## Lesson 4: Claiming the Presence of Christ

## Why Must You "seek" the Presence of Christ?

Why do we need to ask Christ to come into our midst since He promised He would be with us and never forsake us (Mt. 28:18-20; Heb 13:5)? The problem is that the presence of Christ is often taken for granted. When a small group meets for prayer someone is likely to remark, "Well, we have more than two or three here so we know Christ is here." The meeting then goes forward without the slightest evidence that His presence makes any difference. It is easy to forget that He is the vine, we are the branches and without Him we can do nothing of eternal value (John 15:5).

## Expectant Faith Claims His Presence

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## Our Lover Waits to be Welcomed

We need to seek the presence of the Lord because this is a love relationship. Christ is our groom and we are His bride. Our Great Lover will not force His presence on us. In love, he waits to be welcomed among us. The main thing we as His lovers should seek is to be with Him. When love reigns in a courtship or marriage the main thing lovers seek is not gifts and help from one another. They seek their beloved's presence and companionship.

When Jesus knocked on the door of the Laodicean church, He didn't say, "I want to see if you have any chores you need me to do or any problems you want me to solve." He said, "if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20b). He wanted to meet with them over a meal. This is a setting where lovers share their hearts with one another.

## Our Greatest Need

Our greatest need is not on the usual list of prayer requests. We need His own dear presence. We understand that if Christ is not in an individual, that person is spiritually dead. We need to likewise see the necessity of Christ's presence in the midst of our homes, our prayer groups, and our churches. Without His presence, heaven's light and life go out of our relationships. Christ can depart from a church where His presence is no longer recognized and honored. He was outside the Laodicean church (Rev. 3:20), and He can go outside of a church today!

## Understanding the Presence of Christ

What does the presence of Christ among His people actually mean? The Spirit who represents Christ is invisible and He is everywhere. His presence with His dearly beloved bride can be compared with a groom who comes to a crowded airport to meet his bride. He finds her and they so enjoy each other's company that they scarcely notice the crowd surrounding them. He is in the midst of hundreds of people, but he is with his bride in a special sense while they share their hearts with each other.

The offer of Christ's presence should be likewise welcomed by our faith and love so that He is in our midst in a special sense. Notice how Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus "that Christ may dwell and be completely at home in your hearts by faith" (Eph. 3:17a paraphrased). He was not praying that they would individually receive Christ. They had already done that.

But if Christ was going to come into their midst and be at home in their hearts AS A CONGREGATION they had to unite in faith that warmly welcomed His presence. The revelation that God is building believers' lives together into a living holy temple where God dwells on earth (Eph. 2:19-22) must be believed and become the controlling factor in our relationship to God and one another in the believing community. When a single person marries, he must adjust his whole life around this new relationship. So we as a living temple must adjust the whole life of our prayer group or church family around the presence of Christ in our midst.

## A New kind of Community

When Christ comes to church He comes as our Head to claim us as His body, which is a new kind of community (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:11-22). All who gather together in Jesus' name need to unite in believing this truth and acting on it. When Christ's presence in our midst is not received by faith then we cannot be transformed into the new community. The Christian community then becomes like a newly married man who is still trying to live as if he were single.

Could failure to believe in Christ's presence in the midst of the church be a major reason for the epidemic of divorce and church splits we are experiencing today? Could this be the reason ethics among church people are about the same as among those who do not go to church?

Millions of professing Christians have never united in prayer focused on claiming the presence of Christ in the new community. Consequently, they do not experience liberation from the fall of Adam and enjoy the transforming and uniting power of Christ's presence in their homes and churches. They have been taught to receive Christ into their individual life, but they never heard of trusting Him to be present as the Head over all things in their marriage and in their church or even in their prayer group.

## This Prayer Can Lift Your Vision

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21 ought to be memorized and prayed with expectant faith wherever Christians assemble. Then, we should believe and behave according to our faith in Christ as our all-powerful and perfectly wise Head in our midst:

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, without end. Amen."

