

The Ministry of Presence

Presented by Mary Lowman

Air Dates: January 1- 4, 2024

Day One

Not long ago I was introduced to a new term: the ministry of presence. A young couple in our church had begun a ministry to the homeless people they encounter on the streets of Chicago around where they live. It began simply by reaching out to one or two, talking to them, inviting them to church, providing Sunday lunch for them, and it grew to over 60 homeless people they served every weekend.

I love their story because it's such a clear example of what Jesus would do. Jesus would see the needs on his doorstep, as Justin and Tara did, and he would start helping them in any way he could. In telling us their story, Justin said that he has come to understand what The Ministry of Presence means. He made it a habit to invite one of his homeless friends to run errands with him, when possible, which he did one day. As they made rounds that day, the homeless man said to him, "All my life I've been told I am worthless and no good, but I don't believe that anymore." Justin asked him why, and he said, "Because if I was worthless, you wouldn't hang out with me."

Justin's willingness to simply be with this man gave him a new understanding of his worth as a person. Justin went on to say that what homeless people need more than anything else is not money or food, but it is a relationship—someone to simply be with them and care about them.

You know, that's true of most of us, isn't it? You and I need other people in our lives just to validate our worth. Can you imagine how you would feel if you believed that other people did not want to be with you? The ministry of presence is real—and it's just what Jesus would do—what he did do when he was on earth. Think of the many stories in the Gospels where Jesus was just "hanging out" with people—some of whom were considered undesirable. There was Zacchaeus and Mary Magdalene and the woman who anointed him with oil, to mention just a few.

This is one ministry you can embrace—the ministry of presence. You and I can simply choose to be present in the lives of people who need to know they are loved by us and by God. You don't have to preach or teach or solve their problems; you just need to be there for them and then see what God will do through you.

Day Two

Do you know what the ministry of presence is? This is a ministry every Christ-follower should take seriously, and every one of us is qualified and equipped for this ministry.

Galatians 6:2 describes it this way: *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.* That is an important part of this ministry of presence—simply being there for others, carrying their burdens, sharing their sorrows, as well as increasing their joys by our presence. This is the fulfillment of the law of Christ, the teaching of Jesus. This is the new commandment Jesus has given us, and it should be a hallmark of our lives as Christ-followers.

So, what I want to ask you today is: What person in your life right now could use your presence? What person needs to know that someone cares and hasn't forgotten them? Stop right now, if you can, and let God's Spirit reveal that person to you. Perhaps a name popped right into your mind; if not, ask God to reveal that person to you. It may be someone very close to you, a relative or close friend; or it may be someone you just met. Or could it be a stranger you haven't met but who is somehow in your life—the beggar on the street or your next-door neighbor?

Recently God has made it clear to me that I need to do a better job of staying in touch regularly with some dear single women who have gone as missionaries to foreign countries. I've visited many of them, and I know how lonely and tough their lives can be. I know that they need the ministry of presence. They don't necessarily need to read my books or listen to my talks; they simply need to know that I have not forgotten them, and I can be present in their lives by way of the internet.

The ministry of presence is not hard to do. You don't need a degree from a Bible school to do it; you don't need to be able to quote Scripture or teach a Bible study lesson to be qualified. You simply need to make a commitment to be present in a person's life; just be there for them, and by your presence you will communicate God's love. That's what people need more than anything else.

Day Three

I want to ask you a question: Where would you be today if you didn't have people in your life who are simply there for you? I can tell you that God has blessed me with some dear people throughout my life who have always been there for me. People who cry with me and laugh with me, who share my burdens and my joys. Their presence in my life has made an incredible difference. I can't imagine where I'd be without them.

That's what I'm talking about this week—the ministry of presence. The incredible value there is in simply being there for others. When we become Christ-followers, we are commissioned by Jesus to serve others. After he washed the disciples' feet at the Last Supper, Jesus said that he had given them an example of how they were to serve each other.

The ministry of presence is about being a servant—putting others' needs ahead of your own. Jesus calls us to come alongside others and become a part of their lives. As Christians, we fulfill the law of Jesus by being present with people. It means we will serve people even when it might make us uncomfortable. It means we stand with people in the midst of their anxiety and fear, in their difficult times.

