

Practicing Presence

By *Jake Wilkinson*

Series: Presence With: God

Talk 1 — Opening, The Beginning & First Prompt

You guys, we have something really special here today. We are going to do something actually for the second time in our church service. We did this quite some time ago. When I got here, we decided that if anything good was going to happen in this place, that this place would become a house of prayer again. That God would do something special, and that's because we were connecting with Him. We were seeking His presence, and His presence is found not only in our individual lives but here at church. I believe that's happening right now. I'm hearing stories. We're seeing people's lives completely turn over to making this a priority in our life, and I'm so proud of us.

We also want to do that in our church service. If you've been a part of The Beginning in the past, that's what we're going to do today. The whole reason The Beginning came up — David, I think, came up with the name — is because if we're going to start with anything, it has to be that. It has to be God's presence in our life. That's why we're here.

Just a brief history. Over the last few months, we have tried to listen. We have tried to follow His leading, and we've come up with a vision statement and a purpose statement. We also went over the life of Abraham and how it was a struggle for the father of our faith. It was a struggle for him. In fact, his grandson was named Israel. And Israel — anybody know what the term actually means? It means the ones who struggle with God. We wrestle with Him.

The reason The Beginning was created in the first place was because we recognize that in our busy, overstimulated culture, it can be very difficult and even sometimes impossible, it feels like, to make time to be present with the most important person in our life. We're going to attempt to do that today. Today, we're going to continue a practice of being present with God. This is finalizing our series on presence with God. We're going to try to do this together.

Now, I'm going to start us off — we're going to have a prompt on the screen. So if you get lost, just look up at the screen and try to re-meditate over whatever happens on the screen here or whatever is on the screen. We'll get a chance to sit with this for three or four minutes while music is played over this. But our first prompt is this: where have you been moving too fast this week to notice — to notice that He's been there with you actually all along? And our prayer is this: God, open my eyes to Your presence. And it's stemming from a text in 2 Kings where Elisha prayed, open my eyes, Lord, that I may see You.

I'm going to have a prayer for us and we're going to sit in this presence for a few minutes.

Jesus, we are praying just for that. I think too many times our eyes are drawn towards the shiny thing, the next thing, the most urgent thing, and they're not drawn to the author of life that can breathe life back into our lifelessness. Like a friend at a party sometimes, we don't even acknowledge Your presence until we look over and realize You've been with us the whole time. Open our eyes. Help us to see You there. Show us where You're at in our life and where You can show up. Amen.

[SONG: Open the Eyes] [SONG: Draw Me Close]

Talk 2 — Psalm 27:4 & James 4:8

Psalm 27, verse 4, says:

The one thing I ask of the Lord, the thing I seek most, is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, delighting in the Lord's perfections and meditating in His temple.

I think there's a couple things we'll have on the screen here as prompts after I pray for us. Where are we settling for visiting God instead of living with Him? And what would change if we delighted in who He is and that mattered more than what He gives us? Let's pray on that for a moment.

Jesus, teach us that Your presence is the very thing that our heart is longing for, not the things that You provide us and material whatever it is. We need those things. You know, You've made it clear. The sparrows need those things. We need those things. You'll provide those things, but what we ultimately need is a relationship and a connection with You, the author of life. Show us the way to live. Amen. Thank you.

James 4:8 says, come near to God, and He will come near to you. What's something that has kept you at a distance — the busyness and distraction or doubt? What's something you need to surrender to God to be able to experience His presence? Let's pray one more time together.

Jesus, help us. I think some of us probably feel like the crippled man that his friends helped to come see You because we don't even feel like we can come to You ourselves. Save us from that, Jesus. Help us to Your presence. Help us to You so that You can heal us, You can love us, and remind us that we are loved and that is the foundation of our existence. God, help us to see the things that are getting in the way of that and turn them over to You now.

[SONG: None Like You] [SONG: Cornerstone] [SONG: Build My Life]

Talk 3 — 1 Corinthians 3 & Returning to the Altar

1 Corinthians 3 — it says, because of God's grace to me, I have laid a foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on the foundation must be careful, for no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have in Jesus Christ.

What are we building our life on? I want to ask a couple things as we close this particular series. If God is going to be a priority in your life, then you have to schedule that. You have to make it a priority. It has to be an active, intentional decision, and we talked about that last week. And that's the second question: what's one time of the day, what's one moment where you will set aside that nothing else will touch that to be with Him and experience His presence as we move forward as a church?

What if we were all engaged in this? Our world would change. Instead of talking about being with Jesus and knowing about Him, we were with Him and prioritized Him in our life.

Jesus, please help us with this. We love the idea of You. We love the idea of being with You, and then yet somehow when it boils down to it, so many of us, we don't plan for it. We don't create an opportunity for You to come into our lives when You have created the most profound opportunity for us to come into Yours. Jesus, You said that Your kingdom is not just up in heaven. We're not just trying to go to heaven. It's here now on this earth. You want to bring it here, and it requires Your citizens to know the King and to understand what He's about and to love Him and allow themselves to be loved by Him. Help us, Jesus.

Genesis 13:3–4 says:

To the place between Bethel and Ai, where his tent had been earlier, and where he had first built an altar, there Abraham returned, and he called upon the name of the Lord.

We call this The Beginning, and you haven't graduated yet, and I hope we never do. If Abraham was the father of our faith, he returned to this altar of what God did, of where His presence was, and he did it over and over again. Like the very food that we eat and the air that we breathe — if we stop doing this thing, other things will cease in our lives. Most important things will stop and we'll miss the most important thing.

I'm hearing lots of amazing stories, you guys, of people actually praying and reading their Bibles for more than they've done that in the past and how their lives have changed. I'm hearing stories every week about this. Keep it up. Thank you guys for being with us tonight. Let's sing one more song and I'll pray for us one more time. Thank you.

[SONG: Gratitude]

Talk 4 — Closing Prayer

What else do we say, Jesus? Thank you. Thank you for what You've done. Thank you that Your Spirit is not just alive and well, but wanting to be with us. It says, while we were still sinning — in the process of it, sinners — You came and died for us in that process because You wanted us that bad. That is a love that we don't understand, that it's hard to believe in, but help us, Lord. Thank you that our King would die for us and that He sent His Spirit to live with us. Some of Your last words were, my peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. That is something that the Spirit will provide no matter what is going on in our life right now. I pray, Lord, that we experience that alone that comes along with Your presence. Thank you for being here with us. Continue moving us forward and let us not forget to return to the altar over and over again, Lord. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.