

# God's Presence in Us

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[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome, everyone. Good morning. You with me? Good to see you. Welcome back. I hope you've had a great summer for those of you who have managed to get away. And welcome to this new series. Always good starting a new series because you have an open book and you can preach everything that everybody's going to preach in the following weeks, which is always good to start with. So as we kick off this new series, we're focusing on this sense of the presence of God, the supernatural presence of God, but the presence of God in us. As Paul writes in his scripture this morning, there are two very clear diametrically opposites here. Those who live in the flesh and have their minds set on what the flesh desires. And those who live in accordance with the spirit and have their minds set on what the spirit desires. The thing is, is Jesus is not remote. He is with us, but we have choices. Paul doesn't stop there. And he's very, very specific in this. Living according to the flesh is death. He doesn't hold back. Or the preferred option for us, those whose minds and lives are governed by the spirit, have life and peace. Which life do we want to choose? Because it is a choice. Right back in the

Psalms, right back in Psalm 15, who may enter your presence on your holy hill? Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right. Speaking the truth from sincere hearts. Those who refuse to gossip or harm their neighbours or speak evil of their friends. Those who lend money without charging interest and who cannot be bribed to lie about the innocent. Such people will stand firm forever.

I think we've got to be honest that our life experience is this tug of war that is often part of the human condition. Good and evil choices, bad choices, good choices. And I guess many people here listening and listening on the podcast would agree with that too. So much of this tug of war is about what Paul speaks of when he talks about our desires. And that's what it comes down to. What are our desires and how does it shape our lives? What is our desire in our every waking moment? I often like to, I have this great thing, I love to observe people. I'm a great people watcher. I don't know whether that's for you as well. My highlight is I don't get upset if I've got to wait for a train. I just love observing people. And when it comes to desires, I love to observe people queuing for their lottery tickets. Because my question is, as you queue for your lottery ticket, what is your desire? What is your desire? What is your desire that you think this win will do for you or for others? Maybe it goes something like this. We're in Tesco's.

Hello mate, how you doing? I see that you're queuing for your lottery ticket. Yeah, that's right mate, what's got to do with you? Well, actually, I'm just really interested to know what your desire is. What would you do if you won that million? Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do with it mate. I'm away from here mate. I'm off to another country. Take my family, nice island, no more troubles, no more worries in my life.

[ 4 : 03 ] That's my desire mate. That's why I'm queuing for a lottery ticket. Oh, that's really helpful. Thanks very much. You're not from the unknown revenue, are you? Excuse me madam, I noticed that you're queuing for your lottery ticket. Oh yes, young man, I queue for it every week. So, as you queue for your lottery ticket, what is your desire?

Well, my desire actually is to give it all away. Oh, that's just amazing. I know, I know. It won't be a choice for me. I stand at my window and I see these poor souls just wandering around and the noise that they make, I would give it all away. I said, that really encourages me, you know, your heart for people, for children and hunger. No dear, no not people, cats. I'm giving it all to cats. People, they've got enough, they've got social services. Cats, dear, cats. I know that's so nice to see. A little harsh, especially if you love cats. You can give to both.

But these decisions that we have to make, the decisions that we have, the choices that we have to make, what drives our desire. It's what Paul is talking about this morning. Our desires are a

powerful thing. Paul hits a nerve with me and I hope with all of us as when he talks about the flesh, and he doesn't just mean the flesh, although all the physical temptations and we all know about those as humans, although there are too many of which we are aware, but we have choices to make in those as well. But it's about our nature. It's about our character, our desires to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, etc. You know that. It's about how we live our lives with Jesus and his teaching, with his examples at the forefront of all that we do. Now there's a road that's interesting to travel down, isn't it, for us as Christians, because when we give, when we share, when we sacrifice, when we worship, what is our motive? What is our desire and our motive in doing that? And that's an acid test that Paul is probably getting to the heart of here. Jesus did a bit of teaching about that, you know. Don't sort of make a big show if you're giving long-winded prayers of how good I am. It's not a spiritual competition about holiness, comparing ourselves with ourselves and judging others. In Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler, he presses a button about desire.

