

The Presence of God or Mysticism

by Tim Conway

This sermon delves into the topic of experiencing the presence of God, distinguishing it from mysticism. It emphasizes the importance of seeking God's presence with a desperate longing, drawing examples from historical figures like Jonathan Edwards, David Brainerd, and Charles Simeon. The sermon encourages a deep awareness of God's closeness, holiness, and love, highlighting the transformative power of encountering God's glory and the need for personal revival marked by a surrender to God and a pursuit of holiness.

Scripture: Jeremiah 29:13, Psalms 105:4, Exodus 33:14, Psalms 22:11, Acts 4:31, Psalms 24:3, 1 Corinthians 14:25, James 4:8, Isaiah 55:6, Psalms 21:6, Psalms 22:11, Psalms 139:23

Topics: "Experiencing God's Presence", "Pursuit of Holiness"

Description

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Transcript

The subject line says, Is feeling the presence of God mysticism? This comes from Anonymous. And they write, What is the difference between the presence of God in your life and mysticism? I have heard guys like Paul Washer and Leonard Ravenhill talk about the presence of God. But John MacArthur has said that you can't feel the presence of God.

A direct quote from MacArthur is, I've never felt the presence of God. I don't even know what that means. Is feeling the presence of God mysticism? Mysticism.

I can tell you right now that this is a dangerous subject. It's dangerous because I think you can derail off these tracks very easily either way. And I see it.

I see it around us. Let's just talk about the question. Sometimes just the way people pose questions, you kind of have to look at it because sometimes they're making presuppositions that sometimes aren't true and they need to be challenged.

I've talked about this before. Somebody says, Could you explain to me how, I know I'm a Christian, I know I was saved then, but I still am a slave to sin. Could you please explain to me how that can be? You see they're making the presupposition there that they're a Christian even though their life doesn't reflect true Christianity.

So sometimes presuppositions are wrong and we need to deal with them. But let's just think about the question. What's the difference between the presence of God in your life and mysticism? What's the difference between the presence of God in your life and mysticism? For one, he's making the assumption that maybe those are two things that do have a difference or maybe they don't have a difference.

I've heard guys like Paul Washer and Leonard Ravenhill talk about the presence of God. But John MacArthur, I feel like this is a topic I want to deal with. And because John MacArthur is very public in the things that he said, I don't feel that it would be wrong to speak about this.

But I guess I do even question about taking some of these questions where they're asking you to take one guy's perspective and compare it to another guy's perspective. I was down in Monterey and somebody asked me in the Q&A time, could you please explain how Charles Leiter's theology disagrees with covenant theology? Or something like, could you please explain how Charles Leiter's theology varies from Joseph Urban's? And it's like, uh-uh. Don't ask me that question.

You ask those guys that question. I mean, if you have a question about Scripture or about some truth, but I said, can you tell me what it is specifically about either of those men's teaching that creates some issue? Well, the guy asking the question really didn't know about Charles' teaching. And so it's almost like you want to pit people against each other maybe when they ought not to be pitted together, or at least I ought not to be the one pitting them against each other.

Let them speak for themselves about what they believe. But Ravenhill, Washer, and MacArthur are all very public figures. And the thing is, they have spoken very publicly and openly about their positions about the presence of God.

A very quick search on the internet, and you will pull up things on MacArthur and Washer, and I suspect Ravenhill too because he was very... I didn't specifically look at anything by him, but immediately I found MacArthur and Washer on this subject. I didn't really look for it as far as Ravenhill is concerned, but I've listened to enough Ravenhill. I have some ideas about what his take would be.

He says, I've heard guys like Paul Washer and Leonard Ravenhill talk about the presence of God, but John MacArthur has said that you can't feel the presence of God. Now, then they say this, a direct quote from MacArthur is, I've never felt the presence of God, I don't even know what this means. But listen, if you listen to the quote, I've never felt the presence of God, I don't even know what this means.

Did you notice that he's not denying that there could be a presence of God? And he's not denying that somebody could feel the presence of God. This anonymous person jumps to the conclusion, John MacArthur has said you can't feel the presence of God. And then he gives a quote.

But the quote doesn't say that MacArthur is saying you can't feel the presence of God. In fact, I found this very clip from this sermon that John MacArthur preached on November 17th, that's Charity's birthday, 2013. So, five years ago, November, John MacArthur preached this sermon.

And in fact, if you listen to the clip, he's not denying that you can feel the presence of God. In fact, what he says is, if you feel the presence of God, he expects that you would respond like Isaiah and fall on your face. So let's just be fair to our brother John MacArthur, that he's not actually denying that you can feel the presence of God.

In fact, if you listen to the clip, what you will find is, what he is attacking primarily, which we would do, is the idea that you get in certain churches and they seek to induce into you a sense of the presence of God simply by a light show and really emotional music. You see, that's what he's going after. He's going after the modern churches that seek to put on a big performance and a big light show and get you all emotionally stirred up and say, isn't that incredible, the presence of God that you feel when you're exposed to that kind of thing.

That's what he's going after. And we would agree. I mean, you know, one of the guys that is often quoted and alluded to with regards to the presence of God would be somebody like Martin Lloyd-Jones.

But you talk about somebody... Lloyd-Jones would not even allow the kind of instrumentation that MacArthur would allow into his church. In fact, if you've ever listened to Logic on Fire, you see Ian Murray, he talks about Lloyd-Jones stopping the singing because he felt like they weren't singing it right. He felt like they were being carried away too much by the tune rather than by the words.

All I can say is, he had the ability to discern that. Because that would be very difficult to discern. How do you have a sense when people are not worshipping enough but being carried along by the tune? I mean, there's a sense that we have in worship of different things, but for him to stop like that... Let me see.

I know Spurgeon, they sang a cappella. What did they do in the chapel there? I think it was the organ too. But here's what MacArthur said, I've never felt the presence of God.

