Encounters With God — Delivery Transcript

Romans 12:1 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, January 7, 2024 · *This is the Way*

Watch or listen: Subsplash (video & audio) · YouTube

> ⚠️ ***AUTO-GENERATED TRANSCRIPT — verify against the audio before quoting publicly.*** *Produced from a Descript transcription of the Broadview Church sermon recording and lightly cleaned (filler words removed, obvious mis-hears of names and Scripture references corrected). No timestamps. This is not a publication-ready manuscript and it is not Wes's exact words for print. Check any line against the recording before it goes on a graphic, in an email, or in a book.*

All right, well thanks to the band for leading us in worship this morning and if I forgot to say it earlier: Happy New Year. Happy 2024 to each of you. It's going to be a world full of crazy in 2024. So I hope everybody's buckled up, ready for the ride. One of the most valuable gifts that I think that I could give you as your pastor for 2024 and beyond is the gift of knowing how to pursue the manifest presence of God in your life. One of the best things we can learn how to do corporately as a church is to learn how to pursue the manifest presence of God in our life together in our worship services.

And if you haven't heard me say it before, I'm sure you'll hear me say it today and you'll probably hear me say it in the future I truly believe that one moment in the presence of God, the real God, the God of the Bible can change your life forever. And all it takes is just one moment. To utterly change the whole trajectory of your life. And if you don't believe me, you can look at examples of this in the Old Testament and New Testament we've been studying the book of Genesis in our church lately, and you see that in the life of Abraham.

One moment God's calling on his life called him out of where he was in this state of idolatry in the physical location and totally set a different trajectory for his life. You see the same thing with Moses. And the burning bush, you see the same thing with Samson, you see the same thing with Elisha in Isaiah chapter 6. Isaiah, I'm sorry, you see this with various different characters, one moment in the presence of God utterly changes their life. And you've probably even sensed something similar in your own life. There's something special about these moments that you experience the Lord.

God speaks to you in powerful ways. And it changes the trajectory of your life. And I want us to explore that idea this morning in the book of Romans. As a church, we've been going through the book of Genesis, but we pressed pause to do an advent series. And before we jump back into the book of Genesis, I thought there would be some value to spending four or

five weeks asking the question, not what does our church do but what kind of people do we want to be? As Broadview Baptist church, obviously there's the bigger question than that.

What does it mean to be a Christian? What does it look like to live the Christian life? That's a kind of a given every sermon ought to address that question, but what does it look like for us to covenant together and be a certain kind of people in our local church? And that question is answered by our values. In fact, any church that you love being a part of, probably the reason you love being a part of that church is because the culture of that church is attractive to you and culture is determined by values and one of the values that we have in our church is fostering tangible encounters with the living God.

Every Sunday our goal is that you would experience God, that you don't just hear a message or learn a new song or see people you've haven't seen all week. But that you actually experience God in our worship services. And that's the value we're going to look at this morning. The last week and the coming weeks we're looking at the other four values. In our church and just so that you are aware of them and become familiar with them I'm going to show you these. The first one we looked at last week was making Jesus Known.

Wherever we go. This morning we're looking at fostering tangible encounters with the living God. What does that mean and how do we go about that? The next one that we'll look at next week is about transformation. That we're a Bible-teaching church, but we don't just teach the Bible so you know the Bible. We teach biblical truths so that it would transform your life, change the way that you live. When it comes to community and small groups and our life together, we want to build community, but not just community for the sake of community, but we want to build community that serves like Jesus served humble Christ-like love for others, and then finally we want to welcome people as they are Broadview, I think, has embodied these values long before I got here.

It's why I was attracted to Broadview Baptist church. It's why I became its pastor. And I hope these values continue to be present in our church for years and years to come because I think they're biblical values. I think these are values that if you were to pick any church throughout history and ask Jesus what kind of values should a church like this have he would use langu it wouldn't use this language exactly, he'd probably use way better language, but it would be similar themes because this is what a New Testament church oughta look like and how a New Testament church flourishes and builds a life-giving culture.

