



Are you a Conductor or a Resister?

John 15:9-11

We have been examining how to possess the daily presence of God in our lives. He is here but too often we don't enjoy His fellowship as He meant it to be.

Brother Lawrence many years ago wrote a short paper on his lifelong journey of learning to "Practice the Presence of God." In the end it is very simple - it is becoming aware of God who is with you every minute. But it is also very difficult to do that, every moment. Sometimes I go for days and suddenly realize that I have not been aware of God in my life, moment by moment.

Each week I have tried to give you some important biblical help to do this.

WEEK 1 - FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS OF MY LIFE WITH GOD

- God is always present and active in my life, whether or not I see him.
- My task is to meet God in this moment.
- Coming to recognize and experience God's presence is learned behavior; I can cultivate it.

Here's the thing. I think many Christians "settle" for something less than the relationship that God really wants and saved them for. Settle for a Christianity of principles and precepts. "This is what I believe, this is what I do."

I have been giving "homework assignments" - way we can "learn" to become aware and in contact with God who is with us. If I asked how many of you have been doing the homework, I am afraid the response

would be embarrassing? Why? Don't you want to hear God and be aware of God on a regular basis.

Today I want to bring you *a key response* on our part, if we are going to be aware of God and hear God on a regular basis.

CONDUCTORS AND RESISTERS

An analogy from the field of electricity can help us think about this response to God. The flow of electricity is affected by materials called "conductors" and "resisters."

The difference between a conductor and a resistor can be put like this: *a conductor is willing to let go*. Floating around the periphery of its atoms are electrons that can quite easily pass from one atom to another. They are more or less free agents. So a conductor has what we might call a generosity of spirit when it comes to electrons.

A resister, by contrast, does not want to let go. It hangs onto its little electrons. It clings to the status quo. It is afraid to let go because it wants to keep itself intact. And so it does. But the resister never knows much power.

The secret of the conductor is that it is not generating its own power. The conductor is not particularly strong or clever; it is simply a conduit. It is open and receptive to the flow of current that can change the world from darkness to light.

We live in a spiritually charged universe and we need to learn to be conductors as far as the flow of God's spirit goes. The flow of the Holy Spirit is all around us. We did not invent it, but it has now become fully available. Jesus said in **Jn. 7:38**, *"Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within them."* John's gospel explains that Jesus was talking about the Spirit.

Like our electrical example, we do not have much power in ourselves, but we can choose whether we will be resisters or conductors.

As You Wish

There is a quirky movie that many love, called "The Princess Bride." Have you seen it? I have met people (usually guys) who have seen the movie so often they have memorized large chunks of the dialogue.

After losing a ping pong match, such a person is likely to smile slyly and say, "But I know a secret you do not know. I am not right-handed."

Fernando Ortega once gave a Christmas concert, and when he started to speak, all were expecting some traditional holiday greeting; instead his first words were, "My name is Fernando Ortega. You killed my father. Prepare to die!"

But there is one line that lies at the heart of the story—and at the heart of your story as well. It is spoken when the story begins and when it ends. It is a kind of prayer. In fact, it is the greatest prayer Jesus himself ever prayed. If we were ever able to pray it truly and continually, it is in a real sense the only prayer you and I would ever need.

As the movie opens, we see the heroine going about her chores on a farm. Her name is Buttercup. Soon we meet a young man who works on the farm and answers to the name Farm Boy.

Whenever Buttercup asks Farm Boy to do something for her, he always replies, "As you wish." That's all he ever says to her.

As they grow into their hormones, Buttercup seems to be developing a crush on Farm Boy. One day as he is about to leave the room, she asks him to fetch her a pitcher, which is within easy reach for her. Farm Boy walks over, then stares into her eyes, lifts the pitcher, and whispers: "As you wish."

In that moment, returning his gaze, Buttercup realizes that every time he has said, "As you wish," he was really saying, "I love you."