I don't even know what that means. And he goes on to say this, I haven't got a clue what that means. And then a little bit later he says, if you really felt the presence, you would fall on your face and cry for mercy like Isaiah did.

So, let's just be fair to John MacArthur there. But, for him to say, I've never felt the presence of God, I don't even know what that is. I do know that he will raise an eyebrow at those who believe they have experienced the presence of God.

So, I mean, I'm defending him in the one sense, but I also do know that he and Phil Johnson, I couldn't find it, but I heard it myself before, right in video. I saw and heard MacArthur say it. That he felt like, Phil Johnson asked him about Lloyd-Jones, and I think he said something like, oh, Lloyd-Jones was just seeking some kind of spiritual buzz.

He said something like that. And so he does kind of make light of this. There's no question about that.

I think he's suspect about the talk that has to do with the presence of God. Now, for him to put his own experience out there, that he's never felt it, that probably gives you a little bit of a feeling as to where he's at with regards to it. When a man hasn't experienced something, it generally is going to put you in a different mindset about something than if you have experienced it.

And I just think this, as long as we serve the kind of God that we do, we serve a supernatural God, we serve a sovereign God, we serve a God that doesn't deal with all of His children in exactly the same way.

Listen, just because He doesn't deal with all of His children in exactly the same way, doesn't mean that any of His children are stepchildren or second class. It's not like if Paul Washer or Leonard Ravenhill experienced the presence of God in a way John MacArthur never did.

That doesn't make John MacArthur some second class child of God. Because we could easily look at areas in John MacArthur's life where probably Leonard Ravenhill wasn't as blessed. I mean, we don't want to think this.

God specifically apportions and appoints and gives as He sees fit. Is everybody an apostle? No. Should we all weep tears and have a pity party because we're not all apostles? Can you imagine? Remember when Judas hung himself, his bowels gushed out? What did they do? Remember what the church did? How they responded? They replaced him.

But you know, do you remember how many guys they had to choose from? And they passed over one of them. Can you imagine that guy? Man, I was this close to being an apostle. What did I lack? But we don't have to think that way.

Scripture tells us not to think that way. Because it's a body, and the different parts are different. But I think it's important to say this.

We want to be very cautious. As long as God is God and God is sovereign and God acts in people's life the way He desires to act and the way He will act, we should be very cautious to judge another man's experience. Now, is there a place to test our experience and your experience? I mean, there is.

There's a place to test the spirits. But we should be very careful in being quick to make a pronouncement that what somebody else has experienced is false or isn't from God or isn't Christian or isn't biblical. I mean, yes, there's a place to say something isn't biblical if it's simply not biblical.

But what I'm talking about is things that very much fall within the realm of what's biblical. You know, Martyn Lloyd-Jones said this. In fact, I'll quote to you.

He said, It's a danger to go beyond the Bible, but there's also peril from the other extreme, being satisfied with very much less than what is offered in Scripture. See, that's... I can tell you, pastoring, that is the thing right there that I have been afraid of. Personally, I am not afraid of the charismatic movement moving into our church.

You know what I'm most afraid of? Dead Calvinism. I'm terrified of that. Dead religion.

Dead religion. I mean, if there's something that I recoil from, I'm attracted to lively religion. I remember one time speaking to the converted pastor, or a converted priest, converted Catholic priest from Austin.

What's his name? Richard Bennett. We had Richard Bennett down here years ago, and he preached for us. And I remember being in discussion with him.

You know, he came out of Catholicism, and he was involved in some church up in the Northwest, and he moved from there to Austin. He left that church. And I asked him why.

And he said, I had enough of dead religion when I was a Catholic. But you know, that's true. That is absolutely true.

We don't want to be satisfied with much less than what Scripture offers. I mean, here's the thing. If we go to Scripture, and we go to the book of Acts, and we find such things there, I mean, you show me the verse that says, don't ever expect this to happen anymore.

Is that the last verse? I mean, is there an Acts 29 somewhere? I mean, there's people that have Acts 29 churches. Is there an Acts 29 text that says, oh, but by the way, disclaimer here, all that you've read about here in this book of Acts doesn't happen anymore. Don't expect any of it.

Don't look to any of this as normative. This is all basically dispensational. This was for a certain dispensation in time.

And don't expect the power of God to be demonstrated in these ways. But see, I don't find that text. And so, I would just be very cautious.

I don't want to limit God. And I don't want to be like Nazareth of old, where it said Jesus didn't do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. Listen, you know, what John MacArthur is deathly afraid of, and rightly so, is people who want emotion, and they want experiences, and they step outside of the realm of Scripture, but see, I think we need to be on the same page.

Yes, yes, that's true. Hold to our Bibles very tightly. But at the same time, let's not be satisfied with less than what we find in this book.

And if we find things in this book about the presence of God, I think we ought to long for more, long to have the fullness of what it is, not to be satisfied with less, and not to let the charismatics in any way cause us to give up Scripture. See, this is the thing, I'm afraid that the charismatics, these fringe groups, the crazy people out there, and much of nominal Christianity across this country that's seeking emotion, experiences, they have the light shows, they have the music blaring and playing, and it's basically just a performance. Yes, yes, we should be afraid when they're trying to appeal to people by that, and they're bypassing Scripture, and they don't preach the Gospel, they don't preach the truth.

But if we come to this book, and we're finding God is personal, and God invades people's lives, and God comes into churches, and God pours out His Spirit, and those things are in the Scripture, and there's no text that says, oh, but by the way, in this dispensation, about from the time the last apostle dies until Jesus comes again, don't expect any of that. You know what? See, I don't buy that. And I feel the same way.

