

EXPERIENCING  
*God's*  
PRESENCE



MATTHEW HENRY

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WHITAKER  
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Publisher's note:

This new edition from Whitaker House has been updated for the modern reader. Words, expressions, and sentence structure have been revised for clarity and readability.

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible.

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ISBN-13-0: 978-0-88368-844-1

ISBN-10: 0-88368-844-1

Printed in the United States of America

© 1997 by Whitaker House

Whitaker House  
1030 Hunt Valley Circle  
New Kensington, PA 15068  
www.whitakerhouse.com

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Henry, Matthew, 1662–1714.

Experiencing God's presence / Matthew Henry.

p. cm.

Originally published: New Kensington, PA : Whitaker House, © 1997.

ISBN 0-88368-844-1 (pbk.)

1. Spiritual life—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4501.3 .H46 2002

248.4—dc21

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2002012142

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# Contents

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1. Beginning Every Day with God.....	7
2. Directing Your Prayer to God .....	25
3. Morning Prayers .....	35
4. Spending the Day with God.....	57
5. Every Day, All Day.....	77
6. Opportunities for Waiting on God.....	93
7. Rest after the Day's End.....	111
8. Closing the Day with God .....	125
9. Heavenly Peace .....	145
10. Bedtime Thoughts .....	153
11. Harmful Communication.....	171
12. Helpful Hospitality.....	181
13. Correcting Our Conversation.....	195
About the Author .....	201



## Chapter 1

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# Beginning Every Day with God

*My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD.*

—Psalm 5:3

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I wish to recommend to you David's example in this text. He had resolved in Psalm 5:2 that he would abound in and abide by the duty of prayer: "*Unto thee will I pray.*" Then, in verse three, he set one proper time for it, and that is the morning: "*My voice shalt thou hear in the morning.*" However, it was not only in the morning that David prayed, for he solemnly undertook the duty of prayer three times a day, as Daniel did: "*Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud*" (Ps. 55:17). No, he did not even think that was enough, for he said, "*Seven times*

## Experiencing God's Presence

*a day do I praise thee*" (Ps. 119:164). But I wish to focus particularly on the morning.

I will show that it is our wisdom and duty to begin every day with God. Let us observe in the words of our text, first, the good work itself that we are to do. God must hear our voices; we must direct our prayers to Him. Let us observe, second, the special time appointed and observed for the doing of this good work—in the morning, and again in the morning, that is, every morning, as consistently as morning comes.

The good work that David's example teaches us to do is, in one word, to pray. It is a duty dictated by the light and law of nature, which plainly and loudly says, "Should a people not seek their God?" However, the Gospel of Christ gives us much better instructions and encouragements concerning prayer than any that nature furnishes us, for it tells us what we must pray for, in whose name we must pray, and by whose assistance. It invites us to "*come boldly unto the throne of grace*" (Heb. 4:16) and to "*enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus*" (Heb. 10:19).

This work we are to do, not in the morning only, but at other times, at all times. We read of preaching the Word "*out of season*" (2 Tim. 4:2), but we do not read of praying out of season, for that is never out of season. The throne of grace is always open, and humble supplicants

## Beginning Every Day with God

are always welcome and cannot come unseasonably.

### “My Voice Shalt Thou Hear”

But let us see how David here expressed his pious resolutions to abide by this duty. David said, “*My voice shalt thou hear.*” David may here be understood two different ways: either, *God will* hear my voice, or, *I will* faithfully pray to my God. Let us examine the first meaning; then we will examine the second.

#### God Will Hear

David promised himself a gracious acceptance with God: “You shall, that is, You *will* hear my voice when I direct my prayer to You in the morning.” This is the language of his faith, grounded on God’s promise, that His ear will always be open to the cry of His people. He had prayed, “*Give ear to my words, O LORD*” (Ps. 5:1), and, in the next verse, “*Hearken unto the voice of my cry.*” And then, in verse three, he received an answer to those prayers, and he said, “You will hear, I do not doubt that You will; and though I do not have right now a grant of the thing I prayed for, yet I am sure my prayer is heard, is accepted, and comes up for a memorial, as the prayer of Cornelius did.” (See Acts 10:4.) It is put in God’s file and will not be forgotten. If we look inward and can say by experience that God

## Experiencing God's Presence

has prepared our hearts, we may look upward, may look forward, and say with confidence that He will cause His ear to hear.

