SPIRITUAL LESSONS FOR YOUR PERSONAL GROWTH

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"Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place. . ."

If I just read those words, I hear the music in my mind. I can even hear the congregation singing with me, "I can feel God's mighty power and God's grace," and I feel a sense of calm throughout my body and an invigorating energy lifting my spirit.

"I can hear the brush of angel's wings,
I see glory on each face.
Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place."

There are other songs that lift my spirit, but Surely The Presence is one that never fails. I really can feel an extra energy of love and joy in my heart whenever I sing those words.

The words and music were written by Lanny Wolfe and were based on Jesus' words in Matthew 18:20 "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." Singing the song deepens my knowing that there is something beyond myself that is present and making me stronger. It is a good feeling; in fact it is a very good feeling, one that I'd like to carry with me all of the time.

All of which brings to mind the realization that most of the time my thoughts are caught up in the activities and stresses of the moment. When I need the awareness of the "Presence" most is when I am least aware.

Recent studies have shown that our attention span has been reduced from 12 seconds down to 8. Eight seconds is all we can muster to focus on any one thing at one time thanks to all the conflicting factors going on around us.

Driving in the middle of a three lane city artery at over 50 miles per hour, we have to pay heed to any number of individual cars on either side of us, giving particular attention those which are weaving
from lane to lane in a futile attempt to go faster than the traffic flow. Adding to the distraction are the drivers who are talking on their cell phones, eating a breakfast MacMuffin or drinking their Starbucks coffee. OK, so I'm drinking my Starbuck's too, but that's different. (Oh sure.)

Stresses and distraction are constantly colliding with all of us, all of the time. Even those of us who are retired have a laundry list of 'to do's, and when two or three are completed and crossed off the list, four or five are added at the bottom.

In the last three days we have been back and forth between three cell phone providers and countless hours on the phone or on-line trying to make what should have been a simple transfer from one provider to another. It all finally resolved yesterday and we felt like we needed to celebrate a victory over confusion and stress. And then we realized that in the midst of all that activity we had totally lost our sense of 'The Presence.'

Surely the Presence of the Lord was with us the whole time, every step of the way. But we lost conscious awareness of that Presence because of the frustrations, complications and seeming ineptness of some of the people we were dealing with. That was combined with our own lack of techie knowledge and impatience. God was there, but we weren't.

Yes, stresses of one sort or another are with us every day. Even those alone and bored to death, have to deal with stress, the stress of loneliness and feeling forgotten or unimportant. And the mere fact that we have stress is an indication that we have lost our sense of 'The Presence.' And perhaps just becoming aware of our stress is all we need to let it go and return to that peaceful place of harmony and contentment.

Breathe. Your breath will replace stress if you turn your attention from the stressful situation to simple breathing. God's presence is in
the breath of life and when you turn your thoughts to an awareness of your breathing, you let go of the anxieties and frustrations of whatever is causing you stress. Breathe!

With each in-breath imagine you are breathing in the loving presence of God. Filled with Spirit you are capable of dealing with and overcoming any kind of stress. In fact when you are filled with the Presence of Spirit there is no stress. Everything is calm and you are capable of accomplishing whatever is set before you. Just breathe.

With every breath we not only bring life giving oxygen to our heart, to carry to every extremity of our body from our brain to our big toe, we are filling our spiritual body with God's holy presence.

Stress isn't the only reason we lose awareness of God's Presence. Often times it's because our life objectives aren't in line with God's guidance; we're off purpose, not fulfilling God's plan of good that is the reason for our existence. We're marching to the beat of an alien drummer or we've drifted into a path that worships a false god.

After leading his people out of slavery under the Egyptian Pharaoh and into the desert, Moses went up to the mountain for forty days to receive guidance from the Lord. When he returned he found his disgruntled people had melted their gold to make an idol to a false god. They were afraid of what lay ahead for them on their journey and lost their faith in the Lord God, and began to believe they were being led into disaster. They had a negative shift in consciousness and lost their trust in Moses leadership. They actually had a Divine destiny, but it was up to Moses to get his people back into the consciousness of believing.

Like the Hebrew's in the dessert we can get distracted from pursuing and reaching our highest and best good, from fulfilling the divine plan God has for each one of our lives. When we do we wind up worshiping a false God, generally the god of ego gratification. When we are gratifying our ego self we aren't able to keep an
awareness of God's loving presence; the two are in conflict and the one we give attention to dominates our thoughts.

To test where we are we need to ask a simple question. Is the path I am pursuing more important to me than knowing, feeling and acting on God's love? Which is more important to me, making money, buying a more luxurious house, getting a promotion, winning accolades, or being of service to my community, helping someone get a job or finish school, and becoming a friend to someone of a different faith, or color, or ethnicity, or even sexual orientation? Which is more important, me or the God of goodness and mercy to all.