I can remember the first time I heard Paul Washer say he wanted to tear the book of Acts out of his Bible, and my heart jumped, because I felt the same thing. Because I remember sitting until 4 a.m., 5 a.m., with Craig Musselman, when we were both first brand new Christians, and we'd have Whitefield's biography over here, and we'd be reading things that we read about how the glory of God came, and they prayed all through the night, and without sleep at 6 a.m., they were on the streets because they were so full of the Spirit of God, and they were out there preaching and proclaiming the Gospel. And I'm reading that.

And it's not like you just have to go to the extra-biblical books. You go to the book of Acts, and it's where is this? Where is this? And when I heard Paul say that, it was like, yes! Yes! I don't want to simply read in books about God coming and about the power of God and the presence of God. And I think if we're honest with Scripture, one thing that we can be honest about is God was real, and God came close, and God came down, and God poured out His Spirit, and there was reality like that in Scripture.

And so, look, I recognize that if we talk to somebody who hasn't experienced what we've experienced, and we don't want to set up our experiences as the rule. We don't want to set them up as what other people must experience. Lloyd-Jones had experiences.

He was hesitant to talk about them. I know some of Paul Washer's experiences, very public, out on the Internet. Did John MacArthur have that same experience? He didn't.

He didn't. On the one place, nobody should look at MacArthur and say something's wrong. He must not be saved.

I mean, we don't come to those conclusions. But on the flip side, somebody that hasn't had such experiences shouldn't look at somebody who has and write them off as charismatic or write them off as simply seeking experience. And what if MacArthur has had those experiences, and he just defines them in a different vocabulary? And see, that's one of the things too.

I think that sometimes people experience things. I have thought that people have experienced prophecy during the history of the church. Maybe demonic realities throughout the history of the church.

Maybe experiences that pertain to the visitation of God, but they use different terminology to describe it. And so, one word means something to somebody. I've come across this.

If you go back in history, you will find that some of the things we're talking about today, they talked about back then, but they don't get labeled as charismatics if they were Puritan. For one, if you're a Puritan, you just couldn't be a charismatic. But see, they use terminology that is more acceptable.

And so they get overlooked. Or sometimes if you just had so much credibility like Lloyd-Jones, people just like to... You know, we talk about revisionists, people that come along and rewrite history, like in politics or in the school system. Why? Because they want to kind of set forth their agenda.

Revisionism isn't something that just happens in public school books. It happens in Christianity too. Everybody wants to own Lloyd-Jones.

Everybody wants to own Spurgeon. Everybody wants to own the Puritans. And so basically what you do is you convince yourself that they believed what you believe.

And if you can find anything in their writings, don't look at all their writings, but if they made one statement over here that sounded halfway like it was your position, oh, you latch on to it. Well, we don't care what he said over here, over here, over here. We just ignore it.

Put the blinders on. He's in our group. And everybody likes to do that.

Everybody likes to have support for their positions. But I would just say this, that just reading, Mack Tomlinson told me that he prayed through the Psalms and found it to be extremely beneficial. So when I started the year, not every single day, well, you can kind of tell, I'm in Psalm 22, so we've had more than 22 days in the year so far.

Typically, I try to do about 15 verses, and so if something is longer than that, I split it up over a couple days. Like Psalm 18, that's a three or four day or there. It's pretty long.

But just praying through the Psalms this week, the last two I came across, listen to this. Remember what we're talking about. We're talking about the presence of God.

And the question is, is experiencing the presence of God mysticism? Okay, before I even look at these, I'm in Psalm 21 and 22, but before we even look at them, let's just throw around the term mysticism. What's mysticism? Mysticism. Obviously, it sounds like what words? Mystic, mystery.

So what's a mystery? Something hidden. So the idea of mysticism, what is that? I mean, you think about the mystics. What's the feeling? If you look the word up, there are people who are honest about defining it that it's a hard word to define like with brevity and real preciseness.

What's the feel that you get when you hear mysticism? Magic? What else? A lack of knowledge. It's basically this idea of... See, typically when we're thinking mysticism, we're talking about finding God. And it's like we're looking for God in ways that are deeper.

And you kind of have to go down a special road to find out the deeper ways to access God. I mean, I think just looking at different meanings, these kind of things came up. Deeper awareness and consciousness of God.

Valuing experience above all else. Intuition. Impression.

Having your own set of rules on how to reach God. Valuing mystical experiences in our pursuit of God. Gaining light or spiritual intuition of truth that transcends ordinary understanding.

I mean, you get a feel, right? Attaining to a knowledge of God or spiritual truth through some kind of secret, subjective experiences. It's almost like if you come under the teaching of a mystic, you have to sit at their feet. You couldn't go to any pastor.

You kind of have to sit at the feet of this mystic because they kind of have the secret way of getting to God. That's kind of the idea of mysticism. And so the question is, is pursuing the presence of God, is that mysticism? I would say this, that at least John MacArthur, when he uses the term mysticism, he's talking about something bad.

He's talking about something that isn't biblical. So I think the question comes down to this. Is there anything scriptural that we could bring out? And I've got some history books here and I'm going to get into them in a second.

But again, those are experiences of men or churches from history. Experiences of revival. Much like the experience of Leonard Ravenhill or Paul Washer that you might find.

But what about Scripture? I mean, is there anything in Scripture that seems to resonate with the presence of God? And just these two, Psalm 21. I mean, we read over these things and maybe you would say, oh, well, depending on how you interpret this, but listen to it. Just v. 6 of Psalm 21.

For you make Him most blessed forever. And he's speaking about himself. You go back up to v. 1. O Lord, in Your strength, the King rejoices.

In Your salvation, how greatly He exalts. So he's speaking of himself here. For You make Him most blessed forever and make Him glad with the joy of Your presence.

And just think about that. Is he saying God is omnipresent and so I just go through life happy and joyful at all times because God's present everywhere? I mean, is that the sense that you get? And I'm asking you, as you read verses like this, how do you come away from that? Do you come away feeling like, well, no. No, that doesn't tell me that there's any unique experience of the presence of God that a Christian can have.