You know, I want to be your follower. That's fine if you want to be my follower. I see you've done all of this, but I want you to give up this because I know that you're going to struggle with that.

[ 7 : 01 ] But that's what you need to do if you're going to be a follower. What is your desire? Because if you don't, your desire will always be about money and about looking after yourself. To allow the things of the world to dominate life is, as Paul points out, is nothing short of death, self-extinction. And William Barclay goes one step further and says it's spiritual suicide. Even in our worship, it's about what is our desire as we come here this morning. I remember years and years ago, there was a great conversation over there where a person said, I didn't get anything out of your worship this morning. Thanks very much. But what did you bring? What did you bring to worship?

Because if our desire is just to be a consumerist, as Paul clearly states here in our choices, that's probably not the right mindset. That's the bad news. The good news, the good news here is live with God's presence in us. Live with God's presence to be filled with the Holy Spirit is totally countercultural to death. And as Paul says, it's life and peace. And if you are searching for life and peace, then Paul is very clear about how we do that in our desire and living for him. Paul is living and serving, sharing and teaching in the presence of God and his passion and desire. As he writes to the church in Thessalonians, do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt, but test them all. Hold on to what is good. Reject every kind of evil. And may God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit and body, your whole spirit and body, not just a bit of it. Whole spirit and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus. Many people's response is, yes, Lord, that is my desire, but it's a tough call. And it is a tough call. But Paul ends with that important line in Thessalonians, the one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. He will do it.

I'm not alone here with those of us who have made tough choices in life. We do it probably every day. Do I do this? Do I do that? Being close to Jesus, being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, having his presence with us, makes that possible. I love the rabbinic thing. It says, may you be covered by the dust of your rabbi. You walk so closely with Jesus that you're actually covered with the dust.

You're so close listening to what he says, being in partnership with him, doing what he's doing, seeking to do what he does in the everyday. And as last week we said, do you trust him?

This is what it boils down to. Do we trust in him and all that he can do in us and through us? Living in the power of his spirit. Paul spells it out. That same spirit living in the believer is the same spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. You know, I may be a simple man, but that power that can raise Jesus from the dead to life, he can do that in my life too. Time and time again, if I choose and make that my desire. What is my desire, Lord?

[ 10 : 48 ] I called myself a Christian for years. It was a bit of a tick box exercise really, to be honest. You know, I was born in a Christian family. Tick. You know, I went to church three times on a Sunday as a chorister. Tick. I tried to live lots of ways in my decisions, didn't always get it right, but tick.

When I got married, got married in church. Tick. Attended a home group regularly. Tick. Reading the Bible, maybe not as often as I should, but tick. I prayed. My goodness, did I pray sometimes. Tick.

Tick. But I knew something was missing. And as Paul says, something that had shaped my desire was missing in my life. I tried to live the life that I was reading about, talking, praying, teaching.

The Holy Spirit and the presence of God, I had very little teaching on that at all. And I knew all the way through that my desires didn't match the character that I was living, that I was hearing. To become a follower, a disciple of Jesus in everything that it could be.

Glad to say in 1996, 1996, in my previous calling, I knew that something was missing from my life. [12:22] I've done all the tick box of being a Christian, but I knew something was fundamentally missing from my life. I've been working 16-hour shifts for 14 days on the trot. And it sort of worked out that this particular weekend, that we were going with the children to Hill House to a Christian weekend. That was the plan.

All I wanted to do, frankly, was disappear in a duvet for 24 hours. You know, the last thing I probably wanted to be was in a community where I just wanted to go and sleep.

