

All-In: Face to Face with God

Hebrews 9:1–3 NLT

That first covenant between God and Israel had regulations for worship and a place of worship here on earth. There were two rooms in that Tabernacle. In the first room were a lampstand, a table, and sacred loaves of bread on the table. This room was called the Holy Place. Then there was a curtain, and behind the curtain was the second room called the Most Holy Place. ...

Hebrews 9:6–12 NLT

When these things were all in place, the priests regularly entered the first room as they performed their religious duties. But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. By these regulations the Holy Spirit revealed that the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use.

This is an illustration pointing to the present time. For the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer are not able to cleanse the consciences of the people who bring them. For that old system deals only with food and drink and various cleansing ceremonies—physical regulations that were in effect only until a better system could be established. So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.

Hebrews 10:11–14 NLT

Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. There he waits until his enemies are humbled and made a footstool under his feet. For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.

Hebrews 10:15–22 NLT

And the Holy Spirit also testifies that this is so. For he says, “This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”

Then he says, “I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds.” And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven’s Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God’s house, let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ’s blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

Exodus 33:12–17 NLT

One day Moses said to the Lord, “You have been telling me, ‘Take these people up to the Promised Land.’ But you haven’t told me whom you will send with me. You have told me, ‘I know you by name, and I look favorably on you.’ If it is true that you look favorably on me, let me know your ways so I may understand you more fully and continue to enjoy your favor. And remember that this nation is your very own people.” The Lord replied, “I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you.”

Then Moses said, “If you don’t personally go with us, don’t make us leave this place. How will anyone know that you look favorably on me—on me and on me—if you don’t go with us? For your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on the earth.”

The Lord replied to Moses, “I will indeed do what you have asked, for I look favorably on you, and I know you by name.”

2 Corinthians 3:17–18 NLT

For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

5 Keys to Entering God’s Transforming Presence

1. Enter through Jesus, not through performance.

Matthew 27:50–51 NLT

Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

2. Bring your whole, real self into God's Presence.

3. Daily engage with the disciplines of entering God's Presence.

Entering God's Presence:

Worship

Psalm 22:3 NLT

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

John 4:21–24 NLT

Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

Engage in the Word

Hebrews 4:12 NLT

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

Practice Prayer in the Throne Room

Matthew 6:8–10 NLT

Don't be like [the babbling Gentiles], for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. ...

4. Hold tightly to the hope and encourage one another to acts of love and good works.

Hebrews 10:23–24 NLT

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works.

5. Do not neglect gathering together!

Hebrews 10:25 NLT

And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

Small Group Guide: Face to Face with God

Opening Question

When you think about coming into God's presence, does it feel accessible, or is there something that makes you hold back?

The Curtain Was Torn from the Top

To understand what Hebrews 9 and 10 are saying, we need to feel the weight of what access to God's presence meant to a Jewish believer. The tabernacle — and later the temple — was arranged as a graduated approach to God: a courtyard, an altar of sacrifice, a laver for washing, the Holy Place with its lampstand and table and altar of incense, and then behind a thick curtain, the Most Holy Place. This was where God's presence dwelled — above the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant. Only one man could enter there. Only the High Priest. Only once a year. And only with the blood of a sacrifice, offered first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. The system was a precise picture of the problem: sin had severed the closeness between God and the people He made for Himself, and approach required mediation through a High Priest.

Every day, priests performed their service at the altar and in the Holy Place — close to the presence, but not in it. The Most Holy Place remained behind the curtain, inaccessible to ordinary people, a constant reminder of the distance that sin had created. The beauty of Hebrews is that its original readers understood this in their bones. For them, the claim that Jesus had entered the Most Holy Place “once for all time” and secured redemption forever was a staggering reorientation of everything they had been taught.

The author makes two crucial distinctions between the old and new covenants. Under the old system, the blood of animals covered sin — the word is atonement, which means covering. But it could not cleanse the conscience. It dealt with the external verdict while the internal condition remained unchanged. Jesus' blood does something categorically different. It does not merely cover sin; it cleanses it. In God's sight, the believer stands as pure as Jesus Himself. This is what Pastor Jimmy called the grace paradox: we are forever made perfect in Christ, and that settled reality is what motivates and empowers the ongoing work of being made holy — more Christlike, more transformed from the inside out.

The Hebrew word the Old Testament uses for God's face-to-face presence is *paneh* — the presence and proximity of being with someone, understood in terms of being

directly in front of them. Moses' prayer in Exodus 33 is remarkable for its honesty: he tells God plainly that if God's presence doesn't go with them, he doesn't want to go at all. Because it is the presence of God that distinguishes His people from everyone else. Nothing else does. Not moral effort, not religious practice, not heritage. His presence.

That presence, which was behind a curtain and available to one man one day a year, is now available to every believer every moment of every day. The curtain in the temple was torn at the moment of Jesus' death — from top to bottom, Matthew records, meaning God tore it, not man. The way is open. Pastor Jimmy gave us six keys to entering God's presence — take another look at them and identify which key God is asking you to use to unlock greater intimacy with Him in His transforming presence.

For Discussion

1. What does it mean to you, practically and personally, that you now have access to God's presence every day? Does the reality of that actually shape how you live?
2. The grace paradox says two things are true at once: you are forever made perfect in Christ, and you are being made holy over time. Which of those two truths is harder for you to grasp? Do you tend to underestimate what you already are in Christ, or underestimate how much ongoing transformation is still needed?
3. Key two says to bring your whole, real self into God's presence — the good, the bad, and the ugly. Pastor Jimmy names four patterns that keep us from doing this: avoidance, procrastination, blame-shifting, and entitlement. Do you recognize any of those in yourself? What does it keep you from bringing to God?
4. Moses told God he didn't want to go anywhere without His presence. How much does that posture describe your own approach to decisions, relationships, and daily life? Is there an area right now where you have been moving forward without genuinely seeking God's face first?
5. Hebrews 10:24-25 calls us to motivate one another to love and good works, and not to neglect gathering together. How are you currently doing at both sides of that — being an encourager and staying connected to community? What tends to get in the way?

Closing Prayer

Father, You are the God who tore the curtain — from top to bottom, with Your own hands, so that nothing would stand between us and Your presence. Thank You that we do not need a High Priest to go before us once a year. We have one who goes before us always, whose blood has made us clean and whose righteousness has made us welcome. Forgive us for the ways we have stayed at a distance out of habit, shame, or

self-sufficiency. We want to be people who come to You face to face, with our whole real selves, holding nothing back. Transform us in Your presence. Amen.