

Spiritual Health Check: Aware of God's Presence

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again and welcome here for this Sunday, May 22nd, 2022. So I'm going to address the elephant in the room.

Look at that red mark on the pastor's face. Well, I had a mountain biking incident on Wednesday in the rain, but thankfully my face was there to break my fall. So, good stuff.

Yeah, I'm all right. I said to someone this morning, if my face had been rotated six inches, I could have smashed everything in. So I went right over the handlebars, face first onto the concrete, that fast.

And I laid there and went, uh-oh. And one of the first things I did was put my hand up to my face, pulled it away, and it was covered in blood. Fortunately, I was on the way to the tailor.

So this is someone I know. So I walked into her shop and she went, and I said, it's okay. I said, do you have Kleenex? And she just took care of me. So, yeah, but I'm doing well.

[1 : 02] So, stubborn, solid Irish-Scottish construction, I guess. That's what you get. So another, just a brief pastoral announcement.

I'm away at our Denomination's Ordination Examination Council in Calgary this coming Wednesday morning. So this is the last step in the formal flaming hoop that I have to jump through, that I get to jump through.

It's a blessing as part of my ordination. So following that, I'll be attending our denominational meetings in Calgary. So I'll be there until Saturday. Pastor Luwam will be preaching next Sunday, and I will be back with you on Sunday, June 5th.

So I appreciate your prayers for safe travels to Calgary. I'm not mountain biking there. Thank the Lord. And I pray as well that you would pray for the other ordination candidates.

There's four other people as well this year, and we're all in different degrees of nervousness. We're all in different... Some of us are... English is not our first language.

[2 : 10] Mine is. So there's different challenges that people are going to be facing. There's different kind of things that are making them nervous and contributing to their nerves. So I just...

If you happen to remember on Wednesday, it's a full-day thing. We're just one after the other. I'm first, and I'm a morning person, so that's good. But yeah, just pray for encouragement for those folks, because it's going to be an intense experience, but a good one, I think.

So this morning, we're continuing in our sermon series, Spiritual Health Check. And in this series, we're going to be reminded week by week of the importance of setting a baseline, setting a healthy standard upon which we can measure things in the future.

And as Christians, as followers of Jesus Christ, it's important for us to recognize that our spiritual health, as you've heard me say this before, our spiritual health is actually more important than our physical health.

Obviously, we need our physical health, but our spiritual health is really, really, truly, deeply important. And so over the coming weeks in this series, we're going to continue to take a closer look at some of the ways that we can assess our spiritual health, that we can pause and recognize things and ways that we need to pay attention to this.

[3 : 37] And so our sermon this morning is titled, Aware of God's Presence. Pretty self-explanatory, I hope. And we're going to explore this a little bit this morning by anchoring it in three, there's your three-point sermon, three kinds of concepts.

So our first concept is that our awareness of God's presence is directly related to our perception and understanding of it.

I'll say that again. Our awareness of God's presence is directly related to our perception and understanding of it. So let's begin with some basics then.

What does, now this can be a rhetorical question, but you can blurt something out if you want, what does awareness mean? It's pretty broad, right?

So fortunately, I will unpack this for us a little bit. What does it mean to have awareness? You've heard that expression before. Have awareness of something or to be aware.

[4 : 43] What does that mean? Well, a friend of mine used to say, when he and I first met and had a conversation, he's a super intelligent guy, and he said to me, hmm, and I said, yes.

And he said, you fog a mirror. And I said, oh, that's an interesting question. And I said, what does that mean? And he said, you're sharp, you're aware, you're engaged.

He said, you are there, you're aware, you're present. So awareness, we recognize, can simply mean having a perception of something. I'm aware that something is happening, is there, is whatever it is.

But it can also imply a sense of engagement, a sense of being active. I believe that being aware can also suggest that we are intentionally seeking or looking for someone or something.

Does that make sense? That's a deeper level of awareness. We can be aware of our surroundings. Hopefully you're aware that you're in church right now. You can be aware of your situation or your circumstances.

