

## "God is With Us"

Dallas Willard, Westmont College, May 26, 2011

**Scribe's Comments** - The session was transcribed from the recording in good-faith effort but it is not verbatim. The **bold** and underline offer the scribe's emphasis.



**"God is With Us" - How to Know** [49:00]

[See Willard, "The With God Life: "No Longer Alone with God as Jesus in the Eternal Kingdom Now" Renovare, 2005]

[Start 03:45]

My purpose - What is it for God to be with us?

Philosophers are given to specify some things very closely.

Especially with the task to live with the presence of God.

**Romans 8** - The transformation that comes when people are given new life in Christ.

*"...nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"*

v. 28 - *"All things work together for the good to those who love God and are called according to his purposes."*

Then he builds for the wonderful position that people are in who are in the hands of Christ.

*"Who shall separate us from the love Christ...we overwhelming conquer in Him who loves us...for I am convinced that neither death nor life...heights nor depth..."*

You can finish the list with anything that scares you.

It is not a matter of Christ not stopping from loving us from a distance or keep on loving us no matter what. I think you should understand the statement is active present. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. That is the presence of Christ in our lives and our presence in His life. In that position you are perfectly safe no matter what may happen. Your safety is secured. This world is a perfectly safe place for you to be no matter what happens. That's a good basis for mental health because you have then no grounds to fear. You are able to be at peace no matter what comes your way. You know no matter what happens God is there with you and He will take care of you.

**Psalm 23**, *"I will fear no evil..."*

Can you tell me why? *"...because Thou art with me."*

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The sufficiency of God to the individual is the basis of our security, our mental health, our godly character, the fruit of the Spirit, anointing for service to accomplish whatever it is that God wants us to accomplish.

Christ promised, [08:45]

*"I will be with you always even until the end of the age."*

He had already said, *"I have been given authority over everything on Heaven & Earth."* You're in good company.

**Hebrews 13:5-6**, *"Be content with what you have because He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."*

You have everything that you need. Not only do you have it, you can not be separated from it by any circumstance or anything that might try to separate you.

*"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."*

It is the presence of God in our lives, His being with us that lays the foundation for all of this because of the sufficiency of God with us. Not God in the distance or God going to accept us when we die but now.

Psalm 73 - *"The nearness of God is my good."*

*"The Lord is my portion."* I've got the Lord and that is a lot.

### **Two Ways God Will Be With Us**

[10:40]

#### 1.) Metaphysical - Omnipresence

The problem is you might not know it. He's with you but He is not actively engaged with you, so we need to recognize the other form He is with us.

#### 2.) Manifest Personal Presence

It is not just an arrangement or a metaphysical fact. God being with us is an ongoing interactive relationship and which He acts in relation to us and we act in relation with Him. It is a friendship, companionship, a walk with God and before God. It is give and take. It is knowledge. It is God being for us.

This is God's intent for us - to live in the manifest presence of God. That is why He gave to the people of Israel the Aaronic Blessing.

*"The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face shine upon you, The Lord lift up His countenance (the Lord look right at you) and give you peace."*

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Like a child playing before the face of a Father or Mother who overlooks their lives and holds them in their presence by physical presence and action in their word.

The manifest presence is promised. Immanuel - "God With Us" - one of the primary names of God and Christ.

### **Three Ways to Know God is With Us**

**[13:30]**

#### **1.) PERCEPTION**

A little, odd word, maybe philosophical. It's just awareness. God is with us through our awareness of Him. Being aware of God, is forcible presence to our minds is perhaps the major way that we know that God is with us.

Your Bible has many references to this.

Moses (Hebrews 11) - *"Seeing Him who is invisible"*

Since God is invisible, if we are going to be aware of Him, we have to turn our minds toward God.

Paul in Romans 4 - He had a hard life but he is able to stay on the hopeful, powerful path of service to God. He explains it,

*"We have all this trouble but we're not discouraged. While the outer person is decaying, the inner person is being renewed day by day. We look not at the things that are seen but the things that are unseen. The things that are even are temporal, the things that are unseen are eternal."*

Seeing the Invisible — The main way God is with us is our awareness of His presence.

God is very gentle. If you don't want to see Him, you don't have to...at least for now. I expect there will be a time when everyone will see Him. But that's not going to be a happy time for people who are not used to seeing Him now. If we want to see God, we have to seek Him. Seeking is the key to this way of God being present with us.

