

Today we're starting a short series called 'Why?' We're going to look at some questions Christians ask: next week it's, 'Why didn't God answer my prayer?'; then, 'Why do bad things happen to good people?'; then, 'Why would God use someone like me?' I must say in advance that I'm not going to be able to deal with every aspect of these issues, so I would recommend discussing them with a friend during the week to see what else you can tease out.

Today we're starting with the question, "Why don't I always feel the presence of God?" If you don't know God yet, you might not have asked that but I'm sure some people here have.

But to start this week, I want to ask how many of you who are here would say that at some point in your life you really believe you've felt the presence of God? Would you just raise your hands up right now?

Are there any of you who would say that already in church today you've sensed the presence of God? So, the question I want to ask then is this, if you haven't felt God's presence today, whose problem is it? Is it you because you haven't tuned in, or weren't ready when you came to church? Is it God's issue? Has he decided that only half of us are going to experience his presence today? David's fault because he picked hymns you don't like, and you know you can't worship to hymns you don't like! Anyway, how do you know if it really is the presence of God that you feel?

Over the years I have heard people talk about having a tingling sensation, being overcome with emotion and be in tears or feeling a warmth that passes over them. I have no doubt God can give you any of those feelings and even more. But the truth is that even though God can make you cry, so can cutting onions! Just as God can give you a warm sensation, so can peeing in a wetsuit! So how do you know if you are actually experiencing the presence of God?

**If you don't always feel God's presence, you are not alone.**

In our reading today the writer says: Psalm 88:13 *But I cry to you for help, Lord; in the morning my prayer comes before you.* Then in the next verse says, *Why, O Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me?*

In other words, "Why can't I feel you God? Where are you when I need you? I don't sense that you're near God, why is it that I can't feel your presence?"

As we wrestle with that question, I won't be able to say specifically for every one of you, here's exactly why; but what I want to do is raise some different Biblical possibilities as to why you might not feel the presence of God.

***1. Maybe you are over sensationalizing the presence of God.***

You're looking for something really big and dramatic and some kind of massive sign from God. You know, "God, if this is really you, may a camel walk into my room right now so I'll know that you're leading me to do this!"

And this isn't uncommon. In fact, you can see it in the New Testament when the crowds of people were pressing into Jesus John 6:28-31 <sup>28</sup> *Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?'*

<sup>29</sup> *Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.'*

<sup>30</sup> *So they asked him, 'What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?'* <sup>31</sup> *Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness.....*

I think that a lot of people are over sensationalizing, "I want to feel God's presence! Oh God, do something big, help me see it!"

Thurso was the first place I went to church where there were lots of charismatic believers. Now, for those of you that aren't from the church world, that may not mean much to you, but a charismatic church is a church where people are really excited about God! At the first strum of a guitar the hands go up and they begin to sway, or they're jumping up and down, and some of them have their own little dance, they do this kind of little thing and it's like everybody drank two cans of Red Bull before they came to church! I got to love it but it wasn't the way I was brought up. If you were taking part in the service a whole group of people literally laid hands on you and prayed for you. Actually, I miss that because it was a very positive and encouraging thing.

There were times when I listened to the preacher, or more often during the singing, that I felt really close to God. Then at the end there was a time of singing and I saw people doing their wee dance and I thought to myself, 'Why don't I have that?'

What's funny is that just moments before that, God had clearly spoken directly to me through His Word. And yet, because something fancy didn't happen to me, I started to question, "Did I really experience God?"

I don't know about you, but there may be some of you, that you're still waiting for the camel to come in the door. And sometimes God's presence will knock you down, other times it may just calm you with a peace that goes beyond our human ability to even understand.

Why don't you always feel God's presence? Maybe it's because you are over sensationalizing it.

The second thing is, maybe for some of you:

## ***2. Maybe you're simply distracted.***

God is with you, but you're distracted and not experiencing Him.

You may have experienced that yourself – you’re sitting with your colleague or, even worse, your spouse, and they’re talking and you suddenly realise they’ve stopped talking but you have no idea what has been said. You’re there but you weren’t present.

Luke 10:38-40 <sup>38</sup> *As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. <sup>39</sup> She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, ‘Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’*

Jesus was in the house and Mary was enjoying His presence. But Martha was distracted.

Jesus was right there and yet, she was distracted and missed the moment of enjoying His presence.

The reality is, so many Christians today get distracted by doing the work of God, and they miss the presence of God. They're so busy doing that they're not being in His presence.

And the reality is, you don't have to just be serving God to be distracted, you can be distracted by so many things today. I know people who can't go four minutes without updating their Facebook status, like, "Oh hang on, I just sneezed! Oh hang on, now I'm about to wipe my snot!"

Or you’re sitting in church and you begin to wonder if you put the oven on, or that you need to remember butter on the way home, or that you forgot to do that thing.

The third possible reason is not so funny.

### ***3. Maybe your heart has hardened.***

Why don't I always feel the presence of God? Maybe your heart has grown harder to the things of God. I can't tell you how many people I know that at one time were very tender and sensitive to God. And yet, something happened and their heart has grown cold to the things of God.

In fact, in Matthew 13, Jesus had just taught on what is known as the parable of the sower, and then He went and quoted the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah and says this in Matthew 13:14-15 *In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:*

*“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;  
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.*

*<sup>15</sup> For this people’s heart has become calloused;  
they hardly hear with their ears,  
and they have closed their eyes.*

*Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
hear with their ears,  
understand with their hearts  
and turn, and I would heal them.”*

I don't know how this might play out for some of you, but for some of you there may have been a time where you really were close to God and then something happened. Maybe you prayed for something and said, "God, I believe you're going to do this." And then, God didn't do what you thought and you're like, "Well, forget God!" and you hardened your heart toward God.

