

“KNOWING GOD IS THERE!”  
by Rom A. Pegram (5/3/20)

One of the most powerful ways to get through any crisis or time of difficulty in life ... is to know that *you're not alone* in the midst of whatever it is that you're going through; having someone to lean on makes difficult times of life *bearable*. THE most powerful way, then, to get through our Red Sea moments in life is to acknowledge God's presence with us ... and we need to learn to do just that...

In John 1:18, God's word teaches us that one of the jobs of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Trinity—the Son or Jesus—is to make evident the Father's (God's) presence. So, in our scripture lesson for today, we are really experiencing what I'm going to call a Christophany—a 'Jesus sighting' or an appearance of Jesus himself in history. Just listen to our scripture lesson for today and then I'll unfold this idea even more for you (Exodus 14:19-22, NLT)...

**Then the angel of God, who had been leading the people of Israel, moved to the rear of the camp. The pillar of cloud also moved from the front and stood behind them. <sup>20</sup> The cloud settled between the Egyptian and Israelite camps. As darkness fell, the cloud turned to fire, lighting up the night. But the Egyptians and Israelites did not approach each other all night. <sup>21</sup> Then Moses raised his hand over the sea, and the LORD opened up a path through the water with a strong east wind. The wind blew all that night, turning the seabed into dry land. <sup>22</sup> So the people of Israel walked through the middle of the sea on dry ground, with walls of water on each side!**

Whether Christ himself or an angel under his direction, what a perfect description of our Lord Jesus who gives light to those who trust him; but to those who reject him, utter darkness—comforting one ... and confounding the other, a Savior to one ... and a Judge to the other...

The truth is, in order to get through those Red Sea moments in life when we feel like we've been backed up against a wall (cul-de-sac), *knowing God is there is one of the first steps to victory in the midst of those days*, which leads me to this new God Strategy...

**STRATEGY 7: ENVISION GOD'S ENVELOPING PRESENCE!** Verses 19-20 tell us, again, “Then the angel of God, who had been leading the people of Israel, moved to the rear of the camp. The pillar of cloud also moved from the front and stood behind them. <sup>20</sup> The cloud settled between the Egyptian and Israelite camps. As darkness fell, the cloud turned to fire, lighting up the night. But the Egyptians and Israelites did not approach each other all night.” Here is the presence of God showing up in the lives of God's people in a very powerful ... and protective, I might add ... way!

So, what does this teach us about our Red Sea moments in life? Or, let me ask that another way: How do we master the practice of the presence of God in our lives?

Here's a list of ways to do just that (nearness/presence): Affirm God's NEARNESS in your heart! It's a pretty simple (not simplistic) concept, actually; the more we acknowledge God being in our lives, the more natural it becomes to just *know* that God is there. The Psalmist was practicing 'the presence of God' in his life when he said in Ps. 139:5-6 (MSG):

**"I look behind me and you're there, then up ahead and you're there, too— your reassuring presence, coming and going. <sup>6</sup>This is too much, too wonderful— I can't take it all in!"**

Next, visualize God's PRESENCE in your mind! There's a discipline that many in the Christian faith practice called 'the empty chair discipline.' Sometimes when I've spent time in prayer, I've had an empty chair beside me ... and I speak to God—to Jesus (God in the flesh)—as if he were sitting right there in that chair! It helps me to speak to God naturally ... as if speaking to a friend... (I've also experienced this at Church Council meetings where the Chair wanted to make very, very clear that the first one invited to the meeting ... is Christ himself; a chair was left empty to represent the presence of God who was indeed with us...) It's not a matter of projecting an image of God and pretending that he is there; it's a matter of *recognizing the presence of God* who is *really* there!

Footnote: This is also a helpful practice for parents to teach their teenagers ... "God is in that car with you!" "God is at that party with you!" "God is present in whatever you happen to be doing—even after 10 PM ... when Mom &/or Dad may not be there!" Next:

Access God's NEARNESS through prayer! James 4:8a (TEV) says, "Come near to God, and he will come near to you...." Well, that's great ... but HOW? How do we do that so that we *know*—without a doubt—that God is with us during those most trying times of our lives? In many Bibles, the cross-reference to James 4:8 will take you to the answer in Deuteronomy 4:7 (NIV), which says: "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us *whenever we pray to him?*" [italics mine]. The best way to develop a sense of God's abiding presence in your life is to speak with Him often in prayer! It's that simple ... and it's that difficult (discipline)! Finally, you must learn to...