And so that's what we want to be. We want to be a biblical church. We want to be rooted in God's Word, but we don't just want to know the Word. We want to live the Word and live a certain kind of way as a result of that. This morning we're looking at Romans chapter 12, verse 1, talking about the manifest presence of God. And I don't know how to describe this idea of manifest presence. There's a couple of different ways. To think about it, there are two types of God's presence.

I'm going to say it this way. There's a theological term that gets tossed around by people who write theological books called the omnipresence of God. How many of you ever heard that term before? Omni is just a word that means all, so he's all present, he's all present everywhere at all times, and that's true. So in that sense, God's even present in hell, right? He's there to enforce his wrath and things of that nature. But that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about something different. And that different thing is I'm using the term manifest.

You could use the word tangible. You could use the word special. You could use a variety of different words, but it's just a type of God's presence that is experiential, it is overwhelming, it is sensory, it is concrete. And the only language really you can use to describe it when you experience that manifest presence is subjective. Sensory language. And you actually see this in the Old Testament when the Psalms talk about the manifest presence of God. It often uses sensory language like taste and see that the Lord is good. Or another psalm in psalm chapter sixteen i believe it's sixteen verse eleven in your presence is abundant joy at your right hand are eternal pleasures you this a mode of language of desire and fulfillment, it's because of the experience of God's manifest presence.

I mentioned Psalm 34. 8, taste and see that the Lord is good. Not just know it, not just experience, but taste it like you would taste a beautiful meal or drink, how happy is the person who takes refuge in him. Another example of this in the Psalms is a lot of times the psalmist will say, there's only one thing that I want. One thing I seek after, the one thing that I desire more than anything else. And what is that one thing? It's to be with the Lord. It's for the Lord to be with me.

The one thing I ask from the Lord, what I desire is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, doing what? Gazing on the beauty of the Lord, seeking him in his temple. In other words, something about that gathered worship, experiencing God's presence. That was infinitely better to the psalmist than any other thing in his life. Same thing in Psalm 8410, better's one day in your courts than a thousand anywhere else. So when I say manifest presence of God, that's what I'm talking about. And hopefully we experience God's manifest presence every single Sunday, but I think we all know that's not the case.

There are certain Sundays where God shows up in a very special way. One of the things that really encouraged me is last week. When we were in our time of worship, we didn't even have the full band. And never whenever we don't have the full band, I'm always like, okay, let's see. Let's see how this goes. It was just Taylor and his guitar. And there was a moment in worship. We had just finished praying. Blessed are the poor in spirit. We had confessed our humility and need before the Lord. And then we sang this song, is He worthy?

How many of you were here last week? Okay, good amount. We sang that song, is He worthy? And between that song and the next song, which was Oh Praise the name. There

was this moment where I was overwhelmed with this tangible sense of the presence of God. And to the point that I stopped singing and I started praying. Lord. More bring more. Make us more aware. This it's this it's just like when someone shows up in the room, you know how the mood of the room changes? If President Trump walked in those doors, everything would change, right?

The mood of the room would change. I'm not saying for good or for bad, it would just change the room. Well when God comes into the room in a manifest way, it changes the mood of the room and what was so encouraging to me is I experienced that but I didn't say anything to anybody. I thought I might have said something when I came up here hinting, alluding to it, but not explicitly. But then I bumped into a member of our church in the hallway after church, and that person came up to me and they were just smiling from ear to ear, super excited, and they said, I sense the Holy Spirit in our worship services today.

And she didn't mean like the Holy Spirit, how he's always present, working and moving, but there was a special a special manifestation of God's presence in that worship service. And then someone else came up and said, yes, I did too. And then when I talked about it this morning, there's another person in our early service who had attended the 1045 service and said, yes, I did too. So it's not just something subjective, it's not something personal that only I feel that I think that is the case. Then even this morning there was a sense in which the Lord was ministering to me in a special way.

But I'm not talking about that. I'm not talking about feelings. I'm not talking about something you can manufacture. I'm not talking about something you can control or manipulate. I'm talking about a manifestation of God's presence corporately that everyone senses and it changes you. And the best thing you can learn to do is to learn how to put yourself in a position and help create an atmosphere so that God can minister to you in that way. Individually and most importantly corporately as a church. Because our church exists to help people find Jesus and follow Jesus and become a disciple of Jesus.

