

Joke: An elderly man had owned his large farm in Louisiana for many years.

Right at the back of the farm, there was a large pond that was ideal for swimming. The old farmer had fixed it up real nice with picnic tables, horseshoe courts and some apple and peach trees.

One evening the farmer decides to go down to the pond, to look it over, as he hadn't been down there for a while.

Before setting off, he grabs a five-gallon bucket as he decides he'll bring back some fruit.

As he nears the pond, he can hear voices shouting and laughing with glee. Clearly, someone is having a good time.

As the farmer gets closer, he can see a bunch of young women who are clearly skinny-dipping in his pond.

He makes the women aware of his presence and immediately they all swim over to the far end.

One of the women then shouts, "We're not coming out until you leave mister!"

The farmer replies, "Ladies, I didn't come down here to watch you swim naked or make you get out of the pond. You carry on."

The wily old-timer then holds up his bucket and says, "I just came down here to feed the alligators!"

Today, I want to talk to you about the presence of God.

Here's a question. For those of you that are here for worship, how many would say that you felt the presence of God today?

A follow up question. How do you know? How do you know you felt the presence of God today?

Did you get the Holy Spirit goosebumps, you know that tingling feeling? I know that's happened to me before. Were you so overwhelmed with emotion that you cried in the presence of God? I've had that happen as well. Maybe you just had an unusual, sense of peace, even though your life seems to be so chaotic right now, but in the presence of God you just felt at peace?

Is that how you knew you're in the presence of God?

Because let's be honest God's presence can give you that tinkling feeling, and so can sitting close to somebody cute that you crushing on.

God's presence can make you cry, and so can a touching movie, ever cry at those?

God's presence is incredibly peaceful, but there are other things that can also be peaceful, a walk on the beach, laying in a hammock reading a good book, amen?

So how do you know when you feel the presence of God?

Here's another probably more difficult question.

If you didn't feel the presence of God today during worship, whose fault is it?

It must be God's fault, right? He was holding out on you? He might have revealed himself to the person next to you, but not to you? To you He's holding back His presence.

Was it your fault? You weren't paying attention or got too distracted? By the way it could be that one.

Maybe it was because all we had were videos because our keyboardist is out of town and we have no one else to take her place. And so the songs I picked out just aren't your style. so it was my fault.

Whose fault is it?

What do you do when you want to feel the presence of God, but you don't feel God.

If you don't feel him, is he there? Is He even real?

I hope to answer those questions today.

And so, in this series, I want to talk about ever wonder why God feels far away? And probably more importantly, what do you do when He does.

Let me begin by saying we all have, or will at some point on this journey of following Jesus, feel like we are wandering in the wilderness alone, but. . .

Look at the person sitting next to you and say, "God is with you today."

What do you do if you don't feel the presence of God?

And if you ever have found yourself in that place you're not alone. If you draw near to him and don't always feel or experience some kind of a supernatural moment, you're not alone. But I need yiu to hear this, God is still there, working on your behalf.

As the song says even when I don't feel it He's working. God never stops working.

In Psalm 88: verses 13 and 14, you could almost hear the pain of the psalmist as he says to God,

Psalm 88:13–14 (NIV): But I cry to you for help, Lord; in the morning my prayer comes before you. 14 Why, Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me?

He's saying, God, I'm seeking you in the morning. Spending time in prayer before I start my day. I'm believing that you're there, but God, why can't I feel your presence?

If you've ever felt like that, you're not alone.

David did too. David had times that he knew that he knew that he knew, but there were also times he was running from enemies asking if God had forgotten him.

The Apostle Paul, who wrote almost half the New Testament who found himself blinded by a heavenly light on the road to Damascus, also, finds himself ship wrecked, praying for a thorn in the flesh to be removed, wondering God where are you.

And then there's Jesus, the one who walked intimately with his Father and did His will and only His will. Whose life mission was to glorify God in every way. He's obedient even to death on the cross and Jesus hanging on the cross, stripped naked, being mocked by the creation made in the image of the Creator. The one who became sin for us. And God seems to look away When Jesus needed Him the most.

And Jesus, the Son of God, who's done nothing but the will of the Father cries out, "My God, my God, why can't I feel you?" He says, "Why have you forsaken me? Where are you."

And so today if you've ever wondered why you don't always feel the presence of God, you're not alone.

And what I want to do today is give you some possible reasons scripturally why we don't always feel God.

We'll look at three, I'm sure there's more, but let me give you three.