Reflect God's PRESENCE in your demeanor. Attitude really does matter, folks ... in this ol' thing called LIFE! Nicholas Herman (pronounced är-măñ) was born in Lorraine, France, in 1605. He reached his teen years at the onset of the Thirty Years' War, during which he fought for the French army, was seriously wounded, and walked with great difficulty for the rest of his life. Converted to Christianity at age eighteen, he became an assistant for a local official in the French Treasury.

Years passed, and at age fifty, wanting a richer spiritual life, Nicholas joined a Carmelite monastery in Paris. But he was assigned—of all things—to the kitchen, a task that struck him as insulting and humbling. For several years, he went about his chores grudgingly but dutifully.

One day Nicholas decided to change his way of thinking. He began frequently to remind himself of how constantly God's presence hovered about him. Even the most menial tasks, Nicholas realized, if undertaken for God's glory, are holy; and wherever the Christian stands—even in a hot, thankless kitchen—is holy ground, for the Lord is present there too!

Nicholas's countenance (facial expressions) and demeanor gradually changed, and others began to take notice of his newfound radiance. Christian leaders began to seek out Nicholas for Christian counsel and advice. One man, the Abbot of Beaufort, was particularly impressed with Nicholas' life. The two met four times and exchanged fifteen letters to discuss Nicholas's walk with God. The Abbot made notes of the conversations and preserved the letters; eventually the contents of those letters were published in the mid-1600s in a work called 'The Practice of the Presence of God.' This work was attributed to one 'Brother Lawrence,' the name by which Nicholas was known inside the monastery...

Others should sense God's presence in YOUR LIFE ... through your demeanor ... your facial expressions! If your happy and you know it ... let your face in on it, won't you? Here's the final strategy for today...

**STRATEGY 8: TRUST GOD TO DELIVER IN HIS OWN UNIQUE WAY!** Verses 21-22 reminds us of God's unique ways: "Then Moses raised his hand over the sea, and the LORD opened up a path through the water with a strong east wind. The wind blew all that night, turning the seabed into dry land. <sup>22</sup> So the people of Israel walked through the middle of the sea on dry ground, with walls of water on each side!"

In Isaiah 55 (8-9), the prophet talks about God working in ways that only God can: "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. <sup>9</sup> For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

So, we find that God sometimes works in MIRACULOUS ways... Does God still work through miracles today? The short answer is ... YES; I've seen too many not to believe in miracles (and I'd be happy to talk with anyone about them sometime); but, what I want to stress today is simply this: *There are no cookie cutters in heaven!* Rarely does God work in the same way twice. TRUST GOD TO DELIVER IN HIS OWN UNIQUE WAY! God also sometimes works in...

PROVIDENTIAL ways... Though miracles still do occur, God uses them sparingly; more often than not, the way that God does intervene in our lives is in *providential ways* ... or, in other words, through guiding our ordinary, everyday circumstances. Then, God works in...

MYSTERIOUS ways... I can almost always assure you that when it comes to God, there will always be some mystery about God's actions; we simply, in our finite minds, cannot understand all that God is about and all of the 'whys' of this lifetime ... though

scripture promises that someday we will understand! TRUST GOD TO DELIVER IN HIS OWN UNIQUE WAY!

Folks, the pillar of fire and cloud (the presence of Christ in their midst) followed the Israelites through the wilderness, then disappeared when they entered the Promised Land ... only to appear visually again in places like Solomon's Temple ... and the Upper Room at Pentecost!

That same presence now resides in and around ALL Christians ... everywhere and at every moment. You will NOT face any difficulties alone in this life we live, when you place your faith in the One who actually IS HERE—closer than a friend or brother or sister... The bottom line? KNOW THAT GOD IS THERE ... FOR YOU!