But he's the living God. He is personal. He is alive today and as a person wants to be in relationship with people and people need to know how to commune with God in that personal relational way and they need to learn how to put themselves in postures where that living God can encounter them. And our job is to do everything that we can as a local church to create the atmosphere so that that spiritual dynamic can take place. We know it happens even as I'm talking about it. You're probably thinking of times, maybe even this morning, where you sensed it happening, but it doesn't always happen, right?

Why? Why doesn't it always happen? Why can't you just run the formula, run the play, and God does a certain thing? I think the answer to that is in our text, in Romans chapter 12, verse 1. There are certain things that need to be avoided. There are certain things that need to be pursued and protected. And I think this passage gives us a real good template for how

to create an atmosphere for God's presence to manifest. And so let's read the text, Romans chapter twelve, starting in verse one. This is Paul speaking to a church in Rome, and he's just developed this incredible theology, and then he says, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you now to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.

Holy and pleasing to God. This is your true worship. And I'm going to kind of hinge on this phrase here, true worship. True worship is where God manifests His presence. You're not just singing, you're not just preaching, you're experiencing the Lord. How do you experience that kind of worship? I think what this passage is showing us is that when your heart is properly prepared, and when your worship is rightly offered, you will create an atmosphere that invites the manifest presence of God. And so our hearts need to be properly prepared.

Our worship needs to be rightly offered, but when our hearts are prepared and our worship is rightly offered, it creates an atmosphere for the manifest presence of God. And that right worship and heart preparation revolves, in my opinion, from this passage, around two poles. There are two dynamics. That when you have them present in worship, it creates an atmosphere for God to show up. The two the two dynamics are number one, the exaltation of Jesus Christ. And number two, the surrendering of yourself. Exalting Jesus and surrendering self. You actually see both of those dynamics explicitly stated in this text.

And from my experience, this is just anecdotal. But those moments in my life where God has shown up in a worship service have been the moments where I was emptied of myself, hungry and dependent on the Lord and committed to exalting the name of Jesus. Sometimes intentionally, sometimes because of being led in worship. But when those two things are together, it invite it doesn't control it doesn't manufacture it, but it invites the manifest. Presence of God. So what does it look like to exalt Jesus and surrender self? Well when it comes to exalting Jesus, I want to put it under two headings.

According to Romans chapter 12, verse 1, the way I see this is in that little phrase at the beginning where it says, in view of God's mercies. In view of God's mercy. So exalting Christ in worship is coming to recognize and respond to the reality of God's mercy. In Jesus Christ. And if you are familiar with the book of Romans, you know that the Apostle Paul has kind of been building this argument, exalting Jesus all the way from Romans chapter 1. Romans chapter 1 talks about the wrath of God and all of these things and that reconciliation and righteousness is attainable, but it's attainable not through moral effort or being impressive to God.

It's attainable by grace through faith. He says in Romans chapter 1 verse 17, the just shall live by faith. He says in Romans chapter 3, a little bit later, he makes this argument that we're all sinful and condemned before the Lord, whether you're a Jew or a Greek, whether you're moral or immoral, we're all on the same playing field. And that God has acted in Jesus Christ

to become both the just and the justifier of those who believe. In other words, we had a problem, we were sinful and couldn't fix our sin.

And so God had to, if He's a just God, punish us for our sin, but he's also not just, he's also merciful. And so what he has done is he has acted in Christ to show both mercy and justice at the cross. Of Jesus Christ and that's a mercy that we receive in Jesus that God is just and justifier. He says something similar in Romans chapter four. He has this big argument. About Abraham and how Abraham was justified not through moral effort and obedience but through faith and that the same is true for the New Covenant believers that we are invited into a relationship with God, not by moral effort or adherence to the law, but by faith.

Romans chapter 5, while we were still sinners, while we were weak, Jesus Christ die for us, that the wages of sin, Romans 6. 23, is death. But there is a gift that is given to us by God, a free gift, that is eternal life. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans chapter 7 talks about this tug of war in Paul in Paul. He's like, I do the things I don't want to do, and I don't do the things I do want to do, and this body of death seems to keep me from living the life that I know I'm supposed to live, who will deliver me from this body of death?

