

IN THE LIKENESS OF GOD

Why is it that so many professed believers feel like God is so distant from them? Why do people across this beautiful planet feel as though God is somewhere "*way out there*" and that there's a huge gulf between Him and them? How is it possible for us to feel like we're far from our Creator when He's omnipresent? If He is, indeed, everywhere, and as close as my breath then why do I not feel His presence in my life like I desire to? These questions and more will be answered in this short article. Hopefully by the end we'll have a strong grasp of exactly how to "feel" close to God and to experience His manifest presence.



The answer to all the above questions can be found in one simple word: **likeness**. Things that have the same nature are attracted to one another and can have relationships with one another. Those that do not have similar natures cannot. For example, a man may pet his dog, and while the dog may seem to appreciate it because the nature of the man and the nature of the dog is so distant from one another, their connection is restricted. Although a monkey is one of the most

intelligent animals on Earth and is over 95% similar to humans, the dissimilarities in the remaining 5% are so great that there can be almost no relationship between the two. All relationships work this way. The moment there's a dissimilarity there is separation. The more a couple is alike in nature (not personality) the more they can be intimately connected in a relationship. It's the same with our Creator.

There are *three main components* that make up mankind being reconciled to God for the purpose of having a relationship: atonement, justification, and regeneration. Atonement is the blood of Christ paying for our sin and releasing us from the bonds that separate us from God, but justification is the legal piece that declares us righteous before His courts. When a man bows the knee, recognizes his sin and need of a Savior, and accepts His atoning sacrifice, he is declared righteous, or justified, before Him. It's a legal thing. But regeneration is altogether different.

Regeneration is a matter of the heart, a process that brings back the "**likeness**" or image of God in the person that existed before the sin of Adam. The reason someone who is justified by giving his life to the Messiah can immediately have a relationship with God is that there is enough of His image restored to allow him to be called a "*child of God*."

Have you ever seen a newborn baby and said, "**he looks just like his daddy!**" even though he's bald and chubby while his dad is tall with a full head of hair? But there's enough of the father's image in the baby to allow people to associate the two. This is what happens when someone gives their life to Messiah. They become "*born again*" and are immediately given enough of His image to be considered His child. But even though the young believer is now justified in the courts of heaven and has crossed over from death to life, the Creator is limited in His relationship with His new child by the level of the image that exists. You can have a relationship with a one-year-old but it's limited by the maturity of the child. The more he grows, the greater the likeness and similarity, the greater the relationship.

This is the purpose of pursuing the holiness of God. This is the purpose of decreasing our image and increasing His. This is the purpose of why we forgive, why we're not supposed to judge, why we love with no expectation of return, and why we keep any of the commandments. *It's all toward one purpose*: becoming more in His image and creating a deeper relationship with Him. The more we have in common with Him, the more image of Him we bear, the more His manifest presence is realized in our lives, and the less we "**feel**" distant.

Furthermore, what happens in the earth realm is what determines our heavenly position in Christ. Matthew 5:17-21 says that those who break the least of the commandments and teach others to do so will be called "least in the kingdom." By default, this means that those who *keep* the commandments and teach others to do the same will be the greatest. But He's not just talking about the static keeping of the Torah, because there are many unbelieving rabbis who do that. The entire Torah was given for the purpose of creating the guardrails and instructions on how to stay in a relationship with God by changing our character, nature, and image to reflect more of His. The greatest in the kingdom will be the ones who look the most like Yeshua, whose image most reflects His. And since the way our image grows to look more like His is by keeping His instructions, then what Yeshua said in Mathew 5 is most definitely true. Status in the kingdom is related in proportion to how close we are to Him and how close we are to Him is determined by

how much we allow ourselves to be formed into His image. *The commandments are simply the means to that end.* The commandments are designed to kill the flesh and transform the character.