That's just the way he's talking about his joy. He gets joy in his salvation. He gets joy in thinking about God, showing mercy to his soul, not dealing with Him according to his sins.

And so this is the way he talks. Or is there some reality? Is what he's saying here that there is especially joy produced when God so interacts with him that he senses God is there? And you know, that can happen a lot of ways. It can happen a lot of ways that we experience the presence of God.

Like, you know, one of the ways, I would say this, it's this awareness. The presence of God is not so much God moving from one place to another. You know, Daniel, you've blessed us with your presence tonight.

That means Daniel's here. And he came from there. But you know, when we talk about presence when it comes to God, we're not talking about God moving from one place to another.

We are actually talking about our awareness because the reality is He is everywhere. And when we talk about His presence, we are talking about our awareness that He's there. And I think many of us, including John MacArthur, I think when John talks the way he talks, he would not deny that things have happened in his life that bring close to him a sense of the reality of God.

I don't think he would argue that at all. I mean, there can be a time... I know Christians who have prayed and God gave them exactly what they prayed for. It was like a unique prayer.

Like only God knew. And God answered it in such a way that you're suddenly made aware He knows. I mean, there's a book I recommend to parents.

And if you're a parent and you've never heard about it, it's called God Knows My Size. Written by Silvia Terniciru, a Romanian who tried to escape back during the communist era out from behind the Iron Curtain. And she eventually did get out of the country once the communist regime there fell.

She tells a story. When she was a child and she was growing up, she prayed. She had to wear her older sister's shoes, which were way too many sizes too big, and they would stuff paper in them for them to fit.

And she asked the Lord for a pair of shoes. And you know what? A package somehow came. Her family was terribly poor.

And somehow a package from the West, from Christians in the West, because her parents were Christians. She wasn't yet. She was just a little child.

She wasn't a believer yet. But this package, care package, this package from the West somehow made it into the country and made it there to their family. It had clothing.

It had a pair of children's shoes. And you know what Silvia realized? What happened was she took those shoes and she tried them on and they fit perfectly. And it's like her dad read her mind.

He was watching her and she was really surprised because you know what hit her? I asked God for a pair of shoes and I didn't tell Him my size. And she got the shoes and they fit perfectly. And she looked at her dad and he just smiled and nodded and said, God knows your size.

That's where the title of the book comes from. But she was so struck suddenly by an awareness of God and His presence and that He knows. I mean, that's the reality that gripped my son Joshua when God saved him at the conference last year.

He's going along living his life thinking that he's in control of everything. And brother Charles got up there and showed how real God is and how involved God is and how every movement of Joshua's car when he spun out on I-37 over here, how God was in control of every movement of that car. And what happened is, although he didn't realize it the day he spun out, he's sitting there and he's recognizing the reality of God and God drew near.

You see, this is what we're talking about with the presence of God. It's our awareness of Him. And if we're going to say we're equally aware of God all the time, that's just not the case.

It is not the case. Do you want a greater awareness of God? I do. I definitely do.

And I think it's healthy. And I think we should not fall short of a biblical expectation on an awareness of God. You say, well, is there such a one? Listen, what do you think it means when Scripture says, draw near to God and He will draw near to you? What do you think that means? Does that mean that God is far away from you right now? Well, we talk that way sometimes.

God is far away. But what do we mean? We don't mean that spatially He's far away. What we mean is our perception, our sense of Him, our awareness of Him.

We feel cold. He feels far. Is He far? He's not far.

But that's what we mean when we talk about a presence. There is a joy in the presence. When God so moves, so acts in our lives that He makes His presence known and we become aware of it.

What the psalmist is saying is there's joy connected with that. And of course in the children of God there is. Because which ones of us like to feel that God is far off and far away? We don't want that.

We don't want to feel that. We don't want to experience that. Brother Tim, I remember reading a testimony of a lady from Westminster Chapel.

And she talked about how Brother Lloyd-Jones, after he got preached, that there was a stillness in the whole congregation where you could feel as if a hand was pushing you. And after he had got off, he went into his room and the whole congregation just sat there for 10 minutes and nobody spoke to each other leaving the chapel. Yeah, what is that? Awareness, as you were saying.

That's what happened when Paul Washer came down here and preached the first time down at Community Baptist. I think Ruby and I were probably the only ungodly ones that got up and walked out right away. Now, if you hear the reason, I was working as an engineer at the time and I told Ruby, as soon as this guy prays, we need to run out because I needed to be at work really early the next morning because we had morning meetings the next day and I'd already asked my boss for him off and I wanted to get in as much time as possible so I needed to get home and get to bed.

I didn't realize the rest of the church didn't move. But I did realize the power of the message. We got on Labus Road there and I'm driving along and it hit me.

And I looked at Ruby and I said, I think that was the most powerful message I've ever heard in my life. God comes near. There was another time when Lloyd-Jones was at Sandfields and a woman walked into the church.

She was a witch feeling constrained to go in there and she said she had an awareness of the supernatural much like in witchcraft. The only difference is this was a clean power. But there was an awareness and even as an unconverted witch, she felt that nearness of God.

But listen here in Psalm 22. Again, this is reality. This is where we walk.

This is so common to Scripture. Psalm 22 is one of my favorite psalms. But notice this.

Verse 11. Be not far from Me. Just think about those words right there.

Be not far from Me. I want Your presence. I want You close.

And Spurgeon on this says, a lively sense of the Divine Presence is a mighty stay to the heart in times of distress. Now you think about that. You think about what Spurgeon's saying there.

A lively sense of the Divine Presence is a mighty stay. It steadies your soul in times of trial and difficulty knowing God is near. Just those two, reading those.

The joy of Your presence. Be not far from Me. You see, this is the language of Scripture.