And then Romans it closed with, thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, that life is given. And even though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. He says again in Romans chapter 8, there's nothing that can separate us from the love of God. You want to know what is God's mercy towards us in Christ, it's that neither death nor life, nor things present, nor things to come. Nothing in all creation can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Once he has you, he will never let you go because of what Jesus has done.

That that God's calling and election are sure and irrevocable, that even though the Jews had hardened their heart and they turned away from God and they're going their own way, that the Lord will prevail. Give redemption. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. He goes up line after line after line, mercy after mercy after mercy after mercy, to the point at the very end he just has this doxology and he says uns unscrutable are his judgments, the depths and the wisdom of the knowledge of God, how unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways, because through him and because from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory forever and ever. And then he says, therefore, in view of God's mercies, present your body. So, true worship, worship that'll change your life, worship that'll create an atmosphere where God's Spirit manifests in a special, tangible, concrete way is worship that is centered on the Lord Jesus Christ and it is grounded in the biblical gospel. That we were hopelessly lost without Christ, but that God has in his great love for us, he has acted to send Jesus to do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

And I'm telling you, when you create a worship service that exalts the name of Jesus and preaches that beautiful gospel, the Spirit of God begins to shine and work in ways that are tangible, concrete, and unmistakable. So one of the best things we can do as a local church is to center our worship services around Jesus Christ. Begin exalting Jesus Christ. It is He is worthy. He alone is worthy. We're not worshiping some generic God or some kind of sentimental idea that's palpable for everyone, but we are exalting the name of Jesus, even if he may be offensive, he is our only hope.

There is life in his name and his name alone. But it's not just that, it's also surrendering. Yourself, exalting Jesus, surrendering the self. The surrendering part comes when he says, present your body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. To the Lord, this is your true worship. So it's not just recognizing and responding to God's mercy in Jesus, it's also releasing control of your life and reserving your life, saying, I'm reserving my body. And not everything I am, I'm reserving it for the Lord and for his glory. And so that's articulated in this language about sacrifice.

Present your body as a living sacrifice, which honestly probably for many of us is a little bit weird because you're not steeped in Old Testament Judaism and the sacrificial system and the whole idea about killing animals and sprinkling the blood everywhere who's like wants to sign up for that church service. Nobody is interested in that. But it is important to understand. In fact, the word present that Paul uses is the same Greek word, if you read the Greek version of the Old Testament, it's the same Greek word that gets used to talk about these sin offerings.

What would happen in the Old Testament is they recognize that God is holy and that they were sinful, and that in their sin they didn't deserve to be in the presence of God. And so what God instructed them to do was to sacrifice an animal in the place of their life. In other words, they deserve death, but instead of them dying, someone else would die in their place. So they would sacrifice a bull or a goat or whatever. And in sacrificing the animal, what they were saying is, God, I'm holy, or God, you're holy.

I'm sinful. I know the wages of sin is death, but would you take the place, would you take the life of another in my place to show mercy? And God did. Now I think even the Old Testament saints knew that the blood of bulls and goats can't take away sin. Our sin is a real bad thing. And some animal is not going to atone for it. But what the Lord was doing is he was setting up a framework for the ultimate sacrifice, and that ultimate sacrifice was Jesus. He is the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.

It is through his death that he makes atonement or that he pays the price for all sin, past, present, and future. So essentially, and this is what Romans 3 is all about, that God in Christ was looking over. He was being patient. He was saying, that isn't enough to pay the penalty for your sin, but there is one who can. And in patience, waiting for that day, I will withhold

judgment, withhold judgment, withhold judgment. Then Jesus comes and he settles the accounts. Through his one-time sacrifice. So whatever this present your body means, we know it can't mean that you present your body to make atonement for sin.

Okay? It's very important you understand that. If you want to understand Christianity, you're not being holy to pay the price to impress God so that he'll be okay with you. What you're doing, the way the New Testament talks about it, is you're offering a sacrifice through Christ. You're recognizing that Jesus has become for me what I could never be. So through him or in him, I'm surrendering my life to God like a dead animal. I'm dying to self and I'm giving myself to Jesus. Except for Paul, you're not a dead animal, you're a living sacrifice.

