

Experiencing the Presence of God

Chapter 4 "HIS YOKE" Not Strain

April 18, 1930

I have tasted a thrill in fellowship with God which has made anything discordant with God disgusting. This afternoon the possession of God has caught me up with such sheer joy that I thought I never had known anything like it. God was so close and so amazingly lovely that I felt like melting all over with a strange blissful contentment. Having had this experience, which comes to me now several times a week, the thrill of filth repels me, for I know its power to drag me from God. And after an hour of close friendship with God my soul feels clean, as new fallen snow.

April 19, 1930

If this record of a soul struggle to find God is to be complete it must not omit the story of difficulty and failure. I have not succeeded very well so far. This week, for example, has not been one of the finest in my life, though it has been above the average. I have to make a greater effort next week. I have undertaken something which, at my age at least, is hard, harder than I had anticipated. But I resolve not to give up the effort.

Yet strain does not seem to do any good. At this moment I feel something 'let go' inside, and lo, God is here! It is a heart melting "here-ness," a lovely whispering of father to child, and the reason I did not have it before, was because I failed to let go. And back of that failure there was something else. A crowd of people arrived, who, when they are in a crowd, wish to talk or think nothing of religion. I fear I have not wanted some of them to think me religious for fear I might cease to be interesting.

Loneliness to Never Alone - Frank Laubach

April 19, 1930 (continued)

Fellowship with God is something one dare not cover, for it smothers to death. It is like a tender infant or a delicate little plant, for a long nurturing is the price of having it, while it vanishes in a second of time, the very moment one's eye ceases to be 'single.' One cannot worship God and Mammon for the reason that God slips out and is gone as soon as we try to seat some other unworthy affection beside Him. The other idol stays and God vanishes. Not because God is 'a jealous God' but because sincerity and insincerity are contradictions and cannot both exist at the same time in the same place.

April 22, 1930

The 'experiment' is interesting, although I am not very successful, thus far. The idea of God slips out of my sight for I suppose two thirds of every day, thus far. This morning I started out fresh, by finding a rich experience of

God in the sunrise: Then I tried to let Him control my hands while I was shaving and dressing and eating breakfast. Now I am trying to let God control my hands as I pound the typewriter keys. (If I could keep this morning up I should have a far higher average today than I have had for some time.)

April 22, 1930 (continued)

This afternoon as I look at the people teeming about me, and then think of God's point of view, I feel that this mighty stretch of time in which He has been pushing men upward is to continue for many more millions of years. We are yet to become what the spiritual giants have been and more than many of them were. Here the selection favors those who keep themselves wide open toward God and wide awake. Our possibilities are perhaps not limitless, but they are at least infinitely above our present possibilities of imagination.

There is nothing that we can do excepting to throw ourselves open to God. There is, there must be, so much more in Him than He can give us, because we are so sleepy and because our capacity is so pitifully small. It ought to be tremendously helpful to be able to acquire the habit of reaching out strongly after God's thoughts, and to ask, "God what have you to put into my mind now if only I can be large enough?" That waiting, eager attitude ought to give God the chance he needs. I am finding every day that the best of the five or six ways in which I try to keep contact with God is for me to wait for his thoughts, to ask him to speak.

May 14, 1930

Oh, this thing of keeping in constant touch with God, of making him the object of my thought and the companion of my conversations, is the most amazing thing I ever ran across. It is working. I cannot do it even half of a day - not yet, but I believe I shall be doing it some day for the entire day. It is a matter of acquiring a new habit of thought. Now I like God's presence so much that when for a half hour or so he slips out of mind - as he does many times a day - I feel as though I had deserted him, and as though I had lost something very precious in my life.

May 24, 1930

As I analyze myself I find several things happening to me as a result of these two months of strenuous effort to keep God in mind every minute. This concentration upon God is strenuous, but everything else has ceased to be so. I think more clearly, I forget less frequently. Things which I did with a strain before, I now do easily and with no effort whatever. I worry about nothing, and lose no sleep. I walk on air a good part of the time. Even the mirror reveals a new light in my eyes and face. I no longer feel in a hurry about anything. Everything goes right. Each minute I meet calmly as though it were not important. Nothing can go wrong excepting one thing. That is that God may slip from my mind if I do not keep on my guard. If He is there, the universe is with me. My task is simple and clear.

