

# BodyLife Past Article Archive

## Every Day, Every Moment

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There was never a moment in the last seven days of your life when Jesus wasn't present with you--fully aware of everything you were doing.

Now, what do you think? Is that good news, or bad news?

For most of my spiritual life that kind of thinking was a bit disconcerting to me. The very thought of such a reality made me focus with guilt on every failure and lapse of good judgment. I hate to think Jesus saw all of that.

What's more, at thoughts of him being present with me, I'd feel bad about how little I'd been aware of him with me. Even the good things I'd attempted were the result of my best wisdom, not necessarily his leading. Eventually they would collapse under the weight of the human wisdom they were built on and I'd feel like an idiot.

The words of that perennial Sunday school song would replay in my head: "Oh, be careful little eyes what you see for the Father up above is looking down in love." I know it's a fun song for kids to sing as they get to point to various body parts, but it makes a horrible connection between God's love and an image of him as the divine cop shaking his finger at us whenever we falter or fail. This is certainly not the image of his Father that Jesus passed on to his followers.

Jesus' presence with us is not to police, to condemn, or to harass us. Rather, he is with us to lead us into the fullness of the Father's life. Growing in our awareness and dependence of his presence with us is the whole of what it means to live the Christian life.

## I'd Rather Do It Myself

Last month I took my son Andy with me for my appearance on TNN. My brother is the director of Prime Time Country and Andy wanted to see the inner-workings of television production. For the most part, I'm not as cool in his eyes as I used to be. In fact I have been known to be an embarrassment to him at times, even when I'm not trying. When I had to go off and do other things at the studio, he didn't miss me much.

That is a part of growing up and learning to take responsibility for himself in the world. Unfortunately what's good for growing up to be a responsible adult in the world is the opposite of what it means to mature in Christ. The Christian life is not something we're supposed to learn to live on our own. In fact,

the most important lesson we all need to learn is that we cannot live the Christian life without the daily intervention of Jesus in our lives.

I did get a taste of that on the flight home with Andy. Andy hates to fly and to make matters worse we encountered severe turbulence as we flew into another El Nino storm invading California. Suddenly Dad wasn't so uncool anymore. He wanted me there so that every few seconds he could ask me about our safety. He also needed someone on which to vent his firm resolve that he would never fly again.

That's the picture Jesus wants us to have of him--in times of need and times of joy.

## **He Lives!**

It is easy to celebrate the fact of the resurrection as we did at Easter last month and miss the most important implication of that fact. It means Jesus is alive. He didn't come to found a religion but to invite us to participate in the relationship that Father, Son and Spirit have shared for all eternity.

He yearns for us to live in the reality of his presence with us at every moment, offering access to the Father, wisdom for the circumstances we've engaged, and power for God to be glorified through our lives.

If we are going to be God's people in the earth we not only need to embrace the theological fact of the resurrection but the relational reality of it as well. He is alive--no longer just with his followers, but in them. I love Paul's description of Christian maturity in Gal 4:19 "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you--"

What a powerful image! The risen Christ wants to take shape in you. Think of that! What could describe our life in him any better? Not only is it a joyful hope, but it also points up how incapable we are of producing that by our own strength or ingenuity.

## **"Remain in Me"**

The last instructions Jesus left his followers was to remain, or abide in him, and to love each other. He didn't want them mistaking Christianity for an ethic to be observed or a tradition to follow. They had learned to just live with him for three years or more, he wanted to continue that relationship within them after his resurrection.

But he knew it wouldn't be easy. How do we stay aware of that which we cannot see? We all know how easy it is to live significant chunks of our lives without even thinking of Jesus being with us, much less hearing his voice direct us, or seeing his power equip us.

That is the challenge isn't it? How do we develop a relationship with him whom we cannot see and how do

we live in that awareness of him, when everything about life in this age distracts us from knowing him?

Unfortunately we have too clear a picture of what it means to be a good Christian today. It means going to church, reading our Bibles, trying to live moral lives and sharing the gospel with others. We know what we should do, think or say in any situation and yet we find ourselves incapable of living out the very ethic we embrace. Though we find comfort in doing the things we think God expects of us, we may have no idea how to cultivate our relationship with him.

The sad truth is most of us have had far more training in religion than we have had in relationship.

