

## In His Presence

January 9, 2011

What is it like to come into the presence of God? Biblically speaking, the Hebrew patriarchs' experiences of God were dream-like, accompanied by visions of angels and supernatural visions. Moses first saw God as a blazing fire in a desert bush (*Exodus 3:2-6*). When Moses turned aside to look closer, God spoke and conferred on Moses the mission to set the Israelites free from the oppression of Pharaoh. In God's presence, Moses acquired his purpose in life.

When Moses asked God His Name, God said: "I am who I am" (*Exodus 3:13-14*). The Hebrew can be transliterated as "Yahweh" or "Yehovah", both of which come from a root word meaning "to be." This is the same root word used when God first spoke and said: "Light, **be!**" God was saying: "Call me the 'One Who Can Be Anything Any Time Any Place.'" He was identifying Himself as the Source of *all* life.

So, how are we to approach the Source of our being? Moses was told to take off his sandals because God's blazing Presence had sanctified the spot where Moses was standing. This means we need to step away from the familiar things on which we stand in order to draw near to God. When we allow ourselves to be set apart ("sanctified"), God confers on us His purposes for our lives. He calls us apart to send us back into life as His representatives, like Moses. *Genesis 1:26* says that from the beginning we were made to be God's "likeness", i.e., to carry out His purposes on earth.

The fire of God's Presence can be dangerous. King David tried to bring the Ark of God's Presence up to Jerusalem on a cart. When the cart accidentally tipped, a man named Uzzah reached out to keep it from falling. Man's way of handling God's Presence was not God's way, and Uzzah died on the spot. "Uzzah" means "strength." We can't simply touch God in our own strength. David had to learn how to offer sacrifices every six steps in order to bring forth the Ark of God's Presence — and we, too, have to learn what God desires of us in order to draw nearer to Him.

Praise be to God, we now have Jesus, who came to make God more accessible. How? First, He "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (*Hebrews 9:26*). He also modeled perfectly what it is like to pray, listen and walk as God wants us to. Jesus declared that the key to walking in God's Presence is to understand God as our "Father", a word used in this sense some 260 times in the New Testament but only 15 times in the *Old Testament*. Jesus taught us it is possible to be as intimate with God as a child is with his or her own loving father. "Our Father, Who art in heaven...."

Radically, Jesus also taught us to look for Himself in our neighbors! Like us, they are made in God's image. Jesus said "inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (*Matthew 25:40*). In short, the presence of God is available to us through Jesus all the time if we step aside from the familiar, sacrifice our priorities for His, and learn to see Him in everyone we meet. We can try to do this in our own strength, but when we learn to walk by God's grace, our encounters become supernatural, marked by the blazing light and love of God's Presence.

*Abba, thank You for your unfailing Fatherly love, that can experience, that never fails! Help us see Jesus in our neighbors! Help us love them with a love that never fails.*