So you're surrendering your life to God, but you're not just releasing, you're also reserving. You're saying, I'm for you. The old me is gone. The new me is for you and you alone. Paul said it this way, I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, in the life I now live. I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. So I'm committing my hands and my feet and my sexuality and my finances. So I'm reserving it for righteousness instead of sin.

For God's glory instead of my glory, for the kingdom of God instead of the kingdom of myself or any other earthly ambition. That creates an atmosphere for God to show up in your life. I'm not talking about sinless perfection. I'm not talking about making atonement. I'm talking about total surrender. Reserving your body for the Lord. And the language he uses is it's holy and pleasing. Holy just means set apart. Always think of fine china. You know the china your wife never uses except for special occasions. It's set apart. The Lord is saying, I want you set apart.

I want you reserved for me, for special use for me. And that's pleasing to the Lord. A life that is continually, totally, joyfully surrender to God, that is what pleasing that is what pleases the Lord. It is it is that surrender. It is that yielding yourself and that invites that creates an atmosphere that invites the manifest presence of God. And so what does this look like practically? That's really what I want to finish talking about because that's the theology of it, if you will, but how do you actually make it work?

So I want to give you everything I know about how to create an atmosphere that invites the manifest presence of God. This is something I'm learning. Something I'm trying to grow in, something that honestly I was always suspicious of because I'm a very intellectual type person. And so when I would hear people talk about the manifest presence of God, I thought of charlatans trying to control and manipulate people with fancy music and m mood setting atmospheres and I didn't have any I didn't want that but that's not what I'm talking about.

I'm talking about something so much bigger than that. And something that is real, something that is spiritually real. So how do you do it? How do you how what can you do? So

that God will do what only He can do. Now I'll put it under three headings. Preparation. There's things you can do to prepare. There's things you can do in pursuit of God in worship. And then there's things you can do to protect. That spiritual dynamic so that it continually invites the manifest presence of God in your life. And some of these are explicitly mentioned in the text, some of these are more indirect, but this is just me sharing what I've learned along the way.

When it comes to preparation, the way that I think about it personally, how do you get yourself in a posture of submission and surrender before the Lord, I use a template from the Beatitudes. Because the Beatitudes give you a template for how to become humble, humble before God, who is holy. Honest about your sin, which is offensive to God, and hungry for the presence and grace of God in your life. Now why do I say that? Well if you think about the Beatitudes, what's the first one say? Blessed are the poor in spirit, right?

Then blessed are those who mourn, and then blessed are those who blessed are the meek, for they all inherit the earth, and then blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. So when it talks about blessed are the poor in spirit, what that is getting at is that you are not God and will never be, and you were so foolish to think otherwise. There is only one God, and He is the living God. He is the God of the Bible, and He is great, and He is majestic, and you are not.

The way the Lord's Prayer talks about this is our Father who is in heaven Hallowed be your name. Make your name great. Make your name set apart. And so what you want to do in your life is get to a position where you realize that God is God and I am not. And that creates a poverty of spirit. Once that humility is in place, then you need to become honest with your sin. You need to search your heart and allow the Lord to search your heart and not just say what are the bad things that I'm doing, but why am I doing the things that I do.

What is that idolatry? What is that unbelief in me? What is that selfishness that is making me do the things that I know displease the Lord? And then once you get honest with yourself about your sin, you confess your sin. And the Bible says, blessed are those who do that, because they'll be comforted by the Lord. That's what we did this morning with Ron's help leading us in prayers. Get honest about our sin. And then you want to get hungry for the Lord. And the way I think about this in the Beatitudes, it says, blessed are the meek.

The meek Meekness is strength under control. Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is saying all that I am, all that I have, all of my talents, abilities, money. Everything, I am yielding it. I'm surrendering it to God. I'm saying it's not for my use, it's for his use. And then once you surrender. It says, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. So what you're doing is you're emptying yourself and you're saying, Lord, I'm eager for you. I'm emptying Wes out so that I can be filled with the fullness of God.