- How do I rest in the security of Father's love, even though I still fall short of my own expectations?
- How can I be aware of his presence with me all the time, and not just when I'm afraid or in need?
- How do I identify Jesus' voice when he speaks and how can I know what he's doing in my life through the circumstance I'm caught in?
- How can I really draw on his power and not just give it my best effort?

Those are relational questions. This is what every new convert should learn in their first ten years of becoming a Christian. We shouldn't hasten them on so quickly to get them to look and act more Christian, but to learn how to live out a real friendship with Jesus every day of their lives. If we did that, everything else that needed to happen in their lives would--they'd grow increasingly free of sin, they'd bear God's fruit before the world, they'd love others and see God answer their prayers. Without that relationship, Jesus warned us, we would not be able to do anything that would be fruitful for his work in us or those around us.

## **How Do I Do That?**

If your first thought here is to buy a book or find a seminar or spiritual intimacy, I'm afraid the journey is over before it begins. It's not that those things can't be helpful, but building a relationship with Jesus means spending time cultivating my awareness of his presence and submitting my heart to his will and purpose in me.

Read all the books you want and you won't find that in any of them. That happens only in the dynamic growth of a relationship between you and him. He modeled for us with the disciples what that would look like. It's a friendship. The disciples walked with him every day. They knew his laughter and rebukes, argued with him and listened to his wisdom, called to him in their fears and shook their heads when his words confused them. They grew to know God as a friend.

Jesus wants no less for you. He can take you right where you are and lead you into that friendship that can fill every day with his presence.

The first thing you can do is simply be honest with him about your struggles to know him as a friend. Tell

him the hungers on your heart and the disappointments of past attempts. Ask him to teach you how to know him better and to recognize him through the normal course of daily life.

His presence is not something we experience only in Bible studies and worship services. He wants to be no less real in all the other places we inhabit the rest of the week--offices, houses, schools, cars, airplanes and fields. If we'll just pause even a few seconds throughout our day and recognize the truth of that, we'll find ourselves engaging a conversation with him that runs through our entire life. He will show us things we would easily miss and teach us how to love people around us like he has loved us.

He can teach you how to do that better than anyone. He has been building friendships with people since the world began and is wonderfully good at it. It may be a struggle at times, but learning how to cultivate that relationship is the greatest joy of being a believer in him.

Now I know that there is a not a moment of my life that Jesus is not there, completely aware of everything going on around me and at work to lead me to the fullness Father's life. Even where I struggle, I have no pangs of shame, because only he can change me--and he is well on the way to doing that!

### **Sidebar 1: God in the Shower?**

After a gathering with believers in Ohio a professor visiting the US from India on an exchange program approached me with a question. He loved the informality of our gathering, but was bothered by the casual dress. "If I was going to meet the President of the United States today, I would dress up in a suit and tie. Should we offer God any less?"

"And so would I," I responded. "But there is someone who would feel no need whatsoever to dress up if they met the President today." He looked at me quizzically. "Chelsea. In fact, the President wouldn't want her to dress up because he's her father and no formality is needed."

Isn't it a joy that we are sons and daughters who need no pretense in Father's presence? He invites us to enjoy him, not impress him.

But this question bothers me in another way. Its hidden premise is that God is somehow more present at a gathering of believers than he is when we take a shower in the morning, or when we're hot and sweaty from a hard day's work. And he's not, you now!

### **Sidebar 2: It's the Process, not Perfection!**

After a time of teaching about how Father extends his grace to us while he reshapes our lives, a brother shared something he had discovered: "I think I finally understood something today, I have thought that

God was only pleased by my perfection. Since I never measured up to that I have always struggled. But I am beginning to think he not only wants me to be whole, but that he actually enjoys the process of getting me there."

What else explains why Father just doesn't wave his arms over us and make us all perfect overnight. He wants us to reflect his glory from the inside out. He patiently shapes our lives until Christ is fully formed in us. Like a potter spinning a new pot, he's not just excited about getting it done, but he actually enjoys the whole process--softening the clay, kneading it in his hands, and fashioning with great care into that which he sees in his heart.

If we only think him satisfied when we get it all together, I'm afraid our lives will be filled with frustration--for ourselves and others! But if he enjoys the process, shouldn't we also? He is fashioning you so that Jesus can take form in you. Can you see how he's doing that? But if we can with him enjoy the process of him allowing Jesus to take form in us, then we too can be more patient with our still-glaring deficiencies.

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