Aware of His Presence
by Frank Viola

Aim at Heaven and you will get Earth “thrown in”: aim at Earth and you will get neither.

~ C.S. Lewis

As a college student in my early 20s, I recall one of my friends saying the following:

“The secret to living victoriously is to keep your mind on Christ. Imagine if Jesus were walking with you in the flesh, wherever you went. It would have a powerful impact on what you said yes to and what you said no to. The awareness of His presence would change the way you lived.”

Looking back, I find it hard to fault my friend’s statement.

I’d just add this point. Keeping your mind on the Lord may not perfect you, but it will help equip you to handle the challenges of life with confidence and resolve.

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.

~ 1 Peter 2:19, NIV

It will also give you a discernable vitality, make you more spiritually sensitive, and increase your overall fruitfulness.

In addition, it will enable you to see the world through a different lens. One that is higher and deeper than ordinary.

The Unalterable Promise

I’d like to begin this essay by looking at what I call “the unalterable promise.”

And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20 NLT)

I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5 ESV)

If you are a believer, Jesus Christ lives inside you. Consequently, what we have now is better than what the Twelve had when Jesus was among them during the days of His flesh (see John 14-16).

It makes sense, therefore, that one of the secrets to victory is remaining aware of the Lord’s presence within us.

What I’m speaking about goes beyond morning devotions or “quiet time.”
While it’s great to begin your day with the Lord, it’s not enough. In my observation, the typical Christian who is disciplined to have a daily “quite time” often forgets the Lord throughout the rest of the day.

So we need a new model, a new paradigm for living by the Holy Spirit.

Let me pose a question. Is it possible to “take the Lord” with you during the day, in a practical way, and be conscious of His presence during the routine, the mundane, and the boring?

I say yes. But like any good habit, it must be cultivated.

**Cultivating an Awareness of Christ**

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

~ Hebrews 11:6 NKJV

How can we develop an awareness of the Lord’s presence, acknowledging Him all throughout our waking hours?

Consider the following texts that talk about developing an awareness of those things which are invisible, including the Lord Himself:

- You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you! (Isaiah 26:3 NLT)
- For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. (Romans 8:6 ESV)
- Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2 NASB)
- So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (Hebrews 4:18 NIV)
- Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:2 NIV)
- But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18 NKJV)
- Pray without ceasing. (1 Thessalonians 5:17 ESV)
- Remember Jesus Christ. (2 Timothy 2:8 NIV)

These Scriptures give us the foundation for acknowledging the Lord’s presence. But the practical question of how to keep our minds on Him during the day must be addressed.

To put it in the form of a question: how do we “fix” our eyes on Jesus when we’re engaged in our work? How do we retain an awareness of God’s presence throughout the day? How do we “live in God’s presence” from sunrise to sunset?
I’ve addressed this issue in detail in two places—my book *Jesus Speaks* (written with Leonard Sweet) and my discipleship course *Living by the Indwelling Life of Christ*.

This article is a supplement – as well as a primer – to those two works.

The New Testament gives us a set of terms that describe what it means to acknowledge the Lord’s moment-by-moment presence. Those terms are “abiding” (John 15:4 ESV), “beholding” (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV), and “walking” (Galatians 5:16 ESV).

Also, when we think of the word “prayer” we usually think of a human talking to God. But “prayer” also includes opening ourselves up to God and listening to His still small voice.

**Some Practicals**

> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.
> ~ James 4:8 ESV

What follows are some practical ways that have helped me stay aware of the Lord’s presence over the years. They have encouraged me to have an ongoing, inner conversation with our invisible God.

But like any spiritual practice, some of these practices may work for a season. Then they wear out. Once they wear out, however, you can pick up some others to replace them.

I encourage you to try them out over a period of time, and even experiment with some of your own. They are all designed to help you cultivate a consciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who indwells you and who has promised to never leave you nor forsake you.

In Romans 8:6, Paul exhorts us to “set” our minds on the Spirit. The image of a TV remote control comes to mind. By using the remote, you can “set” your TV to the channel you desire.

When it comes to keeping your mind on the Lord, your will (volition) acts as the remote. So use it to “set” your mind on the Lord, and not “channel surf” randomly.