And that's preparation. That's how I do it. I think there's a lot of templates. You can use the Lord's Prayer as a template. I use the Beatitudes as a template of Becoming properly prepared, seeing the greatness of God, seeing the reality of your sin, emptying yourself of pride and ego and ambition, and surrendering everything to the Lord. Once your heart is prepared, then you need to pursue the Lord in worship. And so what does that look like? Well, corporately it's pretty easy, right? You sing songs. But you don't just want to sing any songs.

You want to sing songs that extol the name of God, that praise the name of God, that describe the reality of Jesus, that preach the gospel You don't just want to sing, you also want to pray. Because in prayer you're responding to God. So it's not just that you're talking about your spouse, you're talking with your spouse. That's good for your relationship, by the way. You're conversing. You're talking with that person you love. And then after you pray, you may want to grow. You may want to learn. So you read the scriptures, or somebody preaches the scriptures and begins to unpack it and extol the goodness and the grace of God.

And there's something about when you pursue the Lord through those graces that he likes to show up. And he likes to say, amen. That's right. And keep pulling that thread. There's more there. Dig in. And so this in your personal private worship. It may look like you have a quiet time, you have a Bible reading plan, you've confessed your sin, you've gotten humble and hook hungry before the Lord, and you just begin to spend time with Jesus. Maybe you play some Christian music, maybe you get out your guitar and sing some worship songs.

The point is you're intentionally pursuing the Lord. The thing about Christianity is the Lord never forces his grace on anybody. He offers it. It's an invitation, but you've got to accept it. You've got to make movement towards him. And when you move towards him, he'll move towards you. The way Jeremiah says it is, if you will seek me with all of your heart, then you'll find me. So you want to pursue the Lord intently, intensely and sincerely. One of the things that I overlooked when talking about preparing your heart for worship, there's a passage in Isaiah.

You may write this down, it's Isaiah 57, verse 15. The Lord lives in two places. He's the high and exalted one whose name is holy. He says, I live in the high and holy place. The only other place God lives is with the oppressed and lowly of spirit. You want to create an environment where God will visit, you've got to become someone who is in need of reviving. The Lord manifests his presence when people live from a place of need. And when you are living from a place of need because you do not have the one thing you desire, it changes the way you live and the way you pursue the Lord.

And when you begin to pursue him from that place, then he will he will do what he promised to do, which is to reveal himself to you. And to manifest his presence. And then finally, the last thing is protecting it. Once you prepare your heart and begin to pursue the Lord. You

want to protect a life that has that kind of atmosphere for God to show up. One of the ways you can do this is by in your time with the Lord, learn to sequence your time with the Lord By first talking to God about what he wants to talk about and then talk about what you want to talk about.

So many times we rush into God's presence and we say, Lord, help me, Lord, I need this, Lord. This is wrong and that is wrong, and it's almost starting out with us. Same way with corporate worship. When you're into a time of corporate worship, if you want to protect the atmosphere, before you start talking about yourself, you need to talk about the Lord You need to see the truth of the Lord. You need to ask the Lord, what do you want to say? Is there anything you want to say to me?

One of the things that we do as a preparatory time of worship in our worship service is before we sing the next song or even before we sing the first song. We ask the Lord, give us ears to hear, and eyes to see, and hearts to receive what it is that you want to give. We want to talk about what you want to talk about before we talk about what we want to talk about. The other two things that will jeopardize God's manifest presence in your life is disobedience and distractions.

So what happens is when you begin to experience God's manifest presence, it almost always comes with a word from the Lord. Do this. And it's usually loud and unmistakable. And so what you want to do, if you want to keep your life in a position where you can experience God's presence, you need to go where God leads and do what God says immediately. And often this is relational. This is the way, at least in my own personal quiet times, often or even in certain worship services, you'll be connecting with the Lord in worship, you'll be being ministered to by the Holy Spirit, and then he'll say to you need to go and write a letter of apology to so-and-so because of because of the enmity that is between the two of you.