**(Eph. 3:14-21)**

## Notice the steps in this prayer:

* We need to be strengthened by the Spirit for honesty and humility. (Thus the Spirit prepares our hearts as a group to let Christ be at home in all our hearts. That gets us ready to become rooted and grounded in love, so that when we are slighted or slandered, our spontaneous response will grow out of Christ-like love.)
* Learn to know by experience what the love of Christ really is.
* Become a community saturated with the presence and lovely character of God as we wholly yield ourselves to Him in love.

This prayer lifts our vision beyond the puny limitations of our own thinking and we trust God "to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think."

It doesn't matter how Christ's presence is manifested. What is important is that He is present. My wife and I frequently ask Him to be in our midst. His presence is quiet but real. He is changing us. Christ has slowly worked to transform some churches. Others have seen a powerful breakthrough like water breaking a dam and flooding the dry ground.

Look what happened in a small midwestern town.

Christ intervened in the churches in Alliance, Nebraska, in 1990 with the good news of His love and brought changes no human program could possibly accomplish. The prayers of a small group of pastors, who poured out their hearts for fifteen months for a powerful work of God in Alliance were amazingly answered. In 1987 Paul Harvey had announced that Alliance had the highest per capita incidence of drug use in America, but things changed when heaven came down bringing a new life of transforming love.

The breakthrough began on March 18, 1990, when an eight day evangelistic series led by Don Anders and Family stretched into a nine and one-half week crusade. Over nine hundred confessed Christ in this small railroad town of 9,500 population. The whole town knew God was at work in their midst. Powerful, reconciling love was changing lives. The wife and ex-wife of one man had experienced eight years of bitterness and sleepless nights. During the crusade they publicly forgave and embraced one another.

A 33 year old woman and her husband were in the midst of a divorce. He was seeing another woman. Their two daughters were suffering from their parents' sins. Then the mother was saved on March 30th and her family was transformed. She testified:

God has saved my marriage and family and has put a love in my heart and soul more intense than it has ever been. God gave me the power of forgiveness, compassion, understanding, love and control over my weak human will and thoughts. I could not change, no matter how hard I tried. I can do nothing, but with Jesus, anything and everything is possible. I desperately want everyone to know this, that through Jesus Christ, you can live a first-rate life on earth and have eternal life in heaven."[1](https://www.praywithchrist.org/leaders-claiming-the-presence-of-christ#endnote)

One man had a very strained relationship with his mother; they hardly spoke. When the meetings began, the family issued a prayer request for the mother. She came to the meetings and trusted Christ. The son and his mother embraced in front of the congregation. Not only did she accept Christ, but they were completely reconciled and the bitterness was gone. Shortly after, the man's wife said:

It's just unbelievable to get birthday cards and phone calls from my mother-in-law. That hadn't happened before."[2](https://www.praywithchrist.org/leaders-claiming-the-presence-of-christ#endnote)

A woman who was suicidal walked into the meetings and immediately felt the impact of warm love. She confessed Christ that night and the next week she brought her estranged husband. They were in process of divorce, but they went to the prayer room together. The next day they called their lawyers to stop the divorce. This news spread rapidly and impacted the whole town.

The evangelist, Don Anders, was quite surprised by such a powerful moving of God. "I don't understand what is happening here," he exclaimed, "but it is wonderful."[3](https://www.praywithchrist.org/leaders-claiming-the-presence-of-christ#endnote) He said he had never held more than an eight day meeting in his fifteen years of preaching and he had never seen the Holy Spirit work like this before.

Seven men spoke during the meetings. "It didn't matter who spoke or what they spoke on; people were convicted and went to the prayer room," according to Anders associate Gene Schupbach.[4](https://www.praywithchrist.org/leaders-claiming-the-presence-of-christ#endnote) Some evenings every known unbeliever present was converted.

