

**Part IV. Four Basic Steps
in Prayer**

~ 12 ~

The presence of God

—The first step: Jesus is here—

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

The request was made to the disciple Philip by certain Greeks who had journeyed far for this very purpose.

Jesus' answer to this request is found in John 12:23-27. Unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains a single kernel, but if it dies—it bears a great crop! Seeing Him in the flesh, He explained, is of little importance compared with seeing Him after His resurrection.

Hymn writers love to write about this theme—that moment when we shall see the Lord Jesus in glory with our own eyes. Why, I wonder, do they limit this moment to after death?

Each of us is influenced by mental concepts and pre-conceived ideas. Many believe they know what Jesus looks like. Others do not. The important thing, here and now, is not what Jesus looked like while on

earth, but whether we are aware of His Presence with us.

Have you ever seen Jesus?

"Tonight in church," wrote a friend who had that day experienced forgiveness, "each time I closed my eyes, or looked at the wall or ceiling, I saw the Lord Jesus Christ. Not His face, just His arms and hands outstretched to me. I couldn't stop thanking Him for His forgiveness, nor praising Him for being right there; for letting me see Him; for wanting me to love Him. It is overwhelming, that He loves me and wants me. I no longer have to be afraid of him, nor of myself. I've never before felt this loved or accepted. For the first time in my life, because I know God accepts me, I can accept myself."

The reality of Jesus' presence is not reserved for a favored few, unless you call the "favored few" those who seek Him. I was never too successful in realizing the presence of God until my attention turned to Christ. Only then did I believe and understand the words, "*Remember, I am with you always.*" (Matthew 28:20, Phillips).

The presence of Jesus *is* the presence of God. For Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, God-with-us—Immanuel. "The man who has seen Me has seen the Father," Jesus explained to Philip, who could be satisfied only if Jesus would *show* him the Father.

"Everything in the Christian life depends on our having a growing sense of Jesus as a person," writes H. A. Hamilton in the little classic, *Conversation with God* (Abingdon). "We have to get to know Him in our minds; we have to practice the art of living with Him. There is no other way."

In my book on witnessing, I have already related at length how I discovered Christ is not merely an

experience, a plan of salvation, nor a part of theology, but a vital, living Person, whose presence with us makes possible two-way communication—communication filled with response and meaning!

This discovery made it possible for me to ask Christ to take possession of my mind, to help me develop creative ideas which might help others not to be afraid to meet the Lord face-to-face—to see Him—to know Him—to believe Him—to feel His love and be assured of His acceptance and Forgiveness.

Jesus is here!

1. We must be aware of the difference between saying prayer, and knowing the nearness of Jesus Christ. The problem in prayer is not that of being taught how to pray, but being assured that God (who loves us) is always near and always with us, in the person of Jesus Christ.

2. We must be willing to be like a child: to come, to believe, to speak from our hearts, without self-consciousness, as we already learned in chapter 7.

3. We must not be afraid nor reluctant, for His love will hold us and heal us. If you are still fearful or unwilling, reread the first five chapters.

4. We must remember that our attention span is very short, especially when attempting to visualize the invisible. Our awareness of His presence will be quick, fleeting, but nevertheless real. As the Apostle Peter wrote, "whom having not seen you love," speaking of Jesus Christ. Cherish these moments.

5. We must speak to Him, and we must say His name. "Lord Jesus, thank You for accepting me, just as I am." Strangely, there are people who are unable to say the name of Jesus in prayer. They can say,

Our Father, but struggle when it comes to saying, *Dear Lord*, or *Lord Jesus* in prayer.

"This adventure in prayer," wrote a mother of four children, "requires a conscious effort on my part to speak the name of Jesus. Now, however, I know for a certainty *Jesus is here*, and that He loves me."

"This new concept of *Jesus is here* has changed my whole prayer life," writes R.D.B. of Texas.

"I must express my gratitude for introducing me to the living Jesus. There was a calm, joyous warmth radiating from each of you present, a certainty in your reference to Him, a sureness that His promises are true. I was eager to learn more about this invisible Visitor of whom you each spoke with such positive reference, that I, too, might know Him personally" (L.H.M.).

6. The secret of His presence is primarily one of awareness, of wordless wonder, and of communication—which enables us to exchange ideas as well as questions. We can respond, be assured, and feel a growing sense of security and reality in our relationship with Christ.

Creative imagination

We must let Christ speak to us.

In the other five steps I've suggested using ideas which will need some of the good creative imagination with which God has endowed you. In this step, I'd like to introduce an experiment, made by Frank Laubach, which I have tried and have found works. I have asked others to try it, and each time the answer comes back, "I tried it! And it does work!"

This requires more of the kind of imagination which precedes all progress. Read about it, at any rate, and do with it what you want and wish.

Dr. Laubach frankly admits this experiment

borders on the mystical, but is nevertheless an experience everyone could and should have. Every Christian is, in a sense, a mystic, for we worship God Who is invisible, and speak with Him Who has no audible voice. Within the limits of our own personality and through this experiment we may know Christ speaking to us.

From the accumulation of your knowledge of Christ, His words, and His ways (which the Holy Spirit has promised to bring to us whenever we need it) we can best carry out this experiment while we walk alone, or are alone in a room. Let both sides of the dialogue come right out of your own mouth—and I mean in plain English!

The conversation might go something like this:

Mary: Lord Jesus, are You right here with me?

Jesus: Yes, Mary, I am here with you.

Mary: Your love for me never changes, does it?

Jesus: No, My love for you never changes; I always have and I always will love you.

Mary: But Lord, sometimes I'm a mighty mixed-up person. How can You love me? Most of the time I don't even like myself.

Jesus: I understand how you feel. Your insight about yourself is indeed limited. I, however, love you for yourself, and My love includes your total self—your *real* self, and all of your potential. Believe this for I am here to help you.



(For further exercise in the manner described here, read Meditation No. 4, then reread it aloud.)

*Meditation No. 4**My child, I love you!*

1. My child, I love you.

I love you unconditionally, good or bad, with no strings attached. I can love you like this because I know all about you—I have known you ever since you were a child. I love you and I know what I can do for you, and what I want to do for you.

2. My child, I accept you.

I accept you just as you are. You don't need to change yourself. I'll do the changing when you are ready. I love you just as you are. Believe this—for I assure you it is true.

3. My child, I care about you.

I care about every big or little thing which happens to you. Believe this. I care enough to do something about it. Remember this. I will help you when you need me. Ask me. I love you. I accept you. I care about you.

4. My child, I forgive you.

I forgive you, and my forgiveness is complete. It is not like that of humans who forgive but cannot forget. I love you, and my arms are open with love that asks, Please, come here to me! I forgive you. Do not carry your guilt another moment. I carried it all for you on the cross. Believe this. It is true. Rejoice and be glad.

