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Searching for the Presence of God

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Searching for the Presence of God

Abstract

"Do you wish to experience the presence of God? Do justice. Care for the needy, the lonely, the afflicted."

Posting about doing God's kingdom work from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/searching-for-the-presence-of-god/>

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Searching for the Presence of God

 [all in allthings.org /searching-for-the-presence-of-god/](https://allthings.org/searching-for-the-presence-of-god/)

Dave Schelhaas

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 51](#)

[Isaiah 58:1-12](#)

[Matthew 18:1-7](#)

Again and again in the Psalms and prophetic writings of the Old Testament, we hear calls to care for the poor, for widows and children, for aliens and the afflicted. But nowhere is this call as powerful as in Isaiah 58.

“Raise your voice like a trumpet,” God says to Isaiah. “Tell my people how they have been rebellious.”

“My people seem confused,” God explains. “They pray to me every day. They ask me to show them what I want. Yet they’re downright smug about how they obey me. They seem to really believe they are faithful to my commands.”

One imagines God scratching his head here. “They want me to bless them. They want me to come near them. ‘Why have we fasted?’ they ask me. ‘Why have we humbled ourselves if you are not going to pay attention to us?’”

In reply, God speaks to Isaiah. He tells Isaiah to say to them: “Even on the days that you fast, you do as you please. You exploit your workers. You end your fasts by arguing and griping at one another. You even hit one another with wicked fists.

“You can’t fast this way and expect me to hear your voice.”

“What do you think a fast is anyway?” God says, through Isaiah’s mouth. “Do you think you are some kind of one-day wonder, as if a day-long fast is good enough? Do you think if you walk around with your head bowed, or lie down for a while on some stinky old blanket, that’ll do the trick?”

“Now, Isaiah,” God says, “treat them like first-graders. Ask them questions that have such easy answers that they will be ashamed. Ask:

“Isn’t this what you want?

That I loose the chains of injustice?

That I get rid of those painful handcuffs called poverty and oppression?

That I break the chains and the handcuffs?”

And ask again,

“Don’t I want you

To share your food with the hungry,

To provide shelter for the homeless,

To clothe the naked,

To never, never turn away from any human in need?"

Now, God pauses for a moment. He looks at his servant Isaiah, smiles, and says, "Tell them that if they do these things, their little basket-covered candlelight will explode with the light of a sunrise, and they will be healthy again. Knowledge of their goodness will precede them wherever they go, and I, the Lord God, will always have their backs. Tell them," God says, "that if they do these things, they will experience my presence."

So, here we read an account of God's people longing to experience the presence of God, but they don't. And they don't understand why. "Why have we humbled ourselves," they ask, "if you are not going to be near to us?"

Jesus must be remembering Isaiah 58 when he says to those whom he welcomes into his kingdom (recorded in Matthew 25): "I was hungry and you fed me; I was thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a refugee and you welcomed me into your home; I needed clothes and you clothed me; I was sick and you looked after me; I was in prison and you visited me...Don't you see? When you did these things to my people, you were really doing them to me."

Do you wish to experience the presence of God? Do justice. Care for the needy, the lonely, the afflicted. Touch the helpless and hurting. Look into the eyes of the poor. There, you will see Jesus. There, you will experience the presence of God in the here and now.