

## The Practice of the Presence of God by Pastor Marty

In any Christian healing model--whether the need be mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological, sexual, or relational--it is necessary for the receivers to focus on something *other* than themselves. Any healing for these people would come from outside the small circle of their being, and, although this may be obvious to another, it is often not realized in the context of the need they are so keenly experiencing. A person trapped in this position will rarely see that this is the case; it seems to come with its own blind spot. This is true in certain degrees with almost anyone, but can be extensive within a soul which is deeply broken to the point of being almost non-functional. Focused only inward, the soul starves; it ceases to *grow* and *become*; it stagnates. This is what C.S. Lewis wrote about in *The Great Divorce*, when the redeemed spirit asks, "Can you not, for one moment, think of something other than yourself?" We may all agree that the Spirit likely asks the same question of our society today.

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In our universe, there are certain laws which run the way physical reality works. One of these laws, the *first law of Thermodynamics*, states that energy is neither created nor destroyed--only transformed or moved to another form. Generally speaking, this means that when you put 100 watts of energy into a

light bulb, you will not get more than 100 watts worth of light out of it. More will not be there unless it comes from somewhere else. *The second law of Thermodynamics* states that all matter and energy tends towards entropy and disorder, meaning that there is always a small amount lost in every transaction. If you put 100 watts of power into a light bulb, you actually get closer to 99.99995 watts of light. A small amount is lost in entropy, energy in a lower state than that which was put into it. For this reason, any "closed system" (a system without energy coming into it) degrades until it becomes totally chaotic and non-functional. This very well describes a person focused on self.

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The practitioner of healing must direct the needy person to look *outside*, thereby giving them something else to see, even if only for a moment. The one who means to be a healer and helper must realize that this is neither a request to make lightly, nor is it a task to be easily accomplished. It can take all their strength of mind and will, and still be as elusive as winning the lottery. As anyone who has ever been on a diet can attest, it is not easy to "not think about food." It is the very act of trying to not think about eating which makes it the center of our thoughts. So it is with those who are focused on themselves or their problems. They are accustomed to knowing what is going

on inside themselves. By leading them to “practice the presence” of something else, they are able to briefly stop practicing their own. This, in itself, can sometimes be enough to heal a broken soul. Even outside of the church, any true psychologist or counselor will readily admit to the health which can come into a person who has been inwardly directed but who starts to write, or play music, or paint. However, often much more is needed. Giving them just “something” to focus on will not be enough. For a person who has never known who they really are, they will look to whatever they focus on to tell them that very thing. They need something or someone to look to, which will *define* themselves.

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The “Fall” leaves men and women very much subjected to the law of spiritual entropy. We are like an arrow shot at a target: gravity begins to pull it down the moment it leaves the bow. The farther the distance, the more it will miss. Each of us is like an arrow on a long-term shot towards a target: in our own strength, we will always fall short of our aim; we are closed systems, under the pull of gravity, missing the mark. The apostle Paul called this “the law of sin and death.” Like the law of gravity, it needs another law greater than itself to overcome it. The human species needs to both aim at something higher than itself (both individually and corporately) and also have a power behind it which can overcome this law of entropy. Only to aim at that which is perfect will give an

upward trajectory. The one who understands the laws of gravity and physics knows that the shot must be aimed higher to compensate. This thing which fallen, broken people look to has to be more whole than they are in order to find themselves defined better than before. This results in an “open system,” which will grow to whatever extent what is being put in exceeds that which is being lost. The more perfect the object of focus, the more optimal the result.

***Only aiming at something perfect will give us an upward trajectory.***

Only the One who created man and woman is above them enough to give them a trajectory upwards, and only a power greater than this “entropy” can bring the arrow to the mark. “Wretched man that I am! Who will save me from the body of death?” asked Paul. In essence, he was saying, “To what can I aim that will be high enough, and what power can get me there?” He knows, for he then answers his question by saying, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” and “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death” and “if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit Who indwells you.” This, then, becomes the gift we give to those who are lost and broken, under the power of the entropy of sin and death. We lead them to put their eyes on the One Who can free them, show them how to aim for the target, and tell them what power to use to reach it. Like a rocket escaping the Earth’s gravity, only constant power greater than that pull can move the ship upwards out

of the clouds. As that power is removed, it starts to fall back until that power is again supplied. So it is with fallen humanity; only power from the One Who is greater than us can keep us moving upwards.