[And I witness to the way in which the world reacts. Take Lanao and the Moros for illustration. Their responsiveness is to me a continuous source of amazement. I do nothing that I can see excepting to pray for them, and to walk among them thinking of God. They know I am a Protestant. Yet two of the leading Muslim priests have gone around the province telling everybody that I would help the people to know God.]

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Chapter 5: It Keeps Getting Better!

June 1, 1930 - One new lesson -

Inwardly this has been a very uneven week. As a whole my end of the experiment has been failure for most of the week. My physical condition and too many distractions have proven too much for me, and God has not been in the center of my mind for one-fifth of the time, or perhaps one tenth. But today has been a wonderful day, and some of yesterday was wonderful. The week with its failures and successes has taught me one new lesson. It is this: "I must talk about God, or I cannot keep Him in my mind. I must give Him away in order to have Him." That is the law of the spirit world. What one gives one has, what one keeps to oneself one loses.

Do you suppose that through all eternity the price we will need to pay for keeping God will be that we must endlessly be giving him away?

June 3, 1930 - Begin to build heaven -

This experiment which I am trying is the most strenuous discipline which any man ever attempted. I am not succeeding in keeping God in my mind very many hours of the day, and from the point of view of experiment number one I should have to record a pretty high percentage of failure. But the other experiment - what happens when I do succeed - is so successful that it makes up for the failure of number one. God does work a change. The moment I turn to Him it is like turning on an electric current which I feel through my whole being. I find also that the effort to keep God in my mind does something to my mind which every mind needs to have done to it. I am given something difficult enough to keep my mind with a keen edge. The constant temptation of every man is to allow his mind to grow old and lose its edge. I feel that I am perhaps more lazy mentally than the average person, and I require the very mental discipline which this constant effort affords.

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June 3, 1930 - Begin to build heaven – (continued)

So my answer to my two questions (to date) would be:

1. "Can it be done all the time?" Hardly.
- 2: "Does the effort help?" Tremendously. Nothing I have ever found proves such a tonic to mind and body.

Are you building sacred palaces for yourself? I meant to write "places" to be sure, but I think I shall leave the word "palaces" for that is what any house becomes when it is sacred. The most important discovery of my whole life is that one can take a little rough cabin and transform it into a palace just by flooding it with thoughts of God. When one has spent many months in a little house like this in daily thoughts about God, the very entering of the house, the very sight of it as one approaches, starts associations which set the heart tingling and the mind flowing. I have come to the point where I must have my house, in order to write the best letters or think the richest thoughts.

So in this sense one man after the other builds his own heaven or his hell. It does not matter where one is, one can at once begin to build heaven, by thoughts which one thinks while in that place, I have learned the secret of heaven building - anywhere.

This morning I read awhile about the tremendous consecration with which the scientists are studying the finest details about the sun, in an effort to find how to predict the weather, and to know how to use its power. And I feel that not yet have I thrown myself into the crucible of this experiment of mind with all the abandon of the successful scientist. We have heard the saying, "All a man's failures are inside himself." And I am willing to confess that as yet I have not "striven unto blood" to win this battle. What I want to prove is that the thing can be done by all people under all conditions, but I have not, proven it yet. This much I do see - what an incredibly high thing Jesus did.

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A great lonesome hunger comes over me at this moment for someone who has passed through the same long, long channels of hope, and aspiration, and despair, and failure, to whom I can talk tonight. And yet - there is no such person. As we grow older all our paths diverge, and in all the world I suppose I could find nobody who could wholly understand me excepting God - and neither can you! Ah, God, what a new nearness this brings for Thee and me, to realize that Thou alone canst understand me, for Thou alone knowest all! Thou art no longer a stranger, God! Thou art the only being in the universe who is not partly a stranger! I invite others inside but they cannot come all the way. Thou art all the way inside with me - here -and every time I forget and push Thee out, Thou art eager to return! Ah, God, I mean to struggle tonight and tomorrow as never before, not once to dismiss Thee. For when I lose Thee for an hour I lose and the world loses more than we can know. The thing Thou wouldst do can only be done when Thou hast full swing all the time.

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The best ways in which to remain aware of God is to wait for his thoughts and to ask Him to speak.

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