Or maybe you that God was leading you to do something, He was prompting you and so you took a step of faith. And when you took that step of faith it didn't work out the way you thought it would and you're like, "Oh well, God must not be speaking to me, or I can't understand Him anyway." Or, "He's not trustworthy!" and so your heart hardened to the things of God.

Or, I don't know how many times I've met people who were close to God at one time and then, some Christian did something that wasn't Christ-like. Or they got hurt by a church, or a religious organization and they're like, "Oh well then God, because of what they did I want nothing to do with you!"

If you wash your car and then leave the leather chamois outside it goes really hard. When it is wet it is soft and pliable, but when it dries out it is solid. When we regularly spend time with God our hearts are responsive, but when we don't take time each day with God, our hearts become like a little harder every day.

Why don't I always feel the presence of God? Well, it could be that my heart has grown calloused or harder to God because of something that happened in life.

#### ***4. Maybe you've built a wall of sin.***

You've built a wall of sin that hinders your intimacy with God.

Look at Isaiah 59:1-2 *The Lord hasn't lost his powerful strength; he can still hear and answer prayers. 2 Your sins are the roadblock between you and your God. That's why he doesn't answer your prayers or let you see his face.*

There's a problem. He can hear you, but your sins have cut you off from God.

Now, let me be really careful and really clear here. If you're a Christian and you sin, you're still a Christian. Just because you sin doesn't mean you're out of the game, you're covered by the blood that Jesus shed on the cross for you; your past sins, your present sins, and your future sins. But the reality is, if you continue living with unrepentant sin; in other words, you're just sinning and you're not sorry and you're not turning away from it that is going to negatively affect the potential of intimacy with God.

Let me explain it this way. If I sin against my father I am still his son. If I continue to treat him badly our relationship would deteriorate. If that continues for any length of time it's like building a wall between us. Even if I continue in my disrespect he is still my father, and I

am his son. Without an apology and working to repair any damage done the relationship that we had would not be restored. It is the same with us and God.

And then finally, why don't I always feel God? Well, here's the big thing for some people:

### ***5. Maybe you don't know God.***

Maybe you don't know Him. Maybe you honestly don't know Him. Because there are so many people who know about God, but don't know God. And there's a huge difference between having a head knowledge of God and having a heart relationship with God. Jesus said it plainly, He said in John 7:28-29 *As Jesus was teaching in the temple, he shouted, "Do you really think you know me and where I came from? I didn't come on my own! The one who sent me is truthful, and you don't know him. <sup>29</sup> But I know the one who sent me, because I came from him."*

God wants us not just to know about Him but to know Him, and maybe the reason you don't feel the presence of God is because you don't really know Him.

We may not always feel God's presence. It's going to take faith to believe in Him even when you don't feel Him. And the good news is faith is pleasing to God. If you always felt His presence, then you wouldn't need faith, and Scripture says without faith it's impossible to please God. So, walking with God is never about our feelings, what do we feel and what do we not feel; it's always about our faith.

As I close I want to build your faith in God and His presence with three presence promises. This is the most important part of all that we're going to talk about today. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, these promises are true, they're always true; they're true of God and they're true for you.

#### ***1. You will find God when you seek God.***

The truth is that God longs to be found. Jeremiah 29:13-14 *You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> I will be found by you,' declares the Lord.....*

When you seek God, he delights in revealing Himself to you. He wanted you to know Him so much that he sent Jesus to reveal His heart, His nature; so you could *not just know about Him, but know Him* intimately. When Jesus rose from the dead, God sent the Holy Spirit who would dwell in you and you can experience the presence of God when you seek Him. Not as kind of little add on to your life, but a whole life, full-on heart pursuit of the Creator of the universe. And if you seek Him like that, He loves to reveal Himself to you. God's not playing hide-and-seek; He's not like, 'Hey, come and find me! You're getting closer!'

Now, some of you may honestly ask the question, "How do I seek God? What does that mean?" And I don't want to assume anything; I want to be as simple and upfront as I can. How do I seek God? Well, one of the easiest ways to seek God is just to open up His Word daily and get to know Him.

Maybe you don't always feel the presence of God because haven't been looking for him through His Word.

You can also seek God through prayer. You may say, "I'm not sure how to pray."

You just talk to God like you would a friend. You tell Him how you feel about Him, you ask for His guidance, you talk to Him about your day; you just talk to God like a friend, and you're seeking Him.

## ***2. You can do life with God's presence.***

*John 14:16-17 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*

You don't have to go to church to be with God, God is inside of you and you can do life with Him. That means, when you wake up in the morning it can be, "Hello God! What do you have today?"

And all day long you're talking to God; you're doing life with His presence because He dwells within you. You will find Him if you seek Him. You can do life with Him.

## ***3. You can experience God right now.***

Here, right now, beyond a shadow of a doubt, you can experience God right now.

In Acts 17:27 Paul explains why God created the world: *God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.*  
<sup>28</sup> *“For in him we live and move and have our being.”*

So we would seek Him, to know Him, in a relationship with Him because He is not far from us. He is a relational God who loves you and wants to be loved back.

More than just me feeling Him, I want Him to feel me. I want Him to feel my heart, my adoration, my praise, my worship, my obedience, because ultimately all of this is not about me, it's all about Him. And so, at those times I feel his presence, I will worship Him. Even if I don't feel His presence, I will worship Him. No matter what I feel, I want Him to feel my heart, my adoration, my longing to know Him. And the good news is, He's not playing hide-and-seek, when I seek Him with all of my heart, He will reveal Himself to me, because He is a loving God who loves us and wants us to know Him.