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Knowing this, we must address a simple question: how do we tap into this power? Paul again answers this question, when he says, *“For those who are according to the flesh (entropy of this world) set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, (set their minds on) the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death (a closed system totally out of power), but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace”* and, even better, *“in all things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.”* The apostle Paul was not the only one who understood this, though. The author of Hebrews says, *“let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author (beginning) and perfecter (end) of faith,”* and Peter says, *“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed,”* and John states, *“For whatever is born (begotten) of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”* Jesus is the answer to the entropy of sin.

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For most of those who look for healing, the question is not, “Should I look to God for help” but “How do I look to Him in a way that will really help me?” It is the shame of the church in our generation that we have so watered down the practice of the presence of God that our words have become empty platitudes, lacking power and understanding. New Christians hear about God-in-Christ living in each of us, but it is too often doctrine that we teach instead of life and that we express. Those who are broken often feel that they have “tried that” and want something “more tangible.” At this point, telling them to “just do it” is usually neither helpful nor compassionate. We need to know that God’s Presence is not only available but also that He is absolutely willing to help the neediest, the dirtiest, the most broken among us. It is knowing His grace and mercy that makes us confident that He **will** help *“all who call upon Him.”* When we know this, we are certain that **if** they reach out to Him, **then** He **will** reach out to them. This certainty is what gives us the authority to confirm to the person that our words are neither empty nor weak. However, we are responsible for having the faith that they can see.

***We are responsible for having faith that others can see.***

The person who wants to help people needs to know how to walk a fine line at this point. On the one hand, we have to be able to say to the person, “Yes, I can help you. Do not be afraid. His power is available to you, and He

will answer.” We briefly give them a person they can see and hear, one who can reach out and touch them and listen to them; they may not be able to believe that God will listen to them directly, but they may be able to believe that He would listen to us. Agnes Sanford would say that often the person needs to hear the calm assurance that comes from speaking in faith. Our matter-of-fact certainty gives the peace and knowledge which increases faith in the person and opens them to receive. On the other hand, we need to make as certain as possible that the person looks not to us but to Christ Jesus, *“through Whom we live and move and have our being”* and *“Who calls those things that are not as though they were.”* If we have pride, this is our weakness and our area most likely to fail. We give them the certainty that we know *“He will answer,”* but we must not do the work for them, for not only will we quickly find that we cannot, but they will not grow. They will become dependent on us to hear from God for them, to get healing for them, to make things better. If we truly want them to be healed, we must not take away their going through the cross to reach the resurrection. If we take away Friday, then Sunday will never come.

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The final question for these people is, *“How do I practice His Presence? What practical thing do I do?”* To tell them what to do, but not how to do it, is sometimes worse than not saying anything at all. How do we

instruct them to practice this Presence, to become *“One with Christ,”* to live in His power? Isaiah answers this question when he says, *“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You.”* Also, as we have seen, Paul says, *“those who set their minds on the things of the Spirit live according to the Spirit.”* In both of these scriptures, the word *“mind”* can as easily be translated *imagination*. We teach them to see themselves taking their place in the cross with Christ. We help them to picture themselves stepping into Christ and Him into them. We explain to them that they will find wholeness as they meditate on the imagery of being *“one with Christ”* and being filled with His Holy Spirit.

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We advise them to not only read the scriptures, but to personalize them, writing them out as if they were personally for them (which, in reality, they are for each of us). We encourage them to start using a prayer journal where they can identify and deal with each thought, feeling, and belief that surfaces in them. We make sure they are going to a church where they will hear words of life and truth. Lastly, we let them know that there is hope, that they have not gone too far for God to reach them, and that they can, even if only a little, trust that *“their Redeemer lives.”* We can do this because we know He does.