[5 : 52] I'm aware of the fact that I landed on my face. But you can be aware of your circumstances, right? You're aware of what's going on in your life. You're aware of your challenges.

Hopefully you're aware of your blessings and the things that are going well for you. So we can also hopefully be aware of our words, our actions.

And that's the convict-y part of this, right? That are we aware of things that we say and do? But like I've said this over and over since I've been here about different concepts, I believe the idea of awareness can be pretty thin and relatively vague, right?

It's kind of a big concept. So you may not even be aware of this being a concern for you, right?

Have you even thought of, as I talk about this, is awareness an issue for you?

Is it something you've ever considered? And I would even suggest that for many of us, potentially the expression blissfully unaware is maybe more accurate.

[7 : 02] Like we may not be aware of what's going on or what's really important. And it's not necessarily that we don't care. However, I think it has more to do that our lives are overloaded.

They're overloaded with a mixture of different disparate things that demand our attention and demand our focus, demand our priorities.

I love last week if you heard the sermon or you were here. Steve Roadhouse, the executive director of Gull Lake Camp, was here. And he talked about how it is important to turn down the noise.

That's the phrase that Steve used that I liked. Turn down the noise in our lives at times, right? And Steve said that last week. And I believe that's the key in many ways to becoming more aware in all areas of our lives.

So what is your perception or understanding or more specifically, an understanding of the idea of being aware, specifically of what we're talking about this morning, which is being aware of God's presence.

[8 : 18] Well, to be truly aware of God's presence in our lives, I think it's important that we gain a better perception or understanding of what that even means, right?

So what does that mean to you, God's presence in your life? Well, what are some of the things that the Bible tells us about?

Let's go to the Bible. Always a good place. What does it say about God's presence? What does Scripture say? Well, Scripture says lots of things, actually, that He is omnipotent, that He is everywhere.

It says that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, lives within us. That's another aspect of God's presence, that He is always with us.

The Bible also teaches us that God is neither confined nor defined by human limitations or definitions. And in fact, all creation exists within and under the presence of God.

[9 : 29] God's presence is infinite. In Jeremiah 23, verses 23 and 24, we read, Am I only a God nearby, declares the Lord, and not a God far away?

Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them, declares the Lord? Do not I fill heaven and earth, declares the Lord.

So we recognize through this that God is everywhere. And we can't wrap. Our mortal brains often cannot wrap our heads around that, right? But He's as close to each one of us as the touch, today, fortunately, the touch of the sun on our face.

Think about that when you leave this morning. The warmth of the sun on your face, that's the immediacy of God's presence. Later this week, a drop of rain on your cheek could remind you. A breath of wind through the grass or through the trees. We're seeing leaves come out on the trees and buds more and more. We're going to begin to hear those sounds.

[10:39] And I want you to try and remember to consider the presence of God when you hear those things. So I hope that gives us a better perception and understanding of what God's presence means more broadly, as well as to us personally.

So our second concept this morning is that our awareness of God's presence is related to the assurance we can have in that fact.

Our awareness of God's presence is related to the assurance that we can have in that fact. So what does it mean that God is always near and always with us?

Well, being aware that God is near to us, is available to us, is with us in our circumstances, should be a very deep sense of comfort.

In Philippians 4, verse 5 to 7, we read, Are you an anxious person?

[12:12] I'm an anxious person. So the words of this short passage often play in my head. Do not be anxious about anything, because the Lord is near.

We live in times that are deeply scarred by fear of the unknown, by uncertain circumstances. But my friends, we are, we can be, we should be, people of hope.

That doesn't mean that our daily worries are insignificant. Not at all. Not in the least. But we have an almighty God at whose feet we can lay them.

The assurance that we have in being aware of God's presence is also powerfully reflected in the words of one of my favorite psalms, Psalm 121.

It's a shorty. So let's say this out loud together, and you can read it on the screen. Let's say it together. I lift my eyes up to the mountains.

[13:24] Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip.

Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you. Everyone together.

The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm.

He will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore. Psalm 121.