This is common language. And so, this presence of God. When you listen to Paul Washer, you know what he said? You can look it up.

There's a clip on YouTube called The Divine Presence. And I've heard Paul say this. He says, and this so resonated with my own heart and thinking on this.

He said he knew old men. Old men. I take it these were men from South America.

And he said they talked about the power of God and they talked about the presence of God. And Paul said he got to the point in his life where he said enough is enough. I am tired of reading books where somebody knew somebody who knew somebody who knew somebody who knew about the presence and power of God.

He said, I wanted it for myself. And he said, I went to praying for it. And he said it came.

And I've heard him say before, somebody might ask, what do you mean it came? Explain to me what you mean. He said, you know. And that's always the case.

When God comes close, Paul said, I am going to seek Him until I find Him or I die. And that's what he did. Listen, you can talk to some good reformed men.

You can ask star wide receiver, all American. Billy Graham was coming to town. He was in the habit of having sports figures give their testimony.

And he began to give his testimony. It was only supposed to be five minutes. It ended up being 15-20 minutes long.

And he said it was as though God rammed a steel rod down his spine. He said he came down from that pulpit and he called it liquid love. Wave after wave after wave of liquid love.

He said he was never the same again. Paul Washer said he would try to go out in the streets in Austin and preach. He said there was no power.

He was fearful. No authority. And he said God came.

And it brought to light his sin. It brought to light the glory of God. And he said he in the end was full of such joy.

Listen, the divine presence, an awareness of his closeness. You know the text that Paul Washer seized is simply this one. Many of you know it.

Jeremiah 29.13 You will seek Me and find Me when you seek for Me with all your heart. I will be found of you. You just think about that text.

You will find Me when you seek for Me with all your heart. Again, seek the Lord while He may be found. Draw close to Him and He will draw close to you.

What does that mean? What does that mean? If it doesn't mean that you will have your sense of His presence inflamed. That's exactly what that means. How can God say, draw near to Me? Which one of you is far from Him? Doesn't Scripture say He's close to every one of us? You see, the perspective is one of awareness.

And you know what? Who are we to say about another man that my level of awareness of the presence of God is the one by which you should all be measured? See, I think that's dangerous. We don't want to do that. We don't want somebody to say to us, I didn't experience that, so that can't be true.

Well look, I love John MacArthur and he's had a prominent place in my life. But I would say this, John speaks strongly about all these experiences that people experience in the charismatic circles. We're not charismatic.

I'm not applauding most of what the charismatic movement stands for. But I would say this, when you decry their experience, but then you want to turn around and tell me about your experience, what have you just done? You've basically tried to tear down their standard by setting your own experience up as the standard. Which is the very thing that he doesn't want to do.

He wants the Scripture to be the standard. And I would say, Amen. Let's let Scripture be the standard.

But I can tell you this, that throughout different periods of history, God has drawn near different individuals. God has drawn near in a number of different ways. And who are we to say, but that could never happen today.

The way God drew near to Enoch, or to Elijah, or to Moses, or to Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob. The way He drew near to David. The way He drew near to Paul, or to the early church when the place shook.

Well, that could never happen today. God's presence can't be experienced that way. To say it's mysticism? You see, by what standard are you going to say that my experience... Look, I recognize, if we're seeking experiences and we abandon this book, the devil will see to it you have experiences.

And he comes as an angel of light and he will deceive you, and you will have supernatural experiences. But when Paul Washer went to the floor, because the presence of God was so powerful, he had to go into the fetal position. When he's a maid aware of the holiness of God, that's no unclean spirit.

No unclean spirit is going to tell you and impact your life and overwhelm you with a sense of holiness. Now, to be fair, Paul falling on the ground in the fetal position is basically what John MacArthur said would happen if God came. But I don't believe that God's presence is always felt to that degree.

I think there are times it is, but not all the time. It could be joyful a lot of times because you talked about how when you get the awareness of God, it's also a joyful experience. And I was thinking of Philippians 4, where Paul says, Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I would say rejoice. And then he says in v. 5, Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

He's not talking about the second coming, but he's talking about the awareness of God. James preached on that. What do you think, James? Is it the second coming? I think the Lord is near experientially in v. 7. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

So there's an experiential peace from God that guards your heart. That's subjective. In Exodus 33, God says this, My presence will go with you.

His presence can go with us. I think there's a reality to that. I think we can feel.

We have a sense. That doesn't mean that there aren't times when we say, not how Jesus said it, but how David said it, My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? There are times when we feel forsaken. But as Charles Leiter has said, the gardener is never so close as when he's pruning with the pruning shears.

Or I think it was, I'm thinking Spurgeon, but I think it was him who said the refiner is never so close to the gold as when the gold's in the fire. But you get these realities. Psalm 105.4 Seek His presence continually.

What is that? Seek His presence continually. You see, brethren, I think that as Christians, this is the great dilemma about grieving the Spirit. Is what? The primary thing you lose is the presence of God.

You lose a sense, an awareness that He's there. Do you remember? One of the things that jumps out at me whenever I think about this is you remember during the dedication of the temple? I'm not talking about the tabernacle. I'm talking about when the temple was completed and Solomon is dedicating the temple and you remember he prayed? You remember what happened when he got done praying? Fire fell and the priests couldn't go in there because the glory of God filled the house.

They were driven from it. I mean, there's a sense of the presence of God that is overwhelming. But I thought maybe... Can I mention one more verse? Yes.

1 Corinthians 14 I've seen the unbeliever in the church and it says, falling on his face, he'll worship God and declare that God is really among you. Something happens when they're prophesying and this person

is there. Falls on his face and says God really is here.

It sounds something experiential. It is experiential. I mean, that's the idea that you don't do this, you rather do this so that he will recognize God is in your midst when a certain thing happens.

