

- Some of us will go to work at an office or facility, school, or home. Maybe you get paid for it or maybe you don't. Work is about adding value. There are things that we do that

add value to the world, to our families. Mothers staying at home taking care of kids are no less adding value than someone who works outside of the home. In fact, I think being a stay at home mom is the most important work that I can think of.

- When you get to your office, business, warehouse, store, classroom or kitchen, ask God to work *with* you Monday.
- Then, work as if you are working for the Lord. That's what the Scripture teaches. We ought to be the best worker in the company! Be the best teacher, medical professional, student, waiter, artist, business person, parent, or even lawyer and pastor that you can be. Do it for the Lord! Do it for the glory of the Lord! He is the boss! How would the way you do your job change if you were working for Jesus?
- This also means that you are going to work with integrity. You are not going to do anything that God would not want you to do in your job.

Lunch Time (lunch box)

Most of us get maybe 30 minutes to an hour for lunch. (Here's a credit card to symbolize it since you have to spend money to buy lunch) I think lunch is an incredible opportunity to develop relationships with those who do not have a relationship with God. Be intentional. Very intentional. Make at least one evangelistic lunch appointment per week. Buy them lunch. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming back from a meal a majority of the times. Jesus ministered around food. Use lunchtime to build relationships for God. Remember, you guys are God's missionaries and He has sent you to your work place. That's your mission field. Your job may be whatever it is but your calling is to be a missionary for the Lord at your job. I am not saying that you should start preaching to your colleagues during lunch, but see what doors God might open. If He doesn't open any door, then let it go. If He does open a door, then be bold. Share your story. Don't condemn. Share your love. Just as naturally as you might share about your loving relationship with your family, share about your loving relationship with God.

- Use "the headphone principle" like the kind that a secret service agent uses. When we talk to people, he says to use one ear to listen to what that person is saying and the other ear to listen to what the Spirit might be prompting you to say to that person.
- There are times when the Spirit will compel you to do something or say something.

- You don't have to be a perfect to be a witness. It's better to share your brokenness and how Jesus love is making an impact in your life. You don't have to tell a dramatic story.
- It's exciting when you have Jesus next to you when you are having lunch with a colleague.

Shopping (credit card):

Talk to God as you shop. It's his money. You are his manager. If you are going to shop, go shopping with Jesus.

Helping (box of Band-Aid)

Then, you might bump into someone who needs your help. (Band-Aid)

- Talk to God and start with a little prayer to Jesus:

Jesus, what are you trying to do in this person's life? Is there a way that I can be a part of that? Can I further your work in this person's life? Could I encourage them? Could I listen to them? Could I speak bold truth to them? Could I love them? Could I touch them? Jesus, could I help you in what you are doing in this person's life?
- You can do that. This is not rocket science. You can do this! Then maybe to that person, you might ask:

Can I help you?
- Maybe there will be some people for whom you will love doing this—people to whom you'll love asking this question.
- Maybe there will be some people you don't like, and you'll think, Maybe I should avoid those people, because Monday is Jesus' day and I don't want to mess up. But actually, it would be a really good thing for you to be around some of those people.
 - To love people when it's difficult—that takes you and Jesus doing it together. If you want to grow spiritually, it's a really good thing for you to have some difficult people in your life.

Fun (Remote Control):

Sometime during the day or evening, you'll spend some time doing fun things. Maybe you watch TV or surf the net. Do you think Jesus would watch TV? (Would he watch LifeStyle Channel or WE channel?—No. Jesus was a dude. He'd be into the Dodgers and Lakers)

- Watch TV with Jesus.
- Talk to him about the show as you watch. Ask him what he thinks. If there's something that makes you laugh, just laugh and say, "That was funny." Talk to Him about what you see. I remember Grace saying that her mom used to talk to God when she was doing dishes. "Lord, I love you!" If Grace's mom can do it while doing the dishes, we can do it while watching TV.
- If He wants to change your habits, He'll speak to you about that. If you really are seeking to follow Him above all, and if there is something that He wants to change, He will speak to it. You'll have to have a tender heart and be open to Him.
- I heard about a man who told his wife that he never wanted to live in a vegetative state dependent upon a machine. He said, "If I ever get in that shape, I want you to pull the plug." She got up and unplugged the television.

Spending Time with Family (Family Picture)

- For those who have kids and work full time, we have some fun time with kids. Talk to Jesus and hear what he tells you about this. The best way to do this might be to unplug the TV.
- Read them stories about Jesus. Talk to them about Jesus. Make it something that coming from you every moment of the day.

Sleep (pillow):

- I think one of the best things to do before we go to bed is to spend about 30 minutes reading a good Christian book. There are so many great books and I think it's a great way to feed your mind and heart for Christ.

Whatever the day holds—household errands, interruptions—every one of them is an opportunity to be with Jesus, to learn from Jesus how to become like Jesus.

- You will not be able to do everything I mentioned. Take just a few ideas and try it.

- And when you forget and mess up on Monday—and you will—no beating yourself up! That’s one of the rules: **No beating yourself up**. Just stop and think: this next moment is another chance.
- Every moment is another chance. This moment right here. He’s here. He’s at work. So we watch. So we listen. So we’re open. Every moment is a “burning-bush moment,” an encounter with God.

Then when you lie down Monday night, do a little review of the day. Just like the football players do when they watch tapes of a game.

- Look at each moment from when you first woke up. Let those scenes go before your mind’s eye and review them with God. Thank Him for all the places where He was with you. If there’s anything God wants you to learn or to change, talk with Him about that. Thank Him for spending the day with you.
- Then the last thing you do is to decide if you’d like Him to spend the day with you on Tuesday. If you would like Him to do that, then ask Him:

Lord would you be with me tomorrow? Would you be with me on Tuesday?

If you can spend one day with Jesus, you can spend every day with Jesus—one day at a time. **Then an ordinary life becomes an extraordinary life—one day at a time.** Then “Up There comes Down Here”—one day at a time. You will begin to bear the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. God will transform you from the inside out as you seek to live every moment in the presence of God.