For many centuries, those wisest about the spiritual life have insisted that this one line response is the door that opens the heart to the presence of God. There is no greater expression of love than a freely submitted will. Surrender. "As you wish."

A posture of surrender and submission is the greatest expression of love to our Lord Jesus, and it is the conductor into the flow of the Spirit in our lives.

Jesus said, **John 15:9-11** "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you

this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Brother Lawrence writes, "...that our sole occupation in life is to please God."

Jean Pierre de Caussade writes, "Every moment, and in respect of everything, we must say like St. Paul, 'Lord, what should I do?' Let me do everything you wish."

At the heart of communion with God, is the whisper of willing surrender, 'As you wish.'

C. S. Lewis wrote that the day is coming when every soul will adopt one of two postures before God: either joyful surrender or defiant separation. One day every being will say either "Thy will be done," or "My will be done."

And the reality is that—at least to some small degree —our hearts are always assuming one or the other of these postures. From one moment to the next we make choices: What will I do next? How will I treat this person? What will I do with this money? Where will I allow this temptation to lead me?

The heart that learns to yield to God and say, "As you wish," from one moment to the next opens itself to the Power of the Universe. It does not matter whether our task is great or small or whether we are famous or obscure.

Let me share several forms or aspects of surrender with you.

THE SURRENDER OF OBEDIENCE

Last week Nina and I had the privilege to join the Builders for Christ ministry in the New Orleans area, to help rebuild a church that was torn apart by Katrina. We joined four other FBCM church members who had flown down a couple days before us. We waited until Nina came back from the ladies retreat, which I hear was really great. I am so glad, for so many reasons, that we made plans to do this. In the days ahead I'm sure I will tell you more.

But now I have to be honest with you about something. I never told anyone this, not even Nina, but I really didn't want to go on this trip this year. I can't even tell you why, but secretly I just didn't feel like participating, even though I enjoy building things, or at least trying to. The only reason I went, I'm sure is because Nina felt so strongly about being able to help out in the New Orleans area. She was determined to get there, even if it meant coming back from a retreat, which was draining, because she

spent many hours in preparation, since she was the retreat speaker. Nevertheless, early the next day, we were leaving on a jet plane for the mission trip.

But the story is about me, not Nina! The reason I never talk to anyone is because God and I had a talk, and he made it clear to me that he wanted me to go. So I had a decision to make. My will or his will.

It does not always work out so well. There are numerous times when I'm sorry to say that "my will" wins out. But this time, and I am so glad it was this time because of all the blessings that I received, this time I said, "As You Wish."

Obedience to God is the first and most important form of surrender. Let's face it, if you want God to speak to you, and, in fact, He does it, and He tells you something, that's no time for a debate. Unlike a conversation with a friend, He's not there to say, "Here's where I think, what do you think?" Or, "Thanks for your opinion God, I'll take it into consideration." No, no, no!

No, if you want to hear God's voice regularly, you need to make a decision upfront that you're going to say, "yes God, yes God, yes God, yes"

THE SURRENDER OF SERVANTHOOD

Matthew 20:26-28 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Let's see if I can say this briefly but clearly. God isn't coming into your life, my life, or anyone's life for OUR selfish purposes. He is not revealing himself and his presence so we can pursue our lives apart from Him. God is not a genie in a bottle that you can rub three times so you can get your greedy wish fulfilled.

Your HIS servant, he's not yours! Our lives, every minute of it, not just when we do specific things for Him, like preach or teach, is to be done as an act of loving service to the one who loved us and loves us supremely, enough to give himself for us at Calvary.

Than me ask you simply, is it your desire and commitment to be a servant of the Lord Jesus every single day?

ONE THING SURRENDER IS NOT

Before we look at a last form of surrender, I want to address one potential misunderstanding that has crushed many people's spirits. It is this: **The call to surrender does not mean we are supposed to kill off all our desires.**

God created desire. In his original plan, desires are an indicator of a creature's purpose.