Here are some practical ways in which you can be intentional about cultivating an abiding awareness of God.

* As soon as you wake up, say something to the Lord like, “Lord, thank you for loving me.” And let that thought occupy you for a little while. Then return His love back to Him by saying something like, “Lord, I love you.” You can do this under your breath, if you like. He will certainly hear you.

* If you drink coffee or tea, purchase a mug that has a Scripture quote or image on it that reminds you of the Lord.

* Go for a “nature prayer walk.” As you walk outdoors, walk slowly. Observe God’s good creation around you and thank Him for His remarkable artistry. The created things are tokens of God’s beauty and presence. They point beyond themselves. As such, they are designed to lead you to worship the Creator, because they reflect Him in some way.
So observe the colors, listen to the sounds, notice the details. Consider the birds and the flowers (Jesus talked about both in His teachings). As I explained in Insurgence, the beauty we find in creation is a token and a shadow of the beauty of Christ.

* As you are out and about, look at the people who you see, and pray for them under your breath or in your mind. Pray whatever comes into your thoughts.

* Take several deep breaths during the day with the understanding that your breath is life, a tangible symbol of the Holy Spirit who indwells you. (Interestingly, Holy Spirit means “Sacred Breath” in both Hebrew and Greek.)

* All throughout the day, develop the habit of talking to the Lord. You don’t have to say a formal prayer. Simply talk to Him as if He were sitting or standing beside you while you are at work, while you’re driving, while you are walking, and so forth – just as you would a friend who was accompanying you. (You wouldn’t want to ignore your friend, so don’t ignore the Lord.) As you develop this habit, it will become second nature. You will develop the practice of having an inward, ongoing conversation with the Lord all throughout the day.

* After you pump gas in your automobile, count the number of times you turn the gasoline cap and remember the Lord based on when you stop turning it. For instance, sometimes I turn it three times – the number three signifies resurrection in the Bible. So I remember that He is a God of resurrection. Sometimes I turn it five times – five is the number of grace. Sometimes seven – seven is the number of God’s perfection.

* Add a screen saver and/or background image to your computer that reminds you of the Lord. As I write this, I use the beautiful creation images that come with the latest version of Windows. Every day, my computer screen shows me a new scene from creation, and I’m reminded of the Lord – the One who authored all created beauty. I also use those creation images for my screen saver.

* Add a background image to your smart phone that reminds you of the Lord.

* Add alerts on your smart phone to remind you to take a quiet moment to turn to the Lord. (Perhaps this is what Paul meant when he exhorted the Thessalonian believers to “pray without ceasing.”)

* Listen to music that stirs your heart. Let your heart worship the Lord as you listen. Play the music in your car, on your smart phone, at your computer, etc.

* Every time you stop at a stoplight, take a quiet moment to turn your heart to the Lord and call on His name. (It can be as simple as saying under your breath, “Lord Jesus.”) A stop light can serve as a wonderful reminder to put a pause on our hurried lives and remember our Source.
*Create flash bulb memories of thankfulness. At different points during your week, take a moment to freeze time and take a mental snapshot of your surroundings. Then thank God for it. This will embed those moments into your mind as “flash bulb” memories – tokens of thanksgiving to God. This practice also helps you to live intentionally and in the present, instead of drifting through life on autopilot.

* Place an object that reminds you of the Lord in your pocket. It could be a small inscribed stone, for instance, that reminds you that Jesus is our Rock. Every time you reach into your pocket and touch the object, turn to the Lord and gently call on His name.

* When taking a shower or bath, spend some time talking to the Lord. (In Scripture, water is an image of the Holy Spirit’s cleansing work through the Word of God. Hence, the shower or bath can be viewed as a spiritual metaphor.)

* Take time to read Scripture, even if it’s a few sentences. Read very slowly, consider what you’re reading, then talk to the Lord about it.

* Whenever you eat or drink, remember the Lord. This doesn’t mean that you must pray before every meal. But perceive food and drink to be springboards to remember Christ. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus presented Himself as food and drink. So our tangible food and drink are but shadows of Him. (See From Eternity to Here, Part 2 for details.)

