

Presents or Presence?

In a relationship, what do you value more: Presents or Presence?

When I was little, my father would often be away from home on business, sometimes for many months at a time, and it was always a joy to welcome him home, not least because he would bring gifts from the countries he'd visited. There was always an aspect of excitement in unwrapping these presents and playing with a new toy, or trying on a new dress. But when I look back at my childhood, as great as these moments were, what I treasure most are the memories of simply spending time with my dad. The dresses have long since been grown out of, and the dolls long left un-played with, but the everyday experience of getting to know him formed a vital foundation that props up our relationship today, indeed guarantees it. Our relationship with our Heavenly Father is no different. Spending time in the presence of God is vital to building a firm foundation of relationship from which outflows every blessing available to us in Christ (Eph 1:3). By seeking first the face of God, all our needs will be met by the hand of God, but sometimes we find ourselves looking all too easily to God's hands, and not his face, desiring his presents and not his presence. In times like these, it is guaranteed that we will wander off course and wonder at our lack.

Are you in a place of faith or fear?

Adam and Eve provide an all too familiar example of what being out of the presence of God means. By putting God's word second to the ways of the world, they were distanced from the presence of God, and one of the first things they experienced was lack of provision. The presence of God that had covered them had also provided for them, and without it they felt vulnerable, full of fear, and that something was missing from their lives. This kind of fear quenches us that our hearts shine not the fire of Abraham-like faith, but a duller light, like the blue light of the flame. The light of God in us is hidden when we hide from God.

The opposite of fear is faith. Abraham's faith in God moved him to put God's word first even when he was unsure of the outcome and great risks were involved. This faith brought him to the heart of God, and being so continually in God's presence built a firm relationship as close as friendship. In Genesis 15:1 the Lord says to Abraham "Fear not, I am your shield, your reward shall be exceedingly great." Thus God's presence protects us and provides for us so that by faith we can enter the rest of God and believe that God will take care of the rest.

Psalm 23 affirms the promise of God's provision to those who dwell in the house (presence) of the Lord (v6). But as this psalm indicates, passing through dark and lonely times in our lives are still realities we are not always delivered from. Are you experiencing a night season in your life at this moment? Do you feel that your circumstances are not ministering peace to you? This psalm says that when we continue to seek God's face and keep fighting the good fight of faith during these "valleys" that God will continue to guide us and protect us. Even when it seems like our enemies have the upper hand, God's provision will continue if we remain steadfast in our faith, and he will bring us once again to still and restful waters. If when the silence falls we can still

believe in God and not give in to fear, setting our minds and keeping them set on the things that are above (Colossians 3:2), God's faithfulness will be both our shield and our reward.

We have a High Priest who is able to understand us, and sympathise with our weaknesses and temptations, and this being God's Son Jesus, we are assured to be brought by Christ to the throne of God at all times. Our Father is looking and longing for ways to be good to us, if only we will look to Him. Let us then approach the throne of Grace with boldness in prayer.

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Day 1

Isaiah 40:31

“But those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.”

Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you that you are my strong tower, I run to you when I need strength. I thank you that I can enter your presence through Jesus Christ and receive your mercy – may I never take your presence for granted. I ask you Lord to strengthen me in my spirit today, and fill me with the fullness of your joy, that I may not be burdened with anxieties. May your peace have a home in my heart and make me a comforting influence on those around me, especially in a world that has no peace. Amen.

Day 2

Psalm 91:4-7

“He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.”

Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you that you are always victorious all things. I lift up to you my life and I ask you to guide me by your wisdom and protect me by your presence. Make me to always walk in your love, believing that nothing can separate me from your love. I trust you Lord to make your face to shine upon me, knowing that your light shines in the darkness and overcomes it, and having faith that no weapon formed against me shall prevail. I will rest in your presence Lord. Amen.

Day 3

Deuteronomy 28:1,12

“If you will listen diligently to the voice of the Lord your God, being watchful to do all his commandments...The Lord shall open to you His good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands; and you shall lend to many nations but you shall not borrow.”

Pray this: Thank you Father that you have provided in advance all that I need, that it is your desire to bless me and make me a blessing to others. I ask you Lord to keep me in your perfect will and in your perfect timing, that I may receive these blessings and be used by you to meet the needs of others. I thank you Lord that you give bread to eat and seed to sow, may I always give you thanks and return to you praise for every blessing. Amen

Day 4

Romans 12:2

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Dear Father God, I thank you for the power in the blood of Jesus, and I plead this blood over my mind, my will and my emotions, that you would seal your word of truth within me. I ask you to ever renew me in the spirit of my mind, that I may meditate on your word continually and know your will. I make my determined purpose to know you Jesus, and to grasp more fully the depth of your love. Amen.

Day 5

Pray Colossians 1:9-14:

Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that you would fill me with the knowledge of your will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding; that I may live a life worthy of you, pleasing you in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of you Lord, being strengthened with all power according to your glorious might, that I may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully give thanks to you Father, for you have qualified me to share in the inheritance with all the saints in your kingdom of light. You have rescued me from the dominion of darkness and brought me into the kingdom of your beloved Son, in whom I have salvation and the forgiveness of all my sins. Amen.