

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Christian Living
Study Guide

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINES

LESSON 5: PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module entitled Christian Disciplines. This series of lessons introduces the disciplines of a Christian life, including prayer, Bible study, as well as fixing our mind on eternal things. This is exciting content that should energize and renew the spiritual life of mature Christians and propel newer Christians into deeper faith. The material is practical in nature, yet focused on the many spiritual rewards of a life devoted to God.

The Student's Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.

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CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINES

LESSON 5: PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

Practicing the presence of God in our everyday lives is about being aware of God's involvement in the details of our lives, and staying close to Him through constant conversation.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

There are many Christian disciplines such as fasting, scripture memory, solitude, fellowship and worship many of which are addressed in other lessons in this series. Each of them requires an understanding and an awareness of the presence of God. The history of this term goes back to a 17th century monk named Brother Lawrence. His collected writings are available as a book called *The Practice of the Presence of God*. This man went about his menial every-day tasks trying to cultivate a continual conversation with God. This idea has inspired Christians ever since to stay mindful that God is close to us at every moment. This practice takes discipline, but can be life-changing for a Christian.

GETTING STARTED

1. When do you feel that God is with you most? Have there been times when He felt far from you?

2. Who are the people you spend the most time with? In what ways have you become more like these people? In what ways have they become more like you?



STUDY

❖ **PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF GOD:** One of the mysteries of Christianity is that God dwells in us. He comes into our lives and is always there! Though God is invisible, we can train ourselves to become aware of His presence and to delight in it each and every day.

➤ Read the following verses and write what you learn about God’s presence with us:

1 Corinthians 3:16	
1 John 4:12-16	
Psalm 129:7-8	

It is incredible to realize that God chooses to dwell in us, abide in us, and there is no where we can go from God’s presence. It is God’s desire to be close to us. He is not a faraway impersonal being, but desires to live inside us, and be central to every detail of our lives!

❖ **HOW TO PRACTICE THE PRESENCE OF GOD:** How do we become more aware of God’s presence in our lives all the time, and walk with Him moment by moment?

- **Start your day with God.** Be intentional about starting your day in prayer. Give your day over to God. Spend time alone with just Him. Listen to Him, learn from Him, and pray to Him. Spend significant time, and don’t rush.
- **Turn the ordinary into holy moments.** When you have ordinary tasks to complete throughout your day that don’t require your full attention, invite God into your task. Talk to Him through it. Tell God what you are thinking about, recite Scripture to yourself, and think about what God has done for you.
- **Practise praise.** No matter what your circumstances throughout the day, practise praising God. Even in trials, stresses (including small things like bad weather, traffic, hard work, etc.), find reasons to praise God. Turn your attention from the troubles around you to God.
- **Be aware of what God is doing.** Sometimes we pray and miss the answers to our prayers because we are distracted or not looking for them. Expect God to show up and answer your prayers! Look at people around you and pray for them, — even strangers on the street. Watch for the ways in which God is working in the experiences of your life.



- Think about what you have done today (or what you plan to do yet). What is one way that you could begin to use these ideas to be more aware of God’s presence?

❖ **KNOWING THE HEART OF GOD:** One benefit of being aware of God’s presence is understanding His heart, — what God values, and loves. This will transform your own heart to be more like His. We will look together at the example of Mary of Bethany, a disciple of Jesus.

- Read the story of two women named Mary and Martha in Luke 10:39-42. What does God value more – time spent in His presence or works done in His name?

As a result of prioritizing time with God, Mary learned more about Jesus and was very close to Him. Serving God did not guarantee an intimate relationship with God, but spending time with Him did!

- Read John 11:32-34. Mary shared her emotions and her concerns with Jesus. When Mary and Martha’s brother Lazarus died, what brought Jesus to tears?

It was Mary’s question, and watching her weep that moved the heart of Jesus. Jesus was very close to Mary because Mary had made their relationship a priority in her life. She didn’t just do things for Jesus, or in His name but rather she gave her time to Him.

At a later time, Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with oil, which was a costly act of worship and adoration. She knew His heart and what mattered most to Him. By doing this, she learned how to worship Jesus and honoured God.

❖ **KNOWING THE PERSPECTIVE OF GOD:** Learning to see the world with an eternal perspective is another benefit of practising the presence of God. In the book of Psalms we have a collection of poems, songs and prayer written by different individuals. Asaph was one of these Psalmists. Psalm 73 describes how reading God’s Word can change us, and give us a better understanding of the world from His perspective.



- Read Psalm 73.
 - In Psalm 73 there are two parts: Asaph's complaint against the rich and prosperous who get their way by oppressing the poor, and Asaph praising God and surrendering his life to Him. What happens to Asaph that brings about the change?
 - In verse 17 he said, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end." It was when Asaph went into the presence of God that he started seeing things as they really were.
 - When we are away from God, our human understanding has a limited perspective of the world.
- When have you had an experience like Asaph's, where you had a change of heart about your circumstances? How can God help us see our circumstances in a different light?

❖ **KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD:** Understanding the will of God for our lives is the last benefit we will look at together. In order to please God we must carry out His will for us. Sometimes that plan is to be still in His presence. Other times it will involve action.

- In 1 Kings 17:1-7 we read about Elijah who was a prophet during the reign of King Ahab. He spoke the words of God when the King said he would put to death all the prophets of the Lord. Elijah had courage because His faith was in God. How could Elijah know what God wanted?

- Read 1 Kings 17:8-24. What did God do for Elijah? Who was His company and source of food during this time?

Elijah knew what God desired of him and obeyed God rather than man. God brought Elijah to a place of refuge where Elijah was provided food by God and spent time alone waiting on God. Elijah knew where he was to go and what he was to do because he was paying close attention to God.



❖ **GOD IS WITH US:** God promises that He is with us, but we must discipline ourselves to live in this reality. It can be difficult to always be mindful of God, but this mindfulness will keep us in constant prayer and thankfulness. You will find your attitude becomes one of gratitude and joy!

- Read the following verses and write down what they tell you about God’s promises to be with you:

Joshua 1:9	
Matthew 28:20	
Hebrews 12:5	
Romans 8:38-39	
Psalms 32:4	

IN SUMMARY

- ❖ We can train ourselves to become aware of His presence and to delight in it each and every day.
- ❖ We can practice the presence of God by starting our day with God, turning ordinary moments into holy ones, practicing praise and being aware of what God is doing.
- ❖ Examples in the Bible demonstrate that God values time spent with Him more than work done in His name.
- ❖ We can know the perspective of God by dwelling in His word, and watching how He works in the world.
- ❖ God will guide us and provide for our needs as we wait on Him and put Him first.
- ❖ We can know that God is with us as we look for His presence with us, and set our minds on Him.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How could you practise the presence of God while doing a daily chore (cleaning house, cooking, sitting in traffic, walking, doing physical work, etc.)?

2. How might practising the presence of God affect your relationships with other people around you?

3. What was most comforting to you about this lesson? What was something new you learned?