If you ever asked that question, "Why am I not experiencing the presence of God?" one possibility is this, this is number one, maybe you're over-sensationalizing God's presence.

You're looking for something supernatural, something awe-inspiring and the presence of God can be that, but it's not always that.

Now hear this church, I'm not saying don't come to church with any expectation. We need to come expecting God to do what only He can do. We need to come expecting Him to show Himself, Amen. But what happens when no one is healed, no sign or wonder takes place? What can happen and it has church because I've witnessed it is people jump on the next wave, until that wave hits shore.

And in John's gospel, John chapter 6, Jesus was explaining something and the context is that some people, they always want to see a sign. They want something big. They want to see the light, fire from heaven, something special.

And so they asked Jesus, "What are you gonna do to impress us? What are you going do to prove your divinity? Give us a sign. Give us a miracle. Give us something.

Look at it. . .

John 6:30–31 (NIV): So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?
31 Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.

And a lot of us, we crave that. I do, I love when God shows up and shows off with something miraculous. They said, Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness. . . God provided for them so what about you Jesus, what sign are you going to provide.

Maybe you're trying to make a decision about something it's important and your like I just need to know, God, if it's your will, just send a sign. If I see an elephant as I look out my window then I'll know for sure it's your will.

I know that sounds silly, but so many times we just want a sign just to be sure.

And listen church, I'm not saying there is anything wrong with that in and of itself. There's stories in the bible that even talk about people that did that very thing.

Here's one. . .

Genesis 24:42–46 (NIV): 42 “When I came to the spring today, I said, ‘Lord, God of my master Abraham, if you will, please grant success to the journey on which I have come. 43 See, I am standing beside this spring. If a young woman comes out to draw

water and I say to her, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar," 44 and if she says to me, "Drink, and I'll draw water for your camels too," let her be the one the Lord has chosen for my master's son.' 45 "Before I finished praying in my heart, Rebekah came out, with her jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water, and I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.' 46 "She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too.' So I drank, and she watered the camels also.

Now here's the thing there were 10 camels and a camel can drink about about 30 gallons. So Rebekah hauled 300 gallons of water if she was strong maybe 5 gallons at a time, so that means she made around 60 trips.

that's an incredible story. . .that's God's will for sure. So there's nothing wrong in laying out that fleece. But what if I sign doesn't happen. So, you leave that church because God didn't show up every week like you were hoping. Do you think God doesn't care to show Himself like that any more? I think God still at times shows us things like that so that we know that we know, but. . .

Listen church I've been to conferences where anointed people of God were ministering. Others sensing, knowing, feeling God in the midst of the service and I didn't always feel what they were feeling and you can begin to wonder, "What's wrong with me? Why don't I feel the presence of God?"

Somebody needs to hear this, feelings aren't the only evidence of the presence of God.
If you always felt God, you wouldn't need faith.

You don't trust everything your feelings tell you. At least I hope you don't. If you trusted everything your feelings told you, some

of you wouldn't be here right now. You'd be at home , in jail, on the lake fishing, someplace just maybe not here.

Feelings aren't the only evidence of the presence of God. As your pastor if I'm being honest I don't always have some supernatural awe inspiring vision when I'm in my prayer closet or ministering to the church.

There are times I've felt nothing to be honest.

So, maybe if you don't feel like you're experiencing the presence of God, maybe you're over-sensationalizing it.

Maybe you're looking for a sign when Jesus already displayed his love for you on the cross. That was pretty amazing that Jesus would take my place and give His life so I can have abundant life.

A second reason you might not be experiencing God, is that maybe your heart has hardened. Maybe your heart has grown cold toward the things of God.

In Matthew's gospel, Matthew 13, Jesus was quoting a prophecy from Isaiah and he said this.

Matthew 13:14–15 (NIV): In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “ ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 15 For this people’s heart has become calloused;

Why don't you always experience the presence of God? Maybe you've allowed your heart to harden. It could be that somebody did something to you. They hurt you, and you closed off your heart toward people or maybe even toward God.

Maybe you had a disappointment and you thought, "I can't really trust God," and you've closed off your heart to Him.

Maybe there's something displeasing to God in your life, a sin, that you have allowed to rule and reign in your heart. And instead of warring against it you have just gotten comfortable with it. You've rationalized it, made friends with it. And contrary to popular believe He still asks us to be holy as He is holy. That's a good spot for an amen.