The problem is that because we really can't understand just how holy God is, we tend to believe that we're more holy than we really are. This leads us to the deception that we're closer to God than we actually are, which, in turn, leads to confusion about why we feel distant from God when we think we're pleasing Him. So then we pray, "*Father, please draw me near to You. Draw me near.*" We don't realize that His immanence, His fully penetrating presence into all things (including us), means that in a spatial sense, we cannot draw any nearer to Him than we already are because He's already as close to us as our very breath. He's already omnipresent, so why do we feel so distant even when we're begging for closeness? Because there's the dissimilarity of nature in our lives. A. W. Tozer calls it "*moral dissimilarity.*" A holy God cannot manifest His presence in the presence of an unholy, carnal believer. He desires to but is restricted by our level of holiness, commitment, and pride. Let's take a look at King David for a moment.

David was a man after God's own heart not because he kept all the commandments perfectly, but because David broke many commandments and showed a lack of understanding that some commandments even existed. No. He was called a man after God's own heart because of his moral similarity. His character was in God's image. His nature was similar. When Shemei threw rocks at him, David's mighty men wanted to **kill** him for disrespecting their king. David's response was to pardon him. He wondered if perhaps what Shemei was saying was from Yahweh. If that was the case, David didn't want to raise his hand against the LORD. But if it wasn't from God, then, he thought, perhaps the Lord would repay him for the slander. How many of us take that kind of non-judgmental position when we're attacked? How many of us live our lives with such love that we actually believe that God is the final avenger of all justice? David let God be God and stayed in his lane as a king who only did what the Creator said to do.

Another example is when David was sitting under Saul. Although Saul threw spears at David, David **never** threw them back. Even when he was being hunted by Saul and had the chance to kill him twice, he dared not raise his hand against him.

David let God be God. When Absalom committed treason and removed David from his throne by promising better leadership, forcing David into hiding once again -- the first recorded church split, I think. ;-)) -- David could have stopped the rebellion but didn't. He chose to let God be God. He did nothing to become king and he fully trusted that if God wanted him to remain king that He would defend his throne. David's nature was morally similar. He carried Yahweh's image in the weightiest of matters. Although David started off a bit shaky with the whole Bathsheba incident, his time in exile and incredible tribulations caused him to seek the Lord with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength.

So why do we believers not experience such *amazing* manifestations from the Holy One of Israel more often? Why do we feel so distant so often? It's because we've reduced the Creator of heaven and earth to a finite man-made god who is our friend and confidant. We've forgotten how holy He really is. We've lost the truth in Christianity that He transcends all things, is above all things, holds the entire universe in the palm of His hand, and has a nature so different from ours that like a human and an ape, the two natures can hardly communicate. He is *perfectly* generous.

We are *perfectly* selfish. (Few believers give even 5% of what God gave them back to the Kingdom much less the commanded principle of the tithe.) He expresses perfect love and maintains His bride as the apple of His eye. We are self-centered and don't care about loving even our neighbor as ourselves much less loving our spouses the way Christ loved the Church.

When all is said and done, we live for ourselves and easily put aside any commandment that puts any burden on our own goals and agendas. Then we have the audacity to wonder why we don't feel close to God and why He doesn't answer our prayers. We're nothing like Him! We actually think He should speak to us and manifest Himself to us, crossing over from His perfect holy habitation and into our unholy, self-centered, ape-like world where we've proven time and time again that we only come to Him when we *need* something and care not about His kingdom agenda. ***Really?!*** And we wonder why we feel distant!

What we need today is a generation of people who understand the holiness, omnipotence, imminence, and perfection of God. What we need is a revival of similarity, a generation that seeks to restore His image on the earth and to increase the likeness of His nature within men. When this happens, God will once again walk among His people as He did in the Garden. He will no longer have to cry out, "***Adam, where are you?***" because we will have stopped trying to cover our nakedness with our fig leaves of human nature and will have bridged the gap through a daily repentant heart and the putting on of **HIS** nature. When we start thinking His thoughts, feeling through His emotions, reacting in situations like Yeshua, and seeing things through His eyes, we will have transcended the initial nursery room image of God in favor of a mature likeness that will qualify us not just to understand that His presence is all around us, but will allow us to actually experience that presence in the same ways we read about in the pages of Scripture. We will no longer just read about how these incredible Bible characters interacted with the Most High in fantastical ways and wish that we could experience Him in a similar fashion; we'll ***become*** modern-day Bible characters, experiencing the living Word in our own lives and setting the example for generations to come.

Shalom!
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April 2018