We may be sure of this, and we must pray in the assurance of it, that wherever God finds a praying heart, He will be found to be a prayer-hearing God. Even if the voice of prayer is a low voice, a weak voice, yet, if it comes from an upright heart, it is a voice that God will hear, that He will hear with pleasure. It is His delight, and He will return a gracious answer. He has heard your prayers; He has seen your tears.

Therefore, when we stand praying, we must stand on this principle, without doubting or wavering: Whatever we ask of God as a Father, in the name of Jesus Christ the Mediator, according to the will of God revealed in Scripture, it will be granted us either in kind or kindness. This is what is promised to us in John 16:23, and the truth of this promise is sealed to us by the concurring experience of the saints in all ages, ever since man began to call on the name of the Lord. Jacob's God never yet said to Jacob's seed, "You seek Me in vain," and He will not begin now. When we come to God by prayer, if we come rightly, we may be confident of this: that notwithstanding the distance between heaven and earth and our great unworthiness to have any favor shown us, yet God does hear our voices, and He will not turn away our prayers or His mercy.

## Beginning Every Day with God

### I Will Faithfully Pray

Although Psalm 5:3 may be taken as a promise that God will hear our prayers, it is also to be taken as David's promising God a constant attendance upon Him in the way He has appointed. "*My voice shalt thou hear*"; that is, I will speak to You. Because You have inclined Your ear to me many a time, therefore I have taken up a resolution to call on You at all times, even to the end of my time. Not a day will pass without Your hearing from me.

Not that the voice is the thing that God regards, as those spoken of in Isaiah 58:4 seemed to think, who in prayer made their voice to be heard on high. Hannah prayed and prevailed when her voice was not heard. It is the voice of the heart that is meant here. God said to Moses, "*Wherefore criest thou unto me?*" (Exod. 14:15) when we do not read that he had said one word. Praying is lifting up the soul to God and pouring out the heart before Him.

As far as expressing the devout affections of the heart by words, they may be of use to focus our thoughts and to excite our desires. It is good to draw near to God, not only with a pure heart, but with a humble voice; in this way we must render "*the calves [or the offerings] of our lips*" (Hos. 14:2).

However, God understands the language of the heart, and that is the language in which we

## Experiencing God's Presence

must speak to Him. David prayed not only, "*Give ear to my words,*" but, "*Consider my meditation*" (Ps. 5:1). Let the words of my mouth, proceeding from the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Your sight (Ps. 19:14).

We must pray from our hearts in every prayer. We must speak to God; we must write to Him. If we receive a letter from a friend, we say that we have heard from him; we must see to it that God hears from us daily.

## God Expects Our Prayers

God expects and requires our prayers. Though He does not need us or our services and cannot be benefited by them, He has obliged us to offer the sacrifice of prayer and praise to Him continually.

God requires us to pray for good reason. Thus God will keep us by His authority over us. He will keep us continually mindful of our subjection to Him, which we are apt to forget. He requires that by prayer we solemnly pay our homage to Him and give honor to His name. By this act and deed of homage, frequently repeated, we will strengthen our obligations to observe His statutes, keep His laws, and be more and more sensible of the weight of them. He is your Lord; worship Him. By frequent, humble adorations of His perfections, you will make a constant, humble compliance with

## Beginning Every Day with God

His will easier for yourself. By doing obeisance, we are learning obedience.

God's requirement that we pray is a testimony of His love and compassion toward us. If He had only said, "Let Me hear from you as often as there is occasion; call on Me in the time of trouble or need, and that is enough," He would have abundantly shown His concern and goodness. However, to show His pleasure in us, as a father does his affection to his child when he is sending him abroad, He gives us this charge: "Let me hear from you every day, though you have no particular business." He shows that "*the prayer of the upright is his delight*" (Prov. 15:8); it is music to His ears.

