

LIVING AWARE OF HIS PRESENCE

23 AUGUST 2026

SUMMARY

Drawing from John 15:4, this Message challenges believers to move beyond merely acknowledging God's existence or identifying with a community of faith, toward an authentic, living relationship with God himself. Bruce Downes makes a critical distinction: the presence of God is not the destination. God is. Using the Catholic spiritual tradition, including the writings of St. Francis de Sales, St. Teresa of Avila, and Brother Lawrence, the Message explores how the practice of repeatedly returning one's attention to God throughout the day through the simple prayer "God is here and I am with him" can gradually transform a person from the inside out. Bruce Downes shares personally that this practice, carried out as a deliberate hourly discipline, has begun to change his thought patterns, his worship, his faith, and his awareness of God in ordinary life. The Message calls missionaries of God's presence to be people who do not merely carry a title or an idea, but who are genuinely shaped by an encounter with the living God.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Believing in God's presence is not the same as knowing God personally. Just as you can know of a public figure without knowing them, it is possible to believe in God, attend church, and call yourself a Christian while still not living in genuine relationship with Him.
- The presence of God is not the destination. God is. The entire point of becoming aware of His presence is to know Him, love Him, and be changed by Him.
- Forgetfulness is one of the great spiritual problems of our lives. We do not always reject God. We simply forget Him, allowing the noise of daily life to crowd out our awareness of the One in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).
- We cannot pray at all times unless we deliberately pray at specific times. Intentional, scheduled moments of turning our attention to God are what train us toward a habitual, continuous awareness of Him.
- The practice of saying "God is here and I am with Him" is not about making God present. It is about waking ourselves up to a reality that is already true.
- A missionary of His presence is not a title. It is a spirituality. It requires learning to live from a real relationship with God, not simply adopting a description.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

- John 15:4: Jesus instructs his followers to remain or abide in him as he abides in them, describing not a single religious experience but an ongoing way of living in communion with him

STORIES:

- Bruce Downes draws a comparison between knowing that the President of the United States or Taylor Swift exists versus actually knowing them personally, to illustrate the difference between believing in God's presence and truly knowing God
- Bruce Downes recalls visiting his elderly grandmother as a boy, noting that knowing she existed was entirely different from being with her, talking with her, and coming to know her through relationship
- Bruce Downes shares his personal experience of setting an hourly alarm on his phone with the words "God is here and I am with him," describing how this practice has begun to change his thought patterns, worship, and interior life
- Bruce Downes recounts how, when filming a video on personal prayer, he felt self-conscious praying in front of a camera, reflecting on the tension between sharing one's prayer life and the appearance of self-promotion
- Bruce Downes references Brother Lawrence, a 17th-century Carmelite lay brother who worked as a kitchen hand and became known for discovering that the ordinary workplace could become a place of communion with God through the repeated, deliberate turning of attention toward him

LIVING AWARE OF HIS PRESENCE

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

OPENING PRAYER

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and open hearts to God's transforming work. Pray the IMPACTERS Community Prayer .

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening

1. Before this Message, how would you have described what it means to be aware of God's presence in your daily life? Has your understanding shifted at all?
2. Bruce Downes uses the examples of knowing of the President or Taylor Swift versus actually knowing them personally. How does that distinction land for you when you apply it to your relationship with God?

Going Deeper

3. Bruce Downes says, "The presence of God is not the destination. God is." What do you think the difference is in practice? Can you think of ways a person or even a community might become more focused on the idea of presence than on God Himself?
4. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says we "tend to forget Him who is our life and our all." Be honest with yourself: in an ordinary day, how much of your mental and emotional energy is genuinely directed toward God? What tends to crowd Him out?
5. Bruce Downes shares that stopping every hour to say "God is here and I am with Him" has begun to change his thought patterns, his worship, his faith, and the way he sees things. Why do you think repetition and regularity have such a powerful effect on the interior life? What does that tell us about how we are made?
6. Francis de Sales said there is a difference between knowing the doctrine of God's presence and directing the attention of the heart toward God who is present. Teresa of Avila spoke of recollection, gathering our scattered selves back toward the God who dwells within us. Brother Lawrence found that a monastery kitchen could become a place of communion. What do these three figures have in common, and what does their example say to you about your own life?
7. Bruce Downes says, "I'm not bringing God back. I'm bringing my attention back to God who's already there." Why does that distinction matter? How might it change the way you approach prayer or moments of spiritual dryness?

8. Bruce Downes reflects that a missionary of His presence "cannot become simply another description that we give to ourselves, another name. If it becomes just a title without becoming a spirituality, we've missed the purpose." How do you guard against that in your own life and in your community?

Personal Reflection

9. Is there a person in your life whose presence has genuinely changed you over time because of how well you came to know them? What did that process look like, and what does it tell you about what God might want with you?
10. Bruce Downes admits openly that he forgets God, that his mind races, that he can be consumed by noise, and that he is still on the journey himself. How does his honesty affect you? Does it make the call to this kind of prayer feel more or less accessible?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This Week, Choose at Least One:

- Set an alarm on your phone to go off at regular intervals throughout the day. When it sounds, pause for just a moment and say, either aloud or silently, "God is here and I am with Him." Do not judge how distracted you were before the alarm. Simply return.
- Place a physical reminder somewhere you will see it often, whether on your bathroom mirror, your desk, your car dashboard, or your kitchen counter, with the words "God is here and I am with Him." Let it interrupt your forgetfulness.
- Spend five minutes in silence before your regular prayer time and do nothing except acknowledge that God is present. Do not begin with requests or a list. Simply arrive, and let that arrival be the prayer.
- Read or listen to a short passage from Brother Lawrence's "The Practice of the Presence of God" or Francis de Sales' "Introduction to the Devout Life." Come back to your group next week and share one thing that stood out to you.
- At the end of each day this week, take two or three minutes to reflect: When during the day was I most aware of God? When was I least aware of Him? What was I absorbed in instead? Do not use this as a time for self-condemnation, but as a way of growing in honest self-knowledge.

CLOSING PRAYER

Close your time together by praying the words Bruce Downes used to close the Message, slowly and together as a group:

"God is here and we are with Him. God is here and we are with Him. God is here and we are with Him."