There's nothing wrong with making money or becoming a huge success. But there’s an obligation that goes with big accomplishments. The greater the success the bigger the responsibility to use that success for the good of humanity. Personal greed is not the way to find God's loving Presence or to reach a place of warmth, joy, happiness and contentment. Love God (first and foremost) and love one another are the only two commandments in Jesus' teachings. Follow that path and God's loving, helping, guiding Presence will be with you always and all ways.

There is a little story within the fictional story of "The Dalai Lama's Cat" that sheds light on this lesson. A very wealthy, globally successful self-development guru came to visit the Dalai Lama. As he spoke he expanded on his many achievements, wealth and successes. But there seemed to be something amiss and it took a while for the guru to get to the point that he was not very happy. Not a good thing for the master of selling happiness through personal achievement to others. Eventually he got to the point.

"Your Holiness, I have been a life coach more than twenty years. I've helped millions of people find their passions, realize their dreams and achieve abundance." On and on he went. At last he said, "I've become a very wealthy man. . . But it isn't working for me."
He told the Dalai Lama he realized he needed a break from his schedule and stopped working, grew a beard, spent time reading and looking after his garden. But his wife became very unhappy with what was going on. She wanted to continue spending her time with celebrities, going to parties and appearing on the social pages. Then she wanted a divorce. And the guru didn't know what to do.

The Dalai Lama assured him there was nothing wrong with his wealth. "It can be most useful when used for good purposes, but it is not a true cause of happiness." His wealth, power, all his abilities were all very good, but not the true cause for his happiness. A true cause is not subject to change, it is and will always be the same result from the same cause. Heating water creates steam. That's a true cause. Water plus heat equals steam. . . always.

Teaching people to live more positive lives is a good thing, but it is not a true cause. There is the danger that self-development can lead to self-cherishing, self-absorption and self-infatuation. Those are not the road to happiness.

"There are two main principles for happiness," the Dalai Lama said. "The first is the wish to give happiness to others, which the Buddhists define as love, and second, the wish to help free others from suffering or dissatisfaction, which we define as compassion." The shift is from placing 'self' at the center of your thoughts to putting 'others' there. "the paradox is that the more we can focus our thoughts on the well-being of others, the happier we become," the Dalai Lama concluded.

As we have indicated, being filled with The Presence brings peace, contentment and self confidence, but it also brings responsibility. The major message from Jesus was to love one another. In fulfilling His teaching and as our needs are taken care of, we broaden our view to show love, caring and help to others.

We need only to recognize in the news that bombards us daily,
that it appears mankind has fallen way short of living in Jesus' message. However, we see evidence right here in our own community of neighbors putting their ego aside to help abused women, homeless children and adults, PTSD veterans, as well as many other fund raising activities in support for other endeavors. That's one positive attribute that comes from ours and other retirement communities.

We may not feel capable of strenuous activities such as Habitat for Humanity's home building or caring for hospice patients, but we can and do send 'thinking of you' cards, make phone calls, cook meals or bake cookies for someone who may be recovering from surgery or an illness, delivering Meals on Wheels, or serving the homeless at the local soup kitchen.

Practicing God's Presence is the one thing that makes sense of each one of our lives. Love and compassion for all of humanity is what practicing the Presence is all about. When we put God first, God will be with us all the way. And if we do what we love doing that contributes to a better, healthier, more sustainable, and compassionate world, we may very well make that fortune after all.

"In the midst of His children
The Lord said He would be.
It doesn't take very many
It can be just two or three.
And I feel that same sweet spirit
That I felt oft times before.
Surely I can say I've been with My Lord"

"Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place. . ."
- And in my life.

Richest blessings,

Art & Dottie Holt
If I ask, what do you think of when I say All Powerful, Everywhere Present and All Knowledge? What is your answer?

Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscience are the words we have used for centuries to describe God. Unlimited power! Presence through time and space! And Beyond everything we have ever learned or have yet to learn!

But could the answer also be “Nature?”

Nature is beautiful, delicate, inviting and the source of absolute wonder. But it is also fierce, explosive, unstoppable and destructive. The continents have been moved across the oceans by the nature of tectonic plates; erupting volcanoes have buried cities and created islands in the ocean. And yet within the basis of Nature, tiny cells have evolved into thousands of animals, mammoth trees and countless brilliant minds.

Everything, everywhere from our planet to all the other planets and stars; in galaxy after galaxy, going all the way back to the ‘Big Bang’ origin of everything we know is nature. Whatever we study we refer to as the ‘nature of’ time, space, life, the mind, light, gravity, sun, moon and stars. It’s all the ‘Nature Of. . .’