*"Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near."*

Isaiah

Seeking Him is the condition of being aware of Him. Awareness is not just something that just happens to us. We have to focus on it. We have to make

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it happen. Sometimes God makes it happen. God gives you an awareness of His presence. That happens to people in the Bible. Probably happened to some people here tonight where God made Himself present to you.

We have to seek Him, even if we have had an occasion when God has forcibly pressed himself upon us, we still have to seek Him.

*"Seek first the Kingdom of God"* How?

We turn our mind to God. We fix our minds upon God. We have the power to direct our mind towards God. When we start to do that, often it is difficult. Many people when they first try that, they don't have anything to count as success. I'm thinking about God but He is not here. That's the way seeking goes. You try to fix your mind upon God. It's like ordinary perception in many ways.

If you are going to see something around you in the physical realm, you're going to have to turn your attention to it. You have to move towards it. You have to take steps. You may need a microscope or telescope. The important thing to understand is that awareness of the presence of God is not something that develops in a passive way. It is something you have to commit yourself to and you have to pursue it. It doesn't just happen.

Why? God wants us to want Him.

Most people don't like to be where they are not wanted. You don't want to go to a party they did not invite you to. Your life is kind of like a party and God wants to be invited to that party. He wants you to want Him enough to seek Him. That's the way personal relationships develop even at a human level. We don't want to be with people who don't want to be with us, who don't want to pay attention to us.

\* Being in the presence of people talking on their cell phone. It's kind of unpleasant, frankly, to be standing next to a person who is talking, especially if they are talking very loudly as they often are, and not paying any attention to you though you are standing right next to them.

It's the nature in human beings to want to be wanted.

God, if He wished to, could overwhelm everyone with His presence all the time. But it would make human life impossible and make the development of persons into what He wants them to be impossible. He has set things up

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where we seek God. The main way we seek God is by turning our attention to Him and dwelling on God in our minds. Our minds are the key to how our life goes. How we perceive things and what we perceive determines the character of our lives.

\* Counseling people in trouble - the key question: *What are you putting your mind on?* What do you have constantly before your mind? Students, for example, who are not doing well in a course do not have their minds on the content of the course. People in trouble in family or occupation or community in various ways, it's always a matter of where their minds are.

We have a choice about where to place our minds. If we want God present in our minds, it is necessary to hold Him before our minds.

There are lots of things that can help with that. [23:35]

Unless there is a resolve to put our mind upon God, His presence with us will not be the governing principle in our lives.

\* *"The Practice of the Presence of God"* Brother Lawrence

It is almost totally a matter of putting your mind upon God and keeping it there.

*"I have quit all forms of devotion and set prayers but those to which my state obliges me [occupation in a monastery]. I make it my business only to persevere in His holy presence whereas I keep myself in simple attention in a general regard for God what I may call an actual presence of God."*

When he started he had a hard time with it. It took him 10 years until he moved into a position of great comfort and ease. When he did this he found it solved all the other difficulties he had in his life.

That's the choice we make. If we want to have God present in our lives, we put our attention there and learn how to hold it there.

People say, "I can't do this."

Suppose they wanted to do that and set their will in that direction. and begin to practice and train themselves. That's the function of intention. You put your mind there and God is always present in your attention. What happens when you do that, God becomes increasingly present. It becomes an awareness that is very different from just thinking about God. It becomes a perception.

Brother Lawrence as he went along, *"I no longer believe, I see."*

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The awareness to pay attention and keep it there becomes increasingly like a perception. The awareness of the presence of God - if you want that, you can develop that. As you develop the presence of God in that kind of awareness, your life becomes one that happily conforms to the presence of God. The presence of God begins to have effects. The key is holding God in our mind until He becomes present to us in the way things are present in ordinary perception.

\* You don't have to your glasses fixed because it is not a physical matter.

When we begin to develop this, we begin to understand other things that are not visible in the spiritual world but they become visible. We become aware when God is acting and also when God is speaking. His speaking is another way His presence to us is made real. We can use scripture to help us keep our minds on God. That is why various disciplines in the spiritual life is to make real the presence of God in our lives. Scripture, Jesus Himself - our adoration of Him, our work as it manifests itself in church and in history, are ways we can bring God before our minds and hold Him there.

This is a deep choice, once you realize that, you being to track what is actually before your mind.

Paul in Romans 12

[29:20]

*"Be transformed by the renewing of the mind"*

The renewing of the mind is primarily changing what it is occupied about, what is before the mind. Taking charge of the mind, always with God's help. We don't have to wait on that. Taking charge of what the mind is directed on is not just a matter of being aware, but also a way of God being with us. Use of scriptures, lectio divina, stories, to make God present to us in a forcible way. The reality comes through the thought.