I'm truly challenging you and myself this week to take this ministry seriously. To actually ask God to show us what person in our lives needs our presence—simply needs us to be there for them.

For example, let's say you work with a person who is going through something emotionally difficult—maybe a divorce or a recent death in their family. I find that when people are in these kinds of traumatic situations, they simply want a listening ear. Could you invite that person to lunch or coffee and simply listen? Not on company time, of course, but at a time and in a place that is appropriate, to be truly present with them, giving them your undivided attention.

Or could it be that there is someone very close to you—a mate or daughter or sibling—who needs to know that you're not too busy to spend time with them? I think sometimes we can fail to see that those nearest to us need our presence—our total attention to them and whatever issues they're facing.

You may have decided that you don't have certain gifts or abilities, and you devalue the contribution you can make in the lives of others. I'm here to tell you today that if you are a Christ-follower, you are totally capable and qualified to have the ministry of presence. It's just a matter of becoming intentional about doing it.

Day Four

I've recently been introduced to this new terminology—the ministry of presence—but actually it's not a new ministry at all. It's exactly what Jesus has commissioned us to do, all of us who are Christ-followers, to be present in the lives of others. Simply to be there.

Everyone in the body of Christ is qualified for this ministry. You do not have to be brilliant, persuasive, articulate, or experienced. You do not have to be anything but available to be a wonderful tool in the hand of God. In fact, often the ministry of presence is a ministry without words.

You know, sometimes we use the Bible as though it were a band-aid. We stick a favorite verse on others who are suffering, and feel we've really helped them. But just as physical injuries take time to heal, emotional injuries do as well. True, when people are suffering, they need the truth of Scripture to help them heal, but sometimes they just need it demonstrated in your actions rather than in your words. Your presence can communicate what your words will never be able to say.

And keep in mind, when you're with someone who is hurting, you don't need to have answers. Often, I say to someone in pain, "I cannot explain this. I don't know why this has happened." That's not terribly profound, but it's often just simply the truth. So, when someone is really struggling with why something hurtful has happened to them, trying to come up with an explanation usually just makes them feel worse. Just be there; just give them the ministry of your presence without answers.

Someone has said that you and I cannot eliminate someone's grief or sorrow, but we can share it and that will lighten their load. True believers, mature Christians grieve. Jesus did, and we will, too. We can't stop it with words, but we can lighten it by our presence.

Are you available today for the ministry of presence? I believe if you are, God will give you an opportunity today to simply be there for someone.

Day Five

What does it mean to practice The Ministry of Presence? God is showing me more and more how to practice being there for people.

For example, often when I am praying for someone or thinking about them, a thought will come into my mind about what I could do to be there for that person. I've learned that when those kinds of ideas come into my mind, it's most likely placed there by the Holy Spirit, and therefore I should pay attention. So, many times I pause right then and write a note or make a call or add something to my to-do list to remind me to do something for that person that will simply let them know I'm thinking about them, and I care.

I have a friend who is struggling with a health issue. Obviously, I can't do anything to help her resolve that issue, but I can let her know that I'm thinking about her and praying for her. Just to say that to someone, whether in person, on the phone, or by written word, is an example of practicing the ministry of presence.

Inviting someone to your home for no reason except to let them be with you is an example of practicing the ministry of presence. This past Thanksgiving two people who didn't have close-by family were with us at my daughter's home, sharing that meal with us, and it was an expression of care and concern to them, though we never spoke those words. Their invitation to be with us was the ministry extended to them that day, and it was a delight to have them with us.

I told you about my friends who are extending this ministry to homeless people around their home in Chicago. I don't think I'll ever forget what one of them said to my friend, Justin. The homeless man said that in spite of the fact that he was always told he was worthless, he now knew that wasn't true. If he were worthless, my friend would not hang out with him.

The ministry of presence is hanging out with someone, even if it might be inconvenient or push you out of your comfort zone. Who is it in your life that would love for you to "hang out" with them? Are you willing to answer the call of Jesus to show his love through the ministry of your presence?