Could it be the jailer too, brother, in Acts 16? Well, I think it's very appropriate to talk about the presence of God any time we see God moving in a pronounced fashion. And so even in the answer of prayer, there can be times where we are really made aware of His presence. We come under conviction.

There's a real awareness. God is at work. If we watch somebody transformed right before us like we've watched in my own son, there's a sense of the presence of God and the working of God and the power of God.

But there are some times where it's felt through fear, a sense of holiness, a sense of joy. And I'm not talking the foolish laughter, the insanity that goes on in the charismatic circle. I'm talking about joy unspeakable and full of glory that at times almost the human frame can't contain.

Now, there can be degrees beneath that, but it's a sense of God so working in His people, among His people, upon His people, that there's an awareness of His presence. I don't want to walk around like, I don't even know what that is. No, I do know to some degree what that is and I want to know more what it is.

But here's a book, Brian Edwards on revival. People saturated with God. There has always been personal revival before public revival in those whom God uses.

This personal revival may take... Now listen to this. It may take many forms. I think that's what's important.

God works different ways with different people. It's just like if we all gave our testimony right now, everyone would be different. It's kind of like call to the ministry or God going to use a certain man mightily in the church or in revival to preach.

This personal revival may take many forms, but it always has the same effect to convince of the greatness and glory of God. I think that's key. And I wanted to start right there because when we talk about the presence of God, when God comes close, or we might say when God comes down, and you know what I mean.

Again, an awareness. But when God makes us aware of His presence, it is not going to be that man might be exalted or lifted up. God reveals Himself to show His glory, to show us we are but men, to convince us of His greatness.

I think that's key. Because if you want to test the spirits, look there. When you hear Paul Washer say what he says, see, listen.

Paul doesn't say, oh, I had this great experience and it made me into this great preacher. He says, I became aware of my sin and I became aware of the holiness of God. You see that? He's being tore down and God is being exalted.

That's the sense. That's the awareness. See, that's what I was talking about when Joshua got converted.

It was this awareness of the bigness of God. That's what Charles was trying to do in that message and he did it with effect. David Brainerd makes the following entry in his diary dated 12 July 1739 as I was walking in a dark, thick grove.

Unspeakable glory. Just think about that. Okay, this is the renowned David Brainerd.

John MacArthur would embrace this man as a man of God. He was reformed. Died in Jonathan Edwards' house.

And you're not going to find anybody to speak evil about him today. I mean, yeah, there's probably some exception, but listen to this. What are we going to do? Are we going to write this off as he's just seeking a spiritual buzz? Brainerd, July 12, 1739, as I was walking in a dark, thick grove, unspeakable glory seemed open to the view and apprehension of my soul.

I do not mean any external brightness, for I saw no such thing, nor do I intend any imagination of any body of light somewhere in the third heaven or anything of that nature, but it was a new inward apprehension. You see, this is what I'm hitting. It's an awareness.

Or anything of that nature. It was a new inward apprehension or view that I had of God, such as I never had before, nor anything which had the least resemblance of it. I stood still.

And what did He do? He wondered and He admired. He worshipped. I knew that I never had seen before anything comparable to it for excellency and beauty.

You see, it was widely different from all the conceptions that ever I had of God or things divine. I had no particular apprehension of any one person in the Trinity, either the Father, the Son, or the Holy Ghost, but it appeared to be divine glory. My soul rejoiced with joy unspeakable to see such a God, such a glorious, divine being.

And I was inwardly pleased and satisfied that He should be God over all forever and ever. My soul was so captivated and delighted with the excellency, loveliness, greatness, and other perfections of God that I was even swallowed up in Him. What are we going to say? Well, it doesn't seem like MacArthur is seeking spiritual buzz.

It seems like as if he was just walking and manifesting. And yet, Scripture says that if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. And if you know about Brainerd's life, he was constantly drawing near, constantly wanting more, constantly wanting God, constantly praying, constantly fasting, constantly faithful to evangelize and go after the souls of the Indians and deny himself.

For others, personal revival came in a less dramatic way. Sometimes over a period of time, even years, but always step by step, they're led into a closer walk with God and a deeper understanding of God. But this is not achieved through any set formula.

That's important. There's no set formula. See, this is kind of one of the areas where you want to be careful with Ravenhill.

I love Ravenhill. But he kind of does approach things as though there's a set formula. That if you do X, Y, and Z, revival will come.

You know, he wrote the book *Why Revival Tarrys*, and so he gives you the prescription for if you don't want it to tarry, you do this, this, and this. I don't think we want to talk that way because somebody may do X, Y, and Z and then revival doesn't come. Now, he would probably say there's a failure on our part.

But see, I don't think that's the way you want to view it. I think you want to view it as God is sovereign and it's good to seek Him, but it's not always the same. This is not achieved through any set formula.

It has no doctrinal label that can be tied to it. Now look, he's not saying that doctrine and truth are not critical. He's not saying that we throw theology out the window.

When he says what he says there, what he means is there's no one denomination or doctrinal persuasion that you need to embrace to assure you that this is going to happen. And you know, that's important because sometimes Calvinists feel like they're entitled to everything because they think we've got the truth. Don't fall for that.

This is one of our problems today. People experience God and immediately label it and then demand that others receive the same. But that's a human attempt to shackle God and confine Him to a set experience.

I think that's very helpful. Very helpful. I'm telling you all this because I want you to want more.

Look, I'm persuaded that having experiences of more of God is one of... I mean, if you actually taste this, you taste and see that the Lord is good, it's one of the greatest persuasions to holiness in your own life that you not grieve the Spirit, you not put up barriers to His presence in your life. Here's something. What does it say? Without exception, those whom God uses in revival are men and women who fear God and sin and nothing else.

They take seriously the command, Be holy as I am holy, says the Lord. The New Testament is full of commands to be holy. And without doubt, unholiness by our Christian leaders is a major reason why we have so little spiritual success today.