## The Secret of this Powerful Work

The secret of this powerful work of God was united prayer. "Preparations for this miracle of God was regular fasting, prayer and cooperation among pastors," according to Jules Ostrander, pastor of Alliance Baptist Church.[5](https://www.praywithchrist.org/leaders-claiming-the-presence-of-christ#endnote)

For fifteen months pastors from five or six denominations had prayed together for one hour a week. Pastor Sam Reed of the Evangelical Free Church explained:

We prayed for renewal of God's people, revival in God's people, purifying of the body that the body might stand up and be counted, that seeking and hungry people might be drawn where they could hear the Word. We agreed not to pray about any specific personal problems or any particular church problems, but in general for the community—that evil would be bound and driven back.**We prayed that God would pour out His Spirit on this community. That sinners would be converted. That the body of Christ would be purified."**[6](https://www.praywithchrist.org/leaders-claiming-the-presence-of-christ#endnote)**(emphasis added)**

Daily prayer meetings were held during the crusade. The evangelist spent much time each day fasting and praying. One pastor prayed while the services were in progress.

"The congregations of the participating churches will never be the same," Sam Reed declared.[7](https://www.praywithchrist.org/leaders-claiming-the-presence-of-christ#endnote) He concluded:

The thing that has lingered as fruit in the Evangelical Free Church is a new commitment to prayer that I don't think the church had before the meetings. We have a new awareness of what our mission is in this community. People are asking me about learning how to share their faith. We have been giving time to prayer in the Sunday morning worship service in which we break up into prayer huddles. Lots of people are being prayed for. It's quiet, but it's continuing.[8](https://www.praywithchrist.org/leaders-claiming-the-presence-of-christ#endnote)

### POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

* How much does the presence of Christ actually mean to you?
* What difference does His presence make in your home, in your prayer group, or in your church?
* Would you notice if Christ were silent or absent?
* Are you ready to claim the presence of Christ in your home or prayer group by making the prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21 your own heart cry to God?
* Make a list of all the things you can say or do that will welcome the presence of Christ and make Him feel completely at home in your midst.

### RESEARCH FOR INSTRUCTOR

* Look up the following passages of Scripture and ask the Lord to teach you the meaning and the importance of His presence in the midst of His people. Note the display of God's glory and the sad day when His glory departed. What can we learn from these old Testament experiences as we consider New Testament references to Christ dwelling with us or in our midst today?
* God dwelling among His people (Ex. 25:8). Idolatry almost resulted in God's departure (Ex. 32:7-8; 33:2-3). Moses' insistence that God's presence was essential (Ex. 33:13-16). The glory of God filled the tabernacle and the temple (Ex. 40:32-38; 2 Chron. 7:1-3). The temple was God's house of prayer (Isa. 56:7; Mt. 21:13; Mk. 11:17; Lk. 19:46). The glory of the LORD left the temple and the city of Jerusalem prior to the captivity of Judah (Eze. 10:18-19; 11:22). Christ's presence among His people (John 1:14; 2:11; 20:26; Lk. 24:36; Mt. 18:19-20; 28:18-20; Acts 4:23-35; Eph. 3:14-21; Rev. 1:13-20; 2:1; 3:22). Note the importance of the love relationship (Rev. 2:4-5) and His presence outside the Laodicean church which He was ready to vomit out of His mouth (Rev. 3:14-22).
* Review the definition of "The Presence of Christ" on page XII.
Read in the Appendix
* "Are You Welcome in His Presence?" and "Oh, God Is Here!" Ask yourself, "Are we welcome in His presence and is He welcome in our presence?"
* Read The Sense of His Presence by David R. Mains, published by Word Books.
* What do you think would happen if your group studying this course became deeply aware of Christ's presence in your midst? How would that change your prayer meetings?

## Endnotes

1 Jules Ostrander, "God Comes To Nebraska Panhandle," Revival Fellowship News, Fall, 1990, 2.

2 Todd Mikkelson, "Revival Comes To Alliance," The Evangelical Beacon, January, 1991, 9-10.

3 Michael Ullrich, "Small Town Transformed After Surprise Revival," Moody, July/August, 1990, 66.

4 ibid.

5 "God Comes To Nebraska Panhandle," 2.

6 "Revival Comes To Alliance," 9.

7 "Small Town Transformed After Surprise Revival," 66.

8 "Revival Comes To Alliance," 10.