

purpose and plan ... to see us in His own image, ruling and reigning in His power with Him.

What could be a more convincing proof that the Father desires our presence? He has come to live in us.

There is one final movement in this story ... the most glorious chapter of all.

CHAPTER 6 **COMING!**



I HAVE A FRIEND who has been mightily used by God. His name is known in many circles. He has a profound reputation, and his life has yielded significant, enduring fruit. If I mentioned his name, you might easily recognize it.

By the grace of God, our lives intersected years ago. I was humbled just to meet him. But as I came to know him, I was astounded to realize one day that he genuinely wanted to be with me. Before long, we were sharing beyond an acquaintance level. We enjoyed each other's company greatly. We shared common interests and passions. We laughed easily together, and we prayed fervently together. Like Jonathan and David, our hearts were "knit together in love."

I was humbled (and deeply blessed) to realize that, although separated by miles, the rest of our lives would be marked by this friendship. By God's goodness, we've been able to join together in some extraordinary ministry initiatives. For as my friend often says, "History is transformed among friends."

As astounding as that incredible realization was, there is another reality that is beyond comprehension. Christ wants to be with us! He wants to be our deepest friend. Everything from the dawn of history until the end of this age and beyond illustrates this fact. We don't believe it or even recognize its incalculable value, which is why we are often halfhearted in seeking the Lord. But it is true.

Though we've seen only the "tip of the iceberg" of this massive truth, we are awed by God's relentless pursuit of us. In ever-increasing ways, He invites us to experience His presence. He calls us, He sent His Son in human flesh to us and for us, and then He gave His Spirit

to indwell us. What gifts! What glorious confirmations of His love! His presence is now constantly available to all who will join Him!

But there is one more level that exceeds all of this.

The Final Chapter

In some of His last words to His disciples, Jesus spoke of this coming intimacy we would enjoy.

“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”⁴⁵

Jesus indicated that His ascension back to His Father was not an escape from this world. The cross, resurrection, and ascension would finish the work here that required His physical presence. Now, He was going to get something ready for us. His next assignment was to do some additional, very deliberate work and perhaps His most creative. He was going to prepare a new heaven and new earth and our eternal home.

The Garden Restored and Revised

In this eternal place, we will enjoy His presence with no intermission. It will be a garden of absolute perfection with no hint of evil. Read John’s Revelation, chapters 21-22, for just a taste of what we will enjoy. It is Eden restored, but better.

There will be no tempter and no possibility of spiritual failure. None of our relationships will be touched by evil. This is why Jonathan

⁴⁵John 14:2-3

Edwards could write *Heaven, a World of Love*.⁴⁶ Think of living in a place where everyone loves you perfectly, you love everyone perfectly, you love God perfectly, and God loves you perfectly. (He always has, but you will understand and experience that fully.)

There was a reason why the original Garden was never meant to be our final residence. In that Garden, the Enemy had access. But in the new world, he is banished forever. Also, in our original home, we had a will with which we could choose to obey or disobey. The Spirit did not reside in us then. In the new world, we will be completely and fully redeemed, and all possibilities of spiritual rebellion will be over. There will be no distractions there. Nothing that woos us away or pulls us back into evil pursuits or mundane living. We will bask in a completely sinless environment!

And there is something else. We will live forever with the full knowledge of what we’ve been saved from and who did the saving. This will create an eternity of unceasing praise and rapturous joy. We will not live with the innocence of the first Eden but eternally humbled by the full knowledge of our sin and rebellion and His extraordinary pursuit of us: By Christ’s grace, He came and died and rose again to deliver us from our sins, and by the Spirit’s indwelling, He gave us the power to know Him on earth with intimacy and power.

This is the ultimate destination of the story ... the place of His *uninterrupted* presence where we will see His face.

There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will

⁴⁶Jonathan Edwards, *Heaven, A World of Love*, Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle, PA., 1969

serve Him; *they will see His face*, and His name will be on their foreheads.⁴⁷

It will be life as God designed, and we will fully experience the purpose for which He made us. We will see that we were created like He is so we can join Him in what He does. And we will rule with Him, doing the precise things that each of us was uniquely created to do, with joy and perfect effectiveness forever.

In the flow of Revelation, at the end of Chapter 20, everything seems to have been accomplished ... Why the need for Chapters 21-22? Because the goal of salvation is not merely God's deliverance of His people from Satan and sin, but also His deliverance of His people to *Himself*. Again, the goal of the gospel is not simply salvation or deliverance from evil, but also eternal communion with God ... the final vision of Revelation spells out the primary goal and theme not only of the Apocalypse but also of the whole of Scripture: God's relational presence among His people in the new creation.⁴⁸

Our hearts will burst with unending gratitude and our lips with unending praise for His manifest presence!

And You

Think of what we've seen in this broad sweep of God's love story. As we understand more and more of this incredible narrative, Satan's lies are fully exposed. God is not withholding from us. He loves us with

⁴⁷ Revelation 22:3-4 (*emphasis mine*)

⁴⁸ Duvall and Hays, *God's Relational Presence*

an everlasting love. Like John, we can now say that "we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us," and that "[God's] perfect love casts out fear."⁴⁹

Let the glory of this truth wash over you like a cascading waterfall. We never again need to wonder if we are loved, accepted, desired, and useful to the Father. Our presence with Him is His great desire, and His relentless pursuit of us has proved it!

Our Father hasn't planned for a mere momentary acquaintance or something useful only to Himself. He has provided everything to bring us into an eternally growing relationship of unsurpassed meaning and boundless joy.

Remember the foundational theme of God's story? God desires to have an unbroken, daily, personal relationship with us, but we must co-operate. His presence is our greatest need, and our presence is His great desire. One day soon, this will be fully and gloriously accomplished for eternity!

⁴⁹ 1 John 4:16,18

The
WAYS
of a
PRESENCE
CENTERED
LIFE

IF OUR PRESENCE is God's great desire, why are most believers not experiencing Him continually? Is it conceivable to experience His nearness all the time? Is the command to "pray without ceasing" even a possibility?⁵⁰ Is there more? Something we're missing?

Remember the foundational truth of the story:

*God desires an unbroken, daily, personal relationship with us,
but we must cooperate.*

So how do we cooperate? What is necessary?

The uniqueness we notice in a mature believer is the nearness of God. We recognize God's fragrance when we are around them. We feel His love, wisdom, and life pouring through these consecrated followers. The Father's presence with them is more constant than with others. No one is perfect, and learning how to live a Presence-centered life happens over time, but there are reasons for this abiding experience.

*A Presence-centered man or woman has embraced the God-given means
to consciously enter and remain in His presence.*

*Over time, these have become their ways
and are the keys to God's presence and power.*

The most effective among us are those who have learned how to cooperate with God continually in some non-negotiable ways—the ways of a Presence-centered life. We may be familiar with each of these components independently, but it is the union of the whole, of all of

⁵⁰1 Thessalonians 5:17

them together, that is essential. The continual practice and application of each part help us abide in His presence.

Our desire in the following pages is to put this in a way that is simple, understandable, and replicable. Memorize these six ways and use them to continually evaluate if you are experiencing His presence and, if not, to discern where you have been distracted and how to return.

We pray it will be a helpful understanding for you and a tool to help those you are discipling as you seek to live a Presence-centered life.

CHAPTER 7 DRAW NEAR

