

BY DALE FLETCHER, M.S.

Faith and HEALTH connection

“Abiding in God’s Presence... A Spiritual Exercise for a Healthier Life”

A few years ago I made an entry about the value of being in God’s presence in my journal. It reads “A huge part of my recent joy has been because I have been in God’s presence. It’s not just the peace that brings the joy, it’s sensing His presence! It’s not so much faith that’s the forgotten factor in health, it’s God’s regular presence that is instrumental - making those countless lifestyle choices we make on a daily basis - God guiding us, giving us strength through the Holy Spirit - His presence when we have negative feelings. His presence can help get us through difficult and stressful moments and situations. His presence can be the source that guides us in everything we do. It’s the power of His presence!” Let’s explore the importance of being closely connected to God—the spiritual exercise of abiding in His presence, and the application to our emotional and physical health.

What the Bible Says: In the following verse the writer addresses the positive emotions that come from being in close company with God. “You (God) will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever. (Psalm 16:11) In the book of John, Jesus tells his disciples that unless they “remain in Him” they will not be able to do anything. “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers.” (John 15:1-4)

What the Research Says: When we are engaged in activities that are pleasurable and that please God, we experience positive feelings and emotions such as joy, trust, love and peace. This very positive state of mind causes the glands of our body to release chemicals into our system that are health promoting. The more we stay well connected to God and sense the awesomeness of His presence, the more of these healthy chemicals will be released into our body and the physiological impact will be positive for our health. Additionally, the greater connection we have with God, the more hope and optimism we will have. Jeff Levin, PhD, in his book *God, Faith and Health*, says “The positive emotions resulting from religious worship can help us to negotiate and overcome the stresses of daily life.”

What You Can Do: How do we abide in God’s presence? It’s clearly a very personal thing. For me, it’s when I am doing things like the following: reading the Bible, praying, thinking about spiritual things, working through a Bible study booklet, worshipping in church, and listening to worshipful music. I love to run and often I will talk to God during my runs which can make it a special time in God’s presence. I frequently play soft Christian music as I read my devotional material and

*Physical exercise has some value,
but spiritual exercise is much more
important for it promises a reward
in both this life and the next*
—1 Timothy 4:8 NLT

the Bible in the morning. I would hope that you might have a special place that you can go to or a meaningful activity you can engage in and sense that you are in the presence of God. Maybe it’s a place outside where you can enjoy a quiet walk. Perhaps it’s a room in your home that is decorated in a very personal way that is special to you.

When I experience being in God’s presence it’s a powerful thing. I have more hope about the future, my cares and concerns seem to fade away. I sense that I have more internal strength and power to do the things I want to do and to be the type of person I want to be. When I sense this close connection to God I don’t have to try as hard to make things happen. I can do things in His strength and not my own. This special power comes through God’s Holy Spirit that lives in those who believe in Jesus. (Ephesians 3:16) For this reason, Christians have something extra going for them, an extra edge if you will, as they can avail themselves to the power that the Holy Spirit brings them. And this power becomes especially available the more we are in God’s presence... the more we abide in Him.

An important component to sense the closeness of God, regardless of our physical location or activity, is that we slow down and are still enough to be able to sense that we are connected with Him and that He is with us. We need to be able to block out the “noise” that is typically all around us so that we can feel close to Him. As well, it’s important to know that our heart is pure and that we have not been in intentional sin. Warren Wiersbe, in his book *Five Secrets of Living*, says that the secret to remaining in God’s presence is obeying His principles. The more we are obeying His principles out of love, the more we will want to spend time with Him and be in His presence. The more we are in His presence the more we will experience love, joy and peace. Being in His presence will give us more power, through the Holy Spirit, to make healthy choices and any necessary behavior change. This, in turn, will impact on our health in a positive way.

Secrets of Living an ABUNDANT LIFE

*The secret of living is fruitbearing.
The secret of fruitbearing is abiding in God.
The secret of abiding is obeying God.
The secret of obeying is loving God.
The secret of loving is knowing God.*

Adapted from *5 Secrets of Living* by Warren W. Wiersbe

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