## **2.) PROVISION**

[30:30]

God's provision is a way of Him being present with us. You can't divorce this from the first way of perception. It is only if you have accepted the awareness of God that you can move on His provision.

Is. 55 - Delight ourselves in the abundance of God's provision because we have turned to the fountain of strength, nourishment, protection. God is there supplying our needs.

If we are focused on ourselves and not on God, we will we try to supply our needs on our own. If we try to supply our needs on our own, generally

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speaking, God will let us do that. If we have it under control, why should He step in? Because of God's grace, He doesn't just treat us in that way.

In general, if we wish to know the presence of God in our lives, we abandon the project of taking care of ourselves.

But you say, "Don't we still work?"

Yes, you work and do what you need to do. The difference is this:

**You do your best but you don't trust your best.**

**You trust the presence of God with you.**

[32:15]

It is in those circumstances that we actually come to know God's acting in our lives. God actions in our lives has a lot of functions but mainly it sets us free from the burden of providing for what we need and we are able to focus on seeking the Kingdom of God. That's why He says,

*"Seek first the Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added."*

That passage beautifully illustrates now the second dimension of God being with us which is His provision for us.

It does not mean you get everything you want. In fact, want is one thing, need is another. Very often we don't know what we need. We know what we want, but by trusting in God's presence with us we are free from the burden of doing what we want. Now, in America that doesn't sound so good because we think we ought to have what we want. But our wants often are not directed towards what is good. It is only as we abandon ourselves to the love God that we are in a position to watch what is good will be provided in our lives.

In our economy and how much it is not under the direction of what is good, what is needed, but in terms of what people and probably what is harmful to them in so many ways.

Abundant provision is when we can find the presence of God with us and know that presence as a reality.

### **3.) POWER**

[34:30]

Power to accomplish. How do we know God is with us? Because there is a power at work acting with us that is not of us. This is beautifully illustrated in many stories in the scripture. One of my favorites is the story about Isaac's life. Isaac was a man who trusted God to accomplish what he needed in his life.

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\* Genesis 26 - Famine in the land God caused Isaac's crops to grow in such a way that it scared his neighbors. Abimelech at first was so frightened they asked him to move away. They had second thoughts and came back and said we want to align with you because we see plainly that God is with you.

One of the interesting things about this as it relates to the abundance of provision is that it doesn't seem to be something that you can trace by specific actions but rather by the slow present action of God in natural processes like growing grain and prospering in finding water and things of that sort which Isaac and others needed water. Isaac would find water and they would take the well from him until he finally got a place he could have on his own.

God does not always show Himself in our life by specific acts that we can identify. Sometimes you can but for the most part you really see the presence of God by looking backward and by realizing that something has happened that you might have been a part of but you can not possibly account for the effect. The sign of God's presence with you in this area is always the outcome of your actions far exceed the possibilities of your talent and your effort. The mark of the presence of the Spirit with the person in the biblical pattern is just that. The outcome of your actions far exceed your own ability and power.

\* Dwight Moody was not a cultivated person and was an uneducated man, but a powerful man and a intelligent man. God came down on Dwight Moody and he begin to see an the effects of his action of ministry far outrunning anything he could entertain. A minister in England followed him around to see how he did what he did. After some weeks the man said, "Mr. Moody it is clear that the Lord is with you because there is not way we can account for what you do in terms of your natural abilities." That was a compliment to Moody. He understood what was going on. He himself went through some experiences with God and after those experiences God was with him in a different way. He went back and preached the same sermons but the difference was in the effect was doubled or tripled. That's the mark of God being with us in power to accomplish in our activities.

We still do good. We do the best we can. We don't trust our efforts. We trust God. When we do that we open our lives to God 's presences with us.

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Paul reporting the the Church at Antioch in Syria - Acts 14:27 - "What God had done with him"...in opening the door to the Gentiles of God's presence. Paul was not impressive, he was not much of a speaker (read that in II Corinthians 10:10), and yet this little man simply showed up and talked. That's all he did. The effect was sometimes he got beat up and it was because the effects of his words was so powerful that it made other people envious. The same thing happened with Jesus. He was killed by people who were envious of him.

### **Summary**

[40:55]

You have these three different aspects of God being with us.

### **Perception**

[

One - the vivid awareness of Him. That is not imposed upon us. That is something we seek through learning to dwell in our minds upon God. We the of Him. We learn how to keep him always before us.