Now, American culture says that real life requires the gratification of our desires. Many people try to convince us that we are essentially like the Sesame Street Cookie Monster. It has a very simple philosophy of life: see cookie, want cookie, eat cookie. Appetites exist to be gratified. That's wrong.

On the other hand, distorted spirituality says real life requires the elimination of our desires. That's wrong too.

An old Quaker sect taught that the way to know that something is from God is that it is always contrary to your desire. But it's why, some Quakers in fact, actually walked naked in the streets, because it was "contrary to their own will or inclination" and, therefore they thought, "in obedience to the Lord." That should have told them something about their teaching!

And the religion that most tends to be associated with the renunciation of all desire is Buddhism (even though, ironically, most statues of the Buddha that we see in America make him look as if he also had a thing for cookies).

Jesus says that real life **requires the TRANSFORMATION of our desires.** If you are thirsty—if you have unsatisfied desires—"come to me."

Desire itself is an invitation to seek God's presence.

As C. S. Lewis once wrote, "*Indeed, if we consider ... the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. . . We are far too easily pleased.*"

THE SURRENDER OF OUR FAILURES

Like I said before, sometimes we forget to surrender. Sometimes we refuse. Then our sense of guilt and inadequacy can cut us off from the current of God's presence. On the occasions when we have

failed to surrender, then we have to learn to surrender our failure.

The most important thing about failure is this: Even when we have failed, the flow of the Spirit can be restored in our lives at any moment. Right now. All we have to do is ask.

Once I tried surfing. I wasn't very good at it. I fell off the board each time a wave came.

But the good news about surfing is this: If you miss one wave, if you fall off, if you wipe out, there's another wave coming right behind it. God just keeps sending them. He never runs out of waves. He has an inexhaustible supply. He's like a wave machine.

The Bible's word for that is "grace." It works this way:

This week I went to the gas station, but was in a hurry to get to work. The car in another lane was leaving too. The right-of-way was not real clear. He cut in front of me.

I felt a surge of anger. He looked at me; I looked at him.

He started gesturing, with intense hostility in his face. I gestured back—differently, because I'm a pastor. I'm thinking, "Get out of my way. Don't you know I have to get to the office, write a sermon about how to flow with the Spirit of God every moment of your life?" (See a pattern? I'm a slow learner.)

Because of that little exchange I realized later, that, for the next hour I had extinguished any kind of sensitivity to the Spirit's presence or guidance in my mind. I had completely shut myself off to the flow of the Spirit. I had broken the circuit. I was a *resistor* instead of a *conductor*. But my failure doesn't get the last word.

Then I said, as I've said a thousand times before, "God, I'm sorry. I don't want to live that kind of life. I don't want to be that kind of person. Forgive me. Help me try again."

And Jesus says to me again the words that are His specialty, the words He himself cried out to his Father from the garden of Gethsemane, the words that death itself cannot stop. They are the same words by which the Princess Bride finally recognizes her true love.

"As you wish."

HOMEWORK

So, my question to you is the same one I posed to you at the beginning. Does it matter to you whether God is really in your life regularly? Or, have you settled for something less, for a Christianity that is more like an insurance policy of the future.

As C. S. Lewis said, *"If we consider ... the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our*

desires, not too strong, but too weak. . . We are far too easily pleased."

But, things don't change unless we change. I have given you, over the last weeks, some real, concrete, actions that WILL make a difference. Hearing God is a learned behavior. You can do it.

So here's my homework for you. I have made a sheet that you will receive as you leave today. It summarizes the steps that I have suggested you take over the course of the series. Will you put that in your Bible and on your desk at work or wherever you need it and make a real attempt to become spiritually in tune with God who is always right next to you.

And today, we have talked about the heart response. Your heart, my heart, needs first of all, needs a response of surrender. Loving surrender to the leadership and lordship of God through Jesus Christ. Will you begin there right now? Will you wake up each morning and out of love for the one who loves you supremely, give yourself to him, give your day to him and obedience and service? Depending on his grace when you fall?