All knowledge is really the knowing of Nature. Do we have knowledge of anything that is not Nature? No. What we know, we know about nature. Does that make ‘Nature’ God? Not exactly, but perhaps it gives us an example we can relate to on the Nature of God. Nature certainly is part of God and deserves our attention. Nature is God’s gift to life. How we treat nature is how we treat God. We can start by taking care of our planet.
“Our consciousness is all that we think and desire and love, all that we believe to be true and consent to. That is why a change of consciousness is necessary before we can change our outer world. We are simply what we believe ourselves to be.”
- Neville

“Changing our consciousness can only be done with our imagination and nothing else, for what we imagine, we become.”
“Healing begins the very moment it is imagined.”
- Abner Prior

“The best medicine for healing is simply love, gratitude and forgiveness, and with them the peace and contentment they offer.”
- Abner Prior

“It’s not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters.”
- Epictetus

“You are loved, you are love. In harmony of mind body and spirit, you are whole and complete.”
- Abner Prior
Words we live by

Our thoughts and words are very important. Words impact our lives in meaningful ways.

This time our word is: TIME

With the advent of Daylight Savings Time I counted 17 clocks and watches that I changed, springing ahead one hour each. What a waste of time, I thought. And then it occurred to me, the reason we seem obsessed by time is because of clocks. Do away with all those rotating pointers and digital number displays, constantly changing and then repeating themselves, and would you have? ‘Now! That’s right, nothing but now. No passing time, no watching the clock and checking your wrist. Asking am I early? Am I late?

Stop looking already! It’s now. Right now, just now. What time is it? It’s NOW.

Talk about a mind shift. Living in the moment is your only choice. It eliminates procrastination, “I’ll do it later,” because there is no later. Do it or don’t do it, are your only choices. Later doesn’t exist. Whenever you do it, it’s done. There, that was easy. No prizes for beating the clock and winning the race against time, but no guilt for coming in last either. . . cause first and last are one and the same, they’re both NOW.

Living with the stress of deadlines is gone as well. Deadlines are meaningless, whether self imposed or dictated by some higher authority. There is only the pride of accomplishment. And everyone likes to feel proud of something.

For the artist or photographer now is everlasting, it is the ongoing sense of the awesome beauty that exists in almost everything we see. Their results are Now, made permanent.
Thoughts to provide a restful sleep:

When the end of the day comes, you head for bed seeking a restful and healing night’s sleep. The thoughts and worries that may have built up during the day need to be gently released. If the issues are pressing, and the required actions are unfinished, take a few minutes to write the essentials on a note pad and then close the cover. They will still be there in the morning, and that will be the time to take action.

Dim the lights and take a few minutes to sit in a comfortable chair. Breathe deeply, but not forcibly, steady but without undue control. Use your breathing simply to relax your body and quiet your mind.

Use your thoughts to find appreciation for all the blessings that have come your way, and simply give thanks. There are people who love you and want for you only the best. God loves you most of all and is with you every step of the way. So just thank that heavenly Presence that guides you and holds you safely so that you may sleep in peaceful rest.

Now to bed. Feeling the tensions calmed in your body and the energy activity slowed to a relaxed state, gently get into your bed, turn off the light and nestle your head on your pillow.

Breathe, relax, let go and close your eyes.

Sleep - restful sleep.
Stimulating thoughts for a productive day:

After a restful night’s sleep your body should be recharged and ready to function fully in an active day. As soon as you have conscious awareness of time and place, allow yourself to stretch and begin deep breathing. Your deep breaths not only bring energy to you, they cleanse the sleepiness from your relaxed state of being.

Before jumping directly into the variety of activities the day may demand, clear your mind, remember your notes from the night before, and begin to prepare yourself by affirming your strength and power within.

Remind yourself: “I am a child of God, capable of all the tasks before me.”

“It is not I, but the Christ within, who does all things.”

“What-so-ever I pray for, believing, shall be done for me.”

“The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

“Divine Order is ever-present in my life.”

And finally, “I move forward with enthusiasm to achieve all that is mine to do.”

These affirmations, several from Daily Word, are powerful tools that prepare you for whatever the day holds in store for you. A positive mental attitude will do wonders to help you achieve anything you set your mind on. But like the physical aspects of your body, your positive attitude must be exercised vigorously and frequently. Finally, just affirm:

“Yes I can!. Thank You, God.”
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Note: The cover photo is actually a reflection of reeds in shallow still waters, near sunset, and is flipped up side down and the color intensified for its meditative effect. In this image I not only sense God’s Presence, I can almost see it, and I hope you will as well.