Listen to this. After 26 years of apparently successful ministry in a large London Baptist church, Douglas Brown became acutely aware that something was missing from his life. This is like Paul Washer saying enough.

I've had enough of living without the presence of God in my life. And you know the interesting thing is, Paul says that from that day to this, Christ is more real to him than any person in the room with him. It's like God has made Himself aware to him and has never taken it away.

That's desirable. Douglas Brown became acutely aware that something was missing from his life. Christ laid His hand on a proud minister and told him that he had not gone far enough, that there were reservations in his surrender.

Here nearly broke my heart while I was preaching. Throughout November and December of 1920, an intense struggle went on. Carried on through to January the following year.

Then in February 1921, Douglas Brown was wrestling in prayer when he felt able to yield his life fully to God. Then something happened. I found myself in the loving embrace of Christ forever and ever.

And all power and all joy and all blessedness rolled in like a deluge. And here it is again. God had waited four months.

That's how long it took. But listen to that. Listen to his experience.

I found myself in the loving embrace of Christ forever and ever. And all power and all joy and all blessedness rolled in like a deluge. I mean, I could go on in here, but Duncan Campbell, the Hebrides revival.

One night a young deacon took his Bible, read to the other young men on their knees from Psalm 24, 3-5. Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, he will receive blessing from the Lord. The deacon said to the others, Brethren, is it not so much humbug to be waiting thus night after night? If we ourselves are not right with God? Lifting his hands toward heaven, he cried, Oh God, are my hands clean? Is my heart pure? Instantly, he fell prostrated on the floor.

An awesome awareness of God filled the barn. God released a stream of supernatural power in their lives. The blood of Jesus Christ poured in and cleansed their souls.

That night they found themselves searched by the holiness of God and saw things in their lives they had never suspected. This was during this season. Duncan Campbell had come.

The whole region seemed saturated with God. You see, that's another word. We can talk awareness, presence.

Saturated with God. Wherever people were, in their homes, in the fields, on the road, they were awesomely aware of God's presence. Visitors to the island noticed it and remarked on it.

An unusual man came to the minister's home one day for prayer. Reverend Mackay told him he had not seen him in the services. The man responded, I haven't been to church, but this revival is in the air.

I can't get away from the Spirit. Campbell was beginning meetings in another church in another part of the island. The minister was out in the field when suddenly Campbell came running from the pastor's study calling out, it's coming, it's coming.

We've got through at last. We're over the top. That very night, revival broke and God's presence was everywhere.

He goes on to say, in the meetings that night, at that very moment, the house shook. Dishes rattled in the sideboard and wave after wave of God's power swept through the building. Some thought there had been an earthquake, but Duncan Campbell remembered Acts 4.31. One night, the service did not end until between 1 and 2 o'clock in the morning.

People were just beginning to disperse when a messenger arrived saying that revival had broken out in another church several miles away. Now imagine this. You have a service.

Revival's in the island. The meeting lets out. It might have been good.

Remember, it's like the Spirit's in the air during this season. Nothing unusual happened. They get done with the meeting and just as the church is about ready to let out, somebody breaks through the door and shouts, Revival's broke out over in so-and-so.

So all the people, even though it's late, it's between 1 and 2 in the morning. We're not going home. They all head across that field to this other church.

It was several miles away. Reverend Campbell, the minister, and about 200 people. Can you imagine that? 200 people.

They're going across that field because Revival's broke out. They start across the fields taking a shortcut to the other church. Suddenly, the sky was filled with the sound of angelic voices singing.

Everyone heard it and they fell on their knees in the field. Some were saved right there as they knelt there. Then they went on to the other service.

There's another place in here where the writer says that Duncan Campbell twice experienced singing from heaven. He told the people, don't put your trust in that. Don't go looking for that.

But he said he was very thankful to have experienced it. What are we going to call that? Now you know what? We could stand back and say, that hasn't happened. Wait a second.

There actually is a biblical example of something like that happening. And so, we want to be careful. We want to be careful.

You know what? We want to be careful of this. We don't want to walk around thinking that we're somehow super-spiritual or hyper-spiritual and live on impressions. That doesn't mean that God cannot impress people.

It does not mean that God can't supernaturally lead people. But we need to check everything by Scripture. But as much as anything, test the fruits of things.

Look, when Duncan Campbell expresses these things, you can research the man's character. When you hear that Jonathan Edwards had experiences like this, which he had, which I'm not going to take the time to get into. Not all of it, but some of it.

But you find a man like Brainerd. He experienced what he did. You can read about his character.

Paul Washer. You know something about his character. John Wesley's Journal for the 1st of January, 1739.

Mr. Hall, Mr. Hinchings, Mr. Ingham, Mr. Whitfield, Hutchings, and my brother Charles were present at our love feast in Fetter Lane with about sixty of the brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exalting joy and many fell to the ground. And soon as we were recovered a little from the awe and amazement at the presence of His Majesty, we broke out with one voice, we praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.

Charles Simeon. This is an evangelical Anglican Calvinist. He describes this.

He speaks about these matters. This is a blessing which though not to be appreciated or understood by those who have never received it. That's so key.

And that is what is so clear to me, this is Lloyd-Jones, in so many writings, men are writing about things they do not know. They have never received and that they do not understand. Back to Simeon, he says, it's not to be appreciated or understood by those who have never received it.

It is yet most assuredly enjoyed by many of God's chosen people. We scarcely know how to describe it because it consists chiefly in an impression on the mind occasioned by manifestations of God's love to the soul. Andy Hamilton described it as liquid love.

I think my wife was telling me she was reading about some woman who described it in the same terminology. Who was that? Who? Liquid love. See, the thing about it is, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Sarah Edwards, Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan, Charles Simeon, A.B. Simpson, I mean, the list goes on of the men.

Some of them you haven't heard. Many Puritans. One after another after another have had experiences of the presence of God that overwhelms them with His majesty, His holiness, a sense of His love.