Psalm 16:9 — *"I have set the Lord always before me. He is at my right hand. I shall not be moved."*

He is saying, "I act with Him and He acts with me."

Isaiah - How Moses did his work leading the people of Israel. *"God's strong arm went at Moses' right hand."* That's for us to know and to learn.

We can know that God is with us now by looking at the three things I have mentioned.

Where is our mind? How is God present before our mind?

By reflecting on that we can know whether or not God is with us, or perhaps some talk show host, or some movie or perhaps it's the Lakers...not a good thing right now. For many people, that is what is with them. Why? Because that's where their mind is. There's not a lot of help to be had from that.

We can look at know that God is with us by looking at how He is present before our minds.

**Provision** - We can look at His provisions for us. Pay attention to and anticipate God's provision for us. That lifts the burdens of life off us.

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Psalm 55 - *"Cast your burden upon the Lord and He will sustain you."*

If that happened would you think God was present with you? Yes.

If you are able to cast your burdens upon the Lord and you see them supplied, you'll know God is with you.

\* RA Torrey, one of the founders of Biola University, an evangelist for God decided He would take no salary. He would depend on people giving what he needed. He would describe, *"If you walk up to a window and ask for what you need and it is provide to you, you are bound to think there is someone on the other side of the window."*

Cast your burden on the Lord, pray for what you need and then you'll know God's presence is with you.

*"Count it all joy when you fall into all kinds of troubles."* (James)

Why would anyone count it all joy when they fall into all kinds of troubles. Because in your troubles you will come to now the presence of God and you will be established in your with Him. Cast your burdens, count it all joy. Why? Because that enables you to know that God is with you.

### **Power**

[45:45]

We should always being try to do things beyond what we can reasonably try to accomplish. That is how we know the presence of God in our lives. Anointing, gifts of the Spirit, fruit of the Spirit are manifestations of God with us. The actions that come through the transformation of character and the effectiveness of service are ways that we find God present with us.

### **How to secure this...**

If we find that this is something for us we want to know how to do it.

For example, for securing the vivid awareness of God with you - you take the available means for fixing your mind upon God - the written Word, the Living Word, meditation on Christ, Holy people you know - we don't worship them but we learn form them. As we use the devices to direct our mind that are provided by God then the awareness of God's presence with us increases. It comes more and more like ordinary seeing. I think a good thing here is for you to experiment with how God comes to mind when you think of Him. How does God come to your mind?

This is something you have to do experimentally. When God comes to your mind, does He come to you as present, standing before you, vividly

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present, perhaps speaking to you, looking at you, but not far away, but right around you. When you turn your mind towards God, what happens? It may be that not much happens. Some student once defined God as an oblong blur.

If that is true and you wish to bring Christ, God, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity more before your mind, then you utilize the written Word, the images you have of Christ, you invoke the Holy Spirit to help you and you build a habit of letting your mind dwell upon God and as you do that, He will increasingly become present in your life.

*How do you cast your burdens on the Lord, and look for provision? [49:00]*

You stop striving, you stop trying to do it all by yourself, you stop trying to make it happen. You keep the Lord in view. You express to Him your expectation and anticipation of Him meeting your need, and possibly you share that with other people. As you do that, you're going to see His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Why is it light when you take it up? Because He is carrying it.

*"Take my yoke on you for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

We don't any longer know much about yokes except those that come in eggs. The yoke was a device of combining the efforts of two or more animals. If you decide you want to pull the whole thing perhaps the other animal, a horse or an oxen, will let you do that. If you wish to share it, the yoke becomes easier and much lighter.

*How do we enter into the power of God? [50:35]*

Attempting in His will what we can not accomplish. That might be a simple thing like ministering to another person whose is in need by prayer. Many people find it difficult to do that thinking what if God doesn't do anything and I look like a fool. Probably you'll look like fool if you don't do anything, at least in God's eyes. It will be better to step out in some accomplishment in society or in the church. The way we come to know the presence of God there is by stepping into a place where God has to act with us in order for us to succeed with what we're trying to do.

So, that's my story...

Perception - Provision - Power [51:40]

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That is God with us and we can know that and we can enter into it by putting ourselves wholly on God in the ways that I have suggested. He will not leave us or forsake us. He is preparing us for a great future in which we are going to reign with Him forever and ever. That's what we are learning now as we live in this life is to live with God in preparation for the future He has for each one of us in His Kingdom.

**~ ~ ~ End of Session at 52:30 ~ ~ ~**

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