Hear this church and I shared a bit if this last week. When I first found Jesus there were some things that I just stopped doing. I know longer did the drugs, drank like a fish, but I started reading the bible, praying, giving home bible studies but before long, in the middle of all those religious activities, I wasn't really experiencing the presence of God like I wanted to.

It wasn't that there were sins blocking, oh I was still doing some things I'm sure were displeasing to Papa, but for the most part sin wasn't the issue, but somehow it became more about my performance than it was about His presence.

Why don't I always feel God?

Maybe your more performance seeking then presence pursuing.

And maybe for some of you, your get more distracted by the people walking past the church during worship than being involved in the worship.

Why don't I always feel God?

Maybe it's because your over-sensationalizing, looking for a sign. Maybe your heart has hardened some. Or number three, maybe God just wants to draw you closer.

I love what Acts Chapter 17 shows us, Paul was preaching in Athens. And in verse 26, he said this. . .

Acts 17:26 (NIV): From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

Pastor what's so special about that verse? Glad you asked, well look why did He do it. . .verse 27

Acts 17:27 (NIV): God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.

God did this so they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, and the good news is, he is not far from any of us.

Maybe God wants to get you to a point in your life where you crave him more, hunger more for him, long to be with him more than anything else, where you seek him with every fabric of your being.

And let's be honest, sometimes it's in the hard times that make you seek him even more than the good times. Have you ever noticed that?

Have you noticed how challenges and hardship often produces the best in you spiritually? And the opposite is true as well. If you have money in your bank account you really don't need to trust Him for provision.

Listen I'm not saying live in poverty to learn to trust Him more, but I'm saying when you don't feel as close to Him as you want you need learn to run after Him, no matter what's in the bank, no

matter how you feel, or whatever circumstance you find yourself in.

What happens when you don't eat? What do you get? Hungry. What happens when you don't drink? You get thirsty.

And when you don't feel God's presence, guess what? You want him all the more! you need him, you crave him, you long for him. You thirst for him. You hunger for him. You want the presence of God. So you need to pursue Him.

And God wants to be pursued. He wants you to want him.

God wants to be pursued. He's a relational God. He wants your heart. He wants your devotion. He wants your passion.

In Jeremiah 29:13, he says this. . .

Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV): You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

So if you don't feel God, you need to know, just because God feels distant doesn't mean God is absent. Just because you don't feel him doesn't mean he's not there. Don't believe everything that you feel. Your feelings will fool you.

Sometimes you have to get out of your feelings and activate your faith. Just believe by faith that if I draw near to God, he's there.

Let's be honest for a moment there are probably times that you won't feel love in your marriage. When that happens do you just automatically walk out. No. You rekindle the fire.

If you don't feel God, you don't walk away. You don't blame God. You step into him, you want more of him. You fan the flames.

Matthew 12:20 (NIV): A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory.

Matthew is quoting from Isaiah and he is saying a bruised reed may be damaged but it is not irreparable, a smoldering wick may be about to lose its fire but it can be re-ignited.

Listen it doesn't matter how broken you are, or feel, Or if you lost some of your passion for the things of God. Don't run from Him, run toward Him. Pursue Him more, pray more, read the Word more, thirst and hunger more.

Get out of your feelings and activate your faith.

Will you ever feel the supernatural presence of an awe-inspiring, overwhelming God that'll drop you to your knees?
Sure. . .sometimes I have.

You will. I promise you. If you continue to pursue him, there will be times when he will show up and show off and stun you to where you can't even speak.

But sometimes it simply we just need to more aware of His presence. . .

You open your Bible and a verse just jumps off the page and your like I needed that today. . .that's the presence of God. Your having one of those days and out of the blue a friend calls that you haven't talked to in a while and says, God put your name on my heart today, is everything all right. . .there's the presence of God.

You turn on the radio and it was like the Holy Spirit wrote that song that was playing just for you. . .there's the presence of God.

You struggled to get to church, it took every bit of faith for you to get here, but then you walk in the door and God meets you. . .there's the presence of God.

Sometimes you have to get over your feelings and activate your faith.

The faith that He is the God that will never leave you. He's the God that will never forsake you. When you don't know what to do, He is with you as your guide. When you're hurting and your life is falling apart, He is with you as your comforter. When you feel all alone and don't know where to turn, He is with you as a friend who sticks closer than a brother. When you can't sleep and you're overwhelmed with anxiety, He is with you as a heavenly peace that passes all understanding.