You need to go and make it right. The in the Sermon on the Mount, God says, before you offer your gift at the altar, first go be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift, because the Lord has no real care for what you're saying here if what's going on there is all messed up. And so go make it right. And so there will be times where I'll just in the middle of a quiet time get out a card and write a card. Sometimes it's a note of encouragement, sometimes it's a note of apology, sometimes it's a phone call, sometimes it's a text message, sometimes it has nothing to do with some enmity in a relationship, it's just the Lord said do something and you do it.

When you put yourself in a position to hear from God will speak. And when God speaks, if you want to protect that atmosphere, do what he says. Because the moment you stop, it grieves the Holy Spirit. And it jeopardizes that dynamic. The second thing is distractions. Distractions will undermine an atmosphere that invites the presence of God. You know how your kids can ruin a good date? Well, distractions can ruin a good moment with the Lord.

And so you want to remove from your life distractions that are preventing you, number one, from even creating the space so that you can meet with God.

You might need to reorganize your schedule. You may need to get up earlier, go to bed later. You may need to remove Netflix or social media or whatever. Another way to deal with distractions is with fasting. Fasting is a an intentional season of pursuing the Lord, and often in fasting God will reveal things to you that are that are desensitizing you to his presence in your life. And so just get rid of them. And after you get rid of them, protect that rhythm, protect that rhythm of your life so that distractions will no longer undermine what God's trying to do in your life.

You've got to become properly prepared. You've got to pursue the Lord intensely and sincerely and protect that dynamic because your enemy does not want you connecting with the Lord in that way. He has committed all of his resources to disrupting your relationships with people. To diverting your attention away from the Lord, from giving you excuse after excuse to not come to worship and not gather with the saints and not sing praise to the Lord, filling your w life with complexity and grief and everything else that will distract you from the Lord.

And so you are at war, you need to live like it. But if you can do those things and you can create that atmosphere, I promise you there will be moments where the Lord will visit you. And when he visits you, he will minister to you in ways that are so amazing. That you'll do whatever it takes to have more and more and more. And I don't just want to challenge you with that personally, although I think it's the best challenge I could give you in 2024. I also want to challenge you with that corporately.

Why can we not make Broadview a place where people experience the manifest presence of God? Why can't we be people who are committed not to exalting ourselves or exalting our brand? But exalting Christ and Christ alone. Where people come into our church, they realize the hero isn't any human, the hero is Jesus. Why can't we be a place where the atmosphere of the room is such that God is pleased to dwell there because critical mass number of people have put themselves in a position to experience his presence. If we could be that kind of church, the Lord will attract people from all over our city who need to meet with the Lord.

Who need God in their life and who will find Him here because we have made it a value to foster tangible encounters. With the living God. So I want to invite you right there where you're seated to enter into a time of prayer and there are things that I've said that maybe you want to pray about or think through, maybe ask the Lord wisdom on how to navigate. You may be here this morning and you're just in a place of need and you need God's presence to minister to you. So would you humble yourself now in these moments?

Rehearse and remember God's mercy and his grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. Remove from your mind or maybe isolate in your life those distractions that have desensitized you to the thing that matters the most. Jesus told Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted about many things, but only one thing's necessary. Choose the better portion and it will not be taken from you if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, to experience God's manifest presence, you've got to experience it through Jesus Christ. You can never make atonement for your sin.

But the good news is atonement has already been made in Jesus if you will just repent and believe in Him. Confess your sin to the Lord and instead of relying on doing better or trying harder, rest in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ who died. For your sins in your place on your behalf because of God's great love for you. And if you've never made that decision public or you've never followed the Lord in believers baptism, you can use this time to commit that to the Lord. I'll be happy to receive you and help you express that decision if that's something the Lord wants you to do.

Let's just take a few moments. Let's give the Lord some space as Preston leads us. The altar is open if you want to pray about anything, but we don't have to rush out. Of what the Lord is wanting to accomplish in our hearts this morning. So let's spend time with the Lord, respond to him as he leads. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are in this place and that your presence is that's where it's at. That's where life is found. I thank you that your grace is greater than all of our sin.

And that it is sufficient for us in our need, whatever it may be. And so would you strengthen us now by your grace as we respond to you in Jesus' name