* Get away in a quiet place and turn off your smart phone and electronic devices. In stillness, set your mind on the Lord and breathe slowly. Do this for a short period of time in the beginning (maybe two to five minutes). You can increase your time later. Solitude is precious because it moves us away from the hustle, the cares, and the lures of the world. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for “be still” in Psalm 46:10 literally means “let go of your grip.” Jesus made a habit of retreating to commune with His Father in solitude.

    But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. (Luke 5:16 NIV)
    Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (Mark 1:35 NIV)

The Old Testament speaks about the practice as well:

    For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, “In returning and resting you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.” (Isaiah 30:15 ESV)
    Be still, and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10 ESV)
    Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him. (Psalm 37:7 NIV)
    For God alone my soul waits in silence. (Psalm 62:1 ESV)
    Return to your rest, my soul, for the LORD has been good to you. (Psalm 116:7 NIV)

And Jesus invites His disciples to do the same:

    Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get
some rest.” So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. (Mark 6:31-32 NIV)

* Combine silence with breathing and calling on the Lord’s name. There is a great deal of Scripture that encourages us to call on the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:28; 12:8; 1 Chronicles 16:8; Psalm 105:1; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:12-14; 2 Timothy 2:22).

In this regard, a common practice of mine is to begin the day by turning my heart to the Lord and being still in His presence, inhaling and exhaling His name. Specifically, choosing some of these words during different times of prayer: “Lord God,” “Jesus,” “My Lord,” “Yahweh” (the Hebrew name of God in the Scriptures), “Abba,” “Father,” and “You love me; I love you.”

Examples:

   Slowly inhale: “Lord” / Slowly exhale: “God”  
   Slowly inhale: “Je-” / Slowly exhale: “-sus”  
   Slowly inhale: “My-” / Slowly exhale: “-Lord”  
   Slowly inhale: “Yah-” / Slowly exhale: “-weh”  
   Slowly inhale: “Ab-” / Slowly exhale: “-ba”  
   Slowly inhale: “Fa-” / Slowly exhale: “-ther”  
   Slowly inhale: “You love me” / Slowly exhale: “I love you.”

* Before you drift off to sleep, say something to the Lord. You may even want to read an entry in a devotional book before drifting off to sleep.

* Meet with another believer on a regular basis and spend time meditating on the Lord, calling on His name, and talking to Him.

These are just some basic ways you can “check in” with the Lord and become continually aware that He is present.

Traditional “quite time” is all about starting your day with God. But the above practices enable you to “carry Him with you” throughout the day, from morning until evening.

Consider these texts from the Psalms which cover the entire day:

   I rise early … to cry out for help and to put my hope in Your Words (Psalm 119:147 NLT)  
   Oh, how I love your instructions! I think about them all day long. Psalm 119:97 NLT  
   On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. (Psalm 63:6 NIV)

In the book and course I mentioned above, I go deeper into the subject.
Dodging Defeat

Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.

~ Augustine

I’ll end this essay with a word about defeat. One of the biggest mistakes that people make when they decide to become more aware of God’s presence is setting the bar too high in the beginning.

To use an illustration, if you set a goal to run a marathon, it’s foolish to try and run ten miles every day in the beginning. You’ll quickly become discouraged because you’ve set yourself an unrealistic objective.

Instead, try running one mile two days a week. Then progress from there.

In the same way, if you’ve never sought the Lord in silence, don’t try to be silent for 20 minutes every day. You’ll quit before developing the habit.

Instead, try to go three minutes in silence two times a week. As you become more familiar with the practice, increase your time by one minute and add another day to the routine.

Incremental change – the cumulative effect – is a powerful tool for forming new habits. So begin slowly – very slowly. And give yourself ample grace to learn. There’s no legalism when it comes to getting to know the Lord, so don’t starting adopting it!

Let your hunger and thirst for Christ govern you.

The gospel of the kingdom is all about living in light of eternity, and bringing something of the eternals down to earth, opposed to putting our hope in the fleeting treasures of this world.

And one of the best ways to prepare for eternity is to be aware of the Lord’s presence.

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