Christ says to His dove, "*Let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely*" (Song 2:14). And it is to the spouse, the church, that Christ speaks in the close of that song of songs: "*Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it*" (Song 8:13). What a shame it is to us that God is more willing to be prayed to and more ready to hear prayer than we are to pray!

## We Have Something to Say

We have something to say to God every day. Many people are not aware of this, and it is their sin and misery; they live without God in the

## Experiencing God's Presence

world. They think they can live without Him; they are not aware of their dependence on Him and their obligations to Him. Therefore, for their part, they have nothing to say to Him. He never hears from them, no more than the father did from his prodigal son when the son was away from home. They ask scornfully, "What can the Almighty do for me?" Then it is no marvel if they ask next, "*What profit should we have, if we pray unto him?*" (Job 21:15). And the result is that they say to the Almighty, "*Depart from us*" (Job 21:14), and this will be their doom.

But I hope better things of you, my fellow believers. I believe that you are not of those who restrain prayer before God. You are ready to acknowledge that there is a great deal that the Almighty can do for you, and that there is profit in praying to Him; therefore, you resolve to draw near to God that He may draw near to you (James 4:8).

We have something to say to God daily, as to a friend we love and have freedom with. We cannot pass the home of such a friend without calling on him; we never lack something to say to him, though we have no particular business with him. To such a friend we open up; we profess our love and esteem, and with pleasure communicate our thoughts. Abraham was called "*the Friend of God*" (James 2:23), and this honor belongs to all the saints. "*I call you not servants,*" says Christ, "*but I have called you friends*" (John 15:15). "*His secret*

## Beginning Every Day with God

*is with the righteous*” (Prov. 3:32). We are invited to acquaint ourselves with Him and to walk with Him, as one friend walks with another. The fellowship of believers is said to be with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ; and do we have nothing to say to Him then?

Is it not enough of an errand to go to the throne of His grace to admire His infinite perfections, which we can never fully comprehend, or sufficiently contemplate, or take enough pleasure in? Is it not enough of an errand to please ourselves in beholding the beauty of the Lord and to give Him the glory due to His name? Have we not a great deal to say to Him in acknowledgment of His condescending grace and favor to us in manifesting Himself to us and not to the world, and in profession of our affection and submission to Him? *“Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee”* (John 21:17).

God has something to say to us as a friend every day, through His providences, through our own consciences, and through the written Word in which we must hear His voice. He hearkens and hears whether we have anything to say to Him by way of reply, and we are very unfriendly if we do not. When He says to us, *“Seek ye my face,”* should our hearts not answer as to one we love, *“Thy face, LORD, will I seek”* (Ps. 27:8)? When He says to us, *“Return, ye backsliding children,”* should we not readily reply, *“Behold, we*

## Experiencing God's Presence

*come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God*" (Jer. 3:22)? If He speaks to us by way of conviction and reproof, should we not answer with confession and submission? If He speaks to us by way of comfort, should we not reply in praise? If you love God, you should not have to seek for something to say to Him, something for your heart to pour out before Him, which His grace has already put there.

We have something to say to God daily, not only as a friend, but also as a master whom we serve and with whom we have business. Think how numerous and important the concerns are that lie between us and God, and you will readily acknowledge that you have a great deal to say to Him. We have a constant dependence on Him. All our expectations are from Him. We have constant dealings with Him; He is the God "*with whom we have to do*" (Heb. 4:13).

Do we not know that our happiness is bound up in His favor, that His favor is life, the life of our souls? It is better than life, than the life of our bodies. And do we not have business with God to seek His favor, to entreat it with our whole hearts, to beg as for our lives that He would lift up the light of His countenance upon us? Do we not have business with God to plead Christ's righteousness, as that through which alone we can hope to obtain God's loving-kindness?