You've got to love what Lloyd-Jones inserted right there with Charles Simeon's words. So often, those who have never experienced try to be the authorities on it. You see, I would just say to somebody like our brother John MacArthur, please, don't condemn what on the one hand, drawing close to God, the presence of God, the joy of His presence.

You will find Me when you seek for Me with all your heart. I shall be found of you. Those kinds of realities are in Scripture.

The idea that somebody can come in the meeting and have a sense that God is there. The idea that people went to prayer in Acts 4 and God came in a unique way and shook the place, which, by the way, happened in the Hebrides revival. Listen, what we don't want to do is stand up and act the authorities on these matters and downplay these things when Scripture speaks of them and God's people throughout history.

And I guarantee you that if you go to the MacArthur camp and you say, what do you think of Lloyd-Jones? What do you think of John Owen? What do you think of A.B. Simpson? What do you think of Charles Simeon? What do you think of David Brainerd? What do you think of Jonathan Edwards? Sarah Edwards? What do you think of them? Are you going to say that their collective experiences are simply to be written off as some mysticism? I'm not going there. I'm not going there. Because I see in Scripture that there's more.

There's more. I see experiences of people in Scripture that are beyond my experiences. And I hear of experiences in history that go beyond my experiences.

And I want more. I want more. I think one of the things that needs to happen is there needs to be a desperation.

I think there's a place to say like Paul Washer did, enough is enough. I'm sick of living off of books. I'm sick of reading about people that knew the Lord.

I want to know the Lord. I'm tired of reading the book of Acts. I would look at Craig and say with our books open, Craig, where is this? Where is this? Where are the days that Wesley writes of? That Whitefield experienced? Where are they? Where are the prayer meetings that go until 3 a.m. and God comes and all

we can do is fall on our faces and break out into song? Where is that? Are we just going to be content? Are you guys going to be content with these books or some similar ones like that? And let them sit there on your shelf? And you look at them? Well, you know, pine away.

Well, they had that in that day. I guess we'll just be satisfied because after all, there's guys on the radio and on the Internet who say that it doesn't exist. And all we're doing is chasing the spiritual buzz.

We don't want to do that. We don't want to be charismatics. So we're just going to be content to have it in the Christian history books.

And you know what? Guys that haven't experienced this, I think Lloyd-Jones is right and I think Charles Asimian is right. So often, the ones that are commenting on it as though there's no validity, there's no reality to it. Don't do that.

Don't do that. We can look at brothers like that, sisters like that, and we can say, look, we recognize that perhaps you haven't experienced it. But that doesn't mean that others haven't.

We want to be careful that we don't set our own experience as the standard. Listen to me again. We are talking about an awareness of God.

An awareness of His love. An awareness of His majesty. An awareness of His holiness.

That's what we're talking about. We're talking about God coming close in ways we sense it and feel it. I don't believe that that is mysticism.

I believe that that is something that God is actually telling His people to pursue. Pursue me. Thirst after me.

Want it like Paul wanted it. When he said enough is enough. I'm going to seek God until I find this.

We don't want to put God on our timelines, but I think that kind of desperation... See, I don't think you ever get desperate like that until you actually have a sense that there's reality to it. You see what God did in Paul's life? Paul Washer? He put men in his life who had experienced this. And Paul knew those men were godly.

They were some of the godliest men in his life. And he knew they talked about the power of God and the presence of God in a way that he couldn't connect with. And sometimes that's what it takes.

Sometimes it takes reading a book like this, like Martin Lloyd-Jones' book, and not saying, oh, he's just pursuing a spiritual buzz, but saying, wait a second, he's not just talking about his own experience. In fact, he hardly talks about his own experience at all. He's talking about Wesley, Whitefield, Brainerd, Owen, Goodwin, and many more.

And you're like, oh, wow. Calvinistic men? Men we consider to be our forefathers in the faith? Did he experience this? I just happened to open to this. Andrew Murray of South Africa, he was presiding at a prayer meeting in one of his churches when suddenly he heard a noise, a kind of rumbling, something analogous to that which happened on the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem as described in Acts 2. And there suddenly the Spirit fell upon them and revival broke out, which led to many conversions among church members and outsiders.

Now that has been the testimony and the history of the church throughout the centuries until this present century. This is Lloyd-Jones. This isn't some wild-eyed charismatic.

This is a man who studied history, read ceaselessly. I want to bring this because I don't want us content. Don't be content.

I don't mean an unrighteous discontent, but I know God is satisfied when we are not content at the little awareness that we have of Him. When we hunger and thirst for more, when we strive to get the dirt and the filth out of our lives, like that young deacon there on the New Hebrides Islands, who ascends the hill of the Lord, clean hands, a pure heart, not wanting to grieve the Spirit. And so we go through life just not knowing these realities because we live these compromised lives.

Don't do that. You know what it says to God when you say things like, enough is enough. Enough with the sin.

Enough with living cheap, shallow lives. Enough. I'm going to seek God because I want more.

I want more of Him. I mean, look how much that honors the Lord when we so live as we want Him. An awareness.

That reality. Don't you want that? Go for a walk tonight and you're out in the dark and you're in some thicket? And glory. I mean, I'm not going to search it out.

Jonathan Edwards talks one time about riding on his horse and he was contemplating the glories of Christ. If Kevin was here, he would know exactly what specific aspect of the glory of Christ. But suddenly, it was like he was transported.

John Flavel, another one of the Puritans, he had an experience that, again, glory. Just glory swept him up. You can read Charles Simeon.

When John Piper does Simeon's biographical sketch, he talks about one of Simeon's friends finding Simeon sitting in the dark. And when he started to speak to him, he said the only word that could come out of Simeon was glory. Glory.

Don't you want that? I hope so. Father, we pray, may You give us a longing for such things. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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