I was empty. Spiritually empty. We had one of those things. I think it's called negotiations in a marriage. Is that a polite word for it? Yeah? Mandy pointed out that I needed to be the father that I needed to be, that my kids had waited for me and they'd all been looking forward to this weekend. I came up with a compromise and I thought, I'll tell you what, there's a good compromise. I'll drop you off with the children and I'll go back and I'll sleep for 24 hours. And I'll come back and I'll be a much nicer person to live with. Was that a good deal?

No. Not with God or with Mandy. Get that in the right order. And the thing was, is I arrived and there was a very dear friend of mine. You may know him, Murray Bennett.

[13:49] Murray Bennett greeted me at the door. I get emotional just thinking about it. He obviously read and he read and he said, how are you doing? I said, not good, Murray. I'm just whatever.

Sensibly, he made a move prompted by the Holy Spirit and said, Clive, do you mind if I pray with you? I'd hardly put the bags down, you know, just unloading the car.

To let you know, frankly, where I was at the time, I said, Murray, you can do what you like. I was at that place. To which he laid his hand on my shoulder and said three amazing words that has changed my life.

Holy Spirit come. I remember just sinking to my knees and laying on my back. I can remember just seeing Mandy's face thinking, yes, yes.

Thank you, Lord. It is as though I had slept for a month. All I remember was Murray just praying with me.

[14:58] I'd slept for a month. And I realised that actually my desire on this tick box, it had this huge thing missing, which was I had desired the Holy Spirit and presence of God in me 24-7.

It changed my life. It changed my life. It changed me considerably. The encounter with the Spirit changed my desire for him and what I did for him, to know him, to serve him.

Be filled, says Paul. Be filled. Not filled once, but be filled again and again and again. That is the presence of God in us. It's a good place to start here because Paul says, if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, the tough line is they do not belong to Christ.

But if Christ is in you, even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because the Spirit lives in you.

As we enter this new series of exploring the supernatural presence of God, I'll ask again, what is your desire this morning? If you're listening on a podcast, if you're driving, whatever you're doing now, what is your desire as a Christian?

[16:23] Do you know the presence of God dwelling in you? And if there is something missing, and you may sense that as I did for a long time, there is something missing.

Is your desire to ask and receive more of him? Jesus is with us. I have not gone away. The presence of God in the power of the Spirit is with us.

Our bodies are the dwelling places. They are his temple in the everyday. Are you filled? Do you want to be filled?

Do you want to know his presence in every circumstance that we are facing, that you may be facing, to be that encouragement for other people?

To be that beacon. To be Jesus. To be him in the presence of the communities that we serve. And if that is your desire, to grow more and more into the likeness of Christ, to encounter his presence, his power, his peace, be filled.

[17:29] Ask. Ask now. You don't have to go to Hill House. You don't have to have an experience. Do it now.

Do it wherever it is. Do it when you go home. Do it over lunch. Do it here now, wherever it is. Lord, you are faithful. You will do it. I desire your presence. I actively seek you.  
Holy Spirit, would you come, and would I know your presence more and more in my life? Would you like that? Seeing people nodding.  
You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh, but in the realm of the spirit. Shall we just pray before we sing again?  
Thanks. Thanks. If you have sensed that sense of something missing, of something more, then ask, Lord, more of your presence in me.  
[ 18 : 43 ] There's been an issue where maybe life has given you choices that has made you doubt. Lord, Lord, Holy Spirit, would you come into that place and renew and refresh us?  
Lord, in that place where we need reassurance and we need your comfort, comforter, Holy Spirit, come into those places of bereavement and need and fill us afresh.  
Where we are seeking you to make choices at this time, Holy Spirit, would you come and meet us in those places and fill us afresh. For those for whom have ticked the boxes for years and for whom the zeal has just withered away to a routine, Holy Spirit, come and bring new life.  
For those of us, Lord, for those who don't know you, who feel we're not in a relationship with you, for whom it feels remote, come this moment, Holy Spirit, come into our lives that we would know you and experience you in the power and love of your Holy Spirit.  
In Jesus' name, Amen.