## Beginning Every Day with God

Do we not know that we have offended God, that by sin we have made ourselves liable to His wrath and curse and that we are daily contracting guilt? And then, do we not have business enough with Him to confess our faults and follies, to ask for pardon in the blood of Christ, to make our peace with God in Him who is our peace, and to renew our covenant with Him in His own strength to go and sin no more?

Do we not know that we have daily work to do for God and our own souls, the work of the day that is to be done in its day? We have business with God to beg of Him to show us what He wants us to do, to direct us in it, and to strengthen us for it. Should we not seek Him for assistance and acceptance that He would work in us both to will and to do that which is good (Phil. 2:13), and then accept and own His own work? Such business as this the servant has with his master.

Do we not know that we are continually in danger? Both the life and the comfort of our bodies are in danger. We are continually surrounded with disease and death, whose arrows fly at midnight and at midday. Do we not then have business with God, in our going out and coming in, in our lying down and rising up, to put ourselves under the protection of His providence, to be the charge of His holy angels?

## Experiencing God's Presence

Both the life and the comfort of our souls are in even more danger. It is our souls that our adversary the devil, a strong and subtle adversary, wars against and seeks to devour. Do we not then have business with God to put ourselves under the protection of His grace and gird ourselves with His armor so that we may be able to stand against the wiles and violences of Satan (Eph. 6:11)? Should we not arm ourselves so that we may neither be surprised into sin by a sudden temptation nor overpowered by a strong one?

Do we not know that we are dying daily, that death is working in us and hastening toward us, that death fetches us to judgment, and that judgment fixes us in our everlasting state? And do we not then have something to say to God in preparation of what is before us? We should say, "*LORD, make me to know mine end*" (Ps. 39:4)! Lord, '*teach us to number our days*' (Ps. 90:12)!" Do we not have business with God to judge ourselves that we may not be judged (1 Cor. 11:31) and to see to it that our matters are right and good?

Do we not know that we are members of that body of which Christ is the head; and are we not concerned to prove ourselves living members? Do we not then have business with God upon the public account to make intercession for His church? Do we have nothing to say for Zion, nothing in behalf of Jerusalem's ruined walls, nothing for the peace and welfare of the land of our birth?

## Beginning Every Day with God

Are we not of the family, or but babes in it, that we do not concern ourselves in the concerns of it?

Do we have no relatives, no friends who are dear to us, whose joys and griefs we share? And do we have nothing to say to God for them, no complaints to make, no requests to make known? Are none of them sick or in distress, none of them tempted or downhearted? And do we not have errands at the throne of grace to beg relief and help for them?

Now put all this together, and then consider whether or not you have something to say to God every day. Particularly in days of trouble it is fitting to cry out to God. On these days you can say to God, *“I have borne chastisement”* (Job 34:31), and, if you have any sense of things, you will say, *“Do not condemn me”* (Job 10:2).

### Allow No Hindrances

If you have all this to say to God, what should hinder you from saying it, from saying it every day? Why should He not hear your voice, when you have so many messages for Him?

Do not let distance hinder you from speaking with God. Imagine that you have occasion to speak with a friend, but he is a great way away. You cannot reach him; you do not know where to find him or how to get a letter to him. Therefore, your business with him is left undone.

## Experiencing God's Presence

But distance does not need to keep you from speaking to God; for though it is true that God is in heaven and we are on earth, yet He is near to His praying people in all that they call on Him for. He hears their voices wherever they are. *“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee”* (Ps. 130:1), said David. *“From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee”* (Ps. 61:2). Jonah said, *“Out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice”* (Jonah 2:2). In all places, we can find a way open heavenward. Thanks be to Him who by His own blood has consecrated for us a new and living way into the holiest and has established a correspondence between heaven and earth.

Do not let fear hinder you from saying what you have to say to God. Imagine that you have business with a great man, but he is so far above you, or so stern and severe toward all his inferiors, that you are afraid to speak to him. You have no one to introduce you or to speak a good word for you, and therefore you choose rather to drop your cause.

