

# Present Your Present



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When we gather to eat supper as a family, our children are often so squirrely that we can't even hold hands and pray without something to fuss about. Sometimes we will flip a sand timer for one minute of silence and stillness, which they endure as torture. This quiets our bodies, but doesn't always ground us in the present. We want to be with each other, and not just take turns talking. While I was praying about this, a simple exercise came to mind, which I learned a few years ago when I was seeing a counselor. It's called a body scan. Like a copy machine, a person closes their eyes and slowly moves their attention over each part of the body, feeling it's feelings, reconnecting each part to our sense of self, and noticing the pumping of blood and life breathing in and out each part.

Then I wondered, how does this relate to prayer? Mental health is important, but even more "this one thing I seek, that I may dwell in his temple and gaze on his beauty" (Psalm 27:4). Then a familiar song came to mind: Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes! The Sunday school version ends with "clap your hands and praise him". This song and "Father Abraham" were both strategic in getting out the wiggles before we "turn around and sit down". That evening we tried something new, and I noticed the effect was just as powerful on myself as the children.

**"Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness." (Romans 6:13)**

Before dinner, we presented our bodies to God in the sequence of the song: head, shoulders, knees, toes, eyes, ears, mouth and nose. In preparation for this, I studied the scriptures about the dedication of the Temple. I noticed the rituals of anointing with oil, laying on of hands, and declaring things as "holy to the Lord" (Exodus 28:36). Jesus embraced all of these rituals in the dedication of his own body as a temple, as well as in his ministry to others.

After anointing each of my children on their foreheads with some lavender baby oil, and asking one of them to anoint myself, I guided them through a short exercise of laying their hands on each part of their own body, and repeating the words "Holy to the Lord". We ended together with the simple prayer, "May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, oh Lord." Perhaps you know the spiritual song based on this prayer, which could also be used for this moment. Three things stood out to me after this experience: the present (offering), the present (gift), and the present (moment).

**"Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll — I have come to do your will, my God.'" - Hebrews 10:5 -7**

As we present our bodies to the Lord, we enter into an active relationship with the present moment. Today is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2). Today, we can hear his voice (Heb. 3:15)! God is ever present, and never absent. He is not the god of the dead, but the living, for to him all are alive (Luke 20:38). But we tend to be absent minded and hard hearted, carried along by time like a conveyor belt. When we present our bodies to God, we become a living sacrifice! Our senses are sharpened, our attention is heightened, and our affections are deepened.

It is a marvel that God, who is everywhere and in everything, created something that exists apart from himself, with a will that is independent of our creator so that it can be freely offered or freely withheld. When we choose to offer our bodies to our Creator, they are a gift that is truly appreciated. Even though God created this gift, and delights in this gift, he does not take it by force, but asks, and seeks, and knocks. What is it like when you imagine your body as a gift that brings joy to God? How does it feel to

know that you are desired? God desires something that is ours to give, our bodies are a present. His banner over us is love. Imagining God to be near does not make him come. He is already here. But it does make it easier for us to be near to him.

**"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." (Psalm 46:1)**

While God is ever-present, we tend to live at a distance from our bodies. We dwell on the past with bitterness, on the future with worry, on the other side of the fence with envy, and in an imaginary world of deceit. We are all experts in avoiding the present. When we do engage in the moment, we have specially designed space suits to protect ourselves from the groan of creation. We insulate ourselves with introspection, or we immunize ourselves to the Spirit by clinging to our false sense of control. Yet all of creation is groaning. Our bodies are groaning. Even the Spirit of God is groaning within us. Just like a body scan, our spiritual senses are heightened in the present, and it hurts. For this reason we often rush away, rather than wait upon the Lord.

It is here in the groan that is hidden the greatest treasure of all - the joy of hope. As we offer our bodies to God, we may not always feel his presence. Initially, we may feel his absence, because there is so much more of God than we can see in the moment, and so much more in ourselves than we can feel. Just as human relationships grow in intimacy over time, so it is with God. When we offer our bodies to God, we present a present to the Ever-Present. ~

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