Amen. Just a quick side note. One of my seminary classes, our prof said, Psalm 121, you have half an hour.

[14:22] Go wherever you want on campus, memorize it, and come back, and we'll recite it together. Yikes! So it's fused into my brain, but it's a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful passage that reflects that, the nature, the presence of God.

And for me, the words of Psalm 139, verses 7 to 10, and I'll read this for us, also speak to that confidence, and assurance that we can have when we're truly aware, when we're truly engaged, when we're truly seeking God's presence in our lives.

Psalm 139, verse 7 to 10 says, Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there.

If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me.

Your right hand will hold me fast. Now maybe you've heard that passage before in your life, and you've thought, Yikes, I can't hide from God.

[15:31] He knows everything I'm doing. He sees everything. But do you hear the other perspective of that passage now as well? The assurance that we have in God's presence? Yes, we should be aware of what we're doing and saying because God is with us.

But we can also take comfort in his presence. Friends, God is with us through every situation, in every trial.

He is protecting us. He is loving and guiding us. He alone knows us completely and loves us unconditionally.

Isn't that an amazing source of encouragement and assurance? Our third concept this morning, our awareness of God's presence is directly related to how engaged and intentional we are in connecting with him.

Our awareness of God's presence is directly related to how engaged and intentional we are in connecting with him. My friends, is your awareness of God simply head knowledge?

[16:51] He's there. I know God's there. Yep, God exists. Or is it intentional and engaged? Are you seeking him? Are you simply aware that God is out there somewhere?

Or are you seeking him and engaged in relationship with him? Has your awareness of God's presence changed and shaped your life?

So how do you experience God's presence in your daily life? Well, I've shared with you before that I tend to experience the presence of God most when I'm immersed in nature.

When the noise of the world is silenced, when I'm surrounded by God's handiwork. No, I didn't take this picture.

I wish I had. Purple is my favorite color and mountains are my favorite place. But maybe that can give you a sense of what the presence of God can mean.

[17:56] Some people experience the presence of God as they lift their voice to him in song. This morning as I was having breakfast, I was listening to, I have a Spotify praise mix that I like to listen to.

And so music fills my spirit. Others experience the deep presence of God when they come before him in prayer, when they are still, when they are quiet.

Not even necessarily when they are praying out loud or even in their mind, but when they are just still before God. As you reflect on things that have happened in your life or even things that have not happened that you regret or that you agonize over, can you recognize and become more aware of God's presence through these things?

My friends, always seek to be aware of God's presence in your life. Listen for wind and trees, rain on your skin, sun on your skin.

Watch for the things that he is doing in your life and in the lives of others. Listen to how he may be calling you back to him, calling you to act as his agent in your circumstances.

[19:19] And friends, listen for his still, small voice. Because he is Emmanuel.

God with us and God with you. So as we prepare to close this morning, how can, you know me, practical pastor, how can we become more aware of God's presence?

How do we do that? Well, take time to remind yourself of some amazing realities that are at work in your life as you seek to engage with God and his presence.

The Holy Spirit lives in you. If you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, the Spirit of God is within you, my friends.

That's important to be aware of. God protects you. Protected me on Wednesday. He will also guide your steps when you ask him.

[20:31] And more importantly, sometimes, when you let him. Friends, God has a perfect plan for your life. You've heard that before, but it's true.

God is at work in the world in profound and powerful ways, and he wants you to partner with him in that.

My friends, living with a conscious awareness of God's presence keeps us on guard against sin as well, as we remember and recognize that it grieves him.

It hurts God when we sin. Living with a conscious awareness of his presence will keep us mindful of how we are speaking or acting or thinking.

Living with a conscious awareness of his presence reminds us that we are secure in God's protection and in his provision.

[21:38] Living with a conscious awareness of God's presence will keep us focused on our calling, our calling to serve others and to be witnesses to the saving grace, his saving grace, that is available to everyone.

And above all, as you seek to become more aware of God's presence, you'll be taking positive, proactive steps to improving your spiritual health.

Amen.