But there is no occasion for your being thus discouraged in speaking to God. You may come boldly to the throne of His grace; there you have a liberty of speech, permission to pour out your whole soul. And such are His compassions to humble suppliants, that even His terror does not need to make them afraid. God does not want you

## Beginning Every Day with God

to frighten yourself! He would have you encourage yourself, *“for ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption”* (Rom. 8:15). By adoption you are brought into, among other things, the glorious liberties of the children of God.

This is not all. We have someone to introduce us and to speak for us, an Advocate with the Father. Did children ever need an advocate with their father? But God has given us two immutable things, in which it is impossible for Him to lie, that *“we might have a strong consolation”* (Heb. 6:18): We have not only the relation of the Father to depend on, but also the interest and intercession of an Advocate, a High Priest over the house of God, in whose name we have access with confidence.

Do not let His knowing what your business is and what you have to say to Him hinder you. Imagine that you have business with a certain friend, but you do not think you need to trouble yourself about it for he is already informed of it. He knows what you want, but does that mean you do not need to speak with him?

It is true that all your desire is before God. He knows your needs and burdens. But He wants to hear them from you. He has promised you relief, but His promise must be put into a petition, and He will *“for this be inquired of by the house of Israel,*

## Experiencing God's Presence

*to do it for them*" (Ezek. 36:37). Though we cannot through our prayers give Him any information, we must through our prayers give Him honor. It is true, nothing we say can have any influence on Him or move Him to show us mercy; but it may have an influence on ourselves and help put us into a position to receive mercy.

The following is a very easy and reasonable condition of His favors: *"Ask, and it shall be given you"* (Matt. 7:7). It was to teach us the necessity of praying in order to receive favor that Christ put that strange question to the blind man: *"What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?"* (Mark 10:51). He knew what he wanted, but those who touch the top of the golden scepter must be ready to state their petition and their request.

We must not let any other business hinder our saying what we have to say to God. We may have business with a friend that we cannot accomplish because we do not have the time. Perhaps we have something else to do that we think is more important. But we cannot say so concerning the business we have with God, for that is without a doubt the one necessary thing to which everything else must be made to give way.

It is not at all necessary to our happiness that we be great in the world or that we amass a large estate; but it is absolutely necessary that we make our peace with God, obtain His favor, and keep

## Beginning Every Day with God

ourselves in His love. Therefore, no business for the world will serve to excuse us for not attending on God. On the contrary, the more important our worldly business, the more we need to pray to God for His blessing on it. By doing this, we will take Him along with us in our business. The closer we keep to prayer, and to God in prayer, the more all our affairs will prosper.

Should I prevail with you now to let God frequently hear from you? Let Him hear your voice, even if it is only the voice of your breathing, which is a sign of life. *“Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry”* (Lam. 3:56). Let Him hear you, even if it is only the voice of your groanings, and those so weak that they cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26). Speak to Him, even if it is in a broken language, as Hezekiah did: *“Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter”* (Isa. 38:14).

Speak often to Him; He is always within hearing. Hear Him speaking to you, and be mindful of His voice in everything you say to Him. Even as you lay a business letter before you when you write an answer to it, God’s Word must be the guide of your desires and the ground of your expectations in prayer. You cannot expect Him to give a gracious ear to what you say to Him if you turn a deaf ear to what He says to you.

You see that you have frequent occasion to speak with God. Therefore, you do well to grow

## Experiencing God's Presence

in your acquaintance with Him, to take heed to do nothing that would displease Him, and to strengthen your interest in the Lord Jesus through whom alone you have access with boldness to Him. Keep your voice in tune for prayer, and let all your language be a pure language that you may be fit to call on the name of the Lord.

In every prayer, remember that you are speaking to God, and show that you have an awe of Him within your spirit. Let us not be rash with our mouths or hasty to utter anything before God, but let every word be well weighed because God is in heaven, and we are on the earth (Eccl. 5:2). If He had not invited and encouraged us to do it, it would have been an unpardonable presumption for such sinful worms as we are to speak to the Lord of glory. And we do well to speak from the heart, heartily, for it is for our lives, and for the life of our souls, that we are speaking to Him.