

# **Dwelling In His Presence:**

**Spiritual Disciplines To  
Deepen Your Walk with God**



by Rhonda Jones

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## About the Author

Rhonda Jones, (aka. The Christian Meditator), is the creator of over 25 Christ-centered meditation and affirmation CDs and the author of the 10-week Christian self-development, ***Detox Your Life and Awaken Your Inner Spirit.***



In addition to her popular website, <http://www.thechristianmeditator.com>, Rhonda hosts annual Christian meditation retreats where participants learn a variety of Christ-centered meditation techniques and discover the profound benefits of Biblically-based meditation and dwelling in God's presence.

It was meditation integrated with the scriptures that helped Rhonda overcome years of depression. Now her ministry reaches thousands of Christians world-wide who have been touched by her guided meditations and teachings.

Learn more about The Christian Meditator by visiting her websites:

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## ***Dwelling In His Presence: Spiritual Discipline to Deepen Your Walk with God***

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### Introduction

My desire in life is that all Christians really know God. Knowing God is a process. It is a spiritual progression of growth towards the divine. It is inexhaustible and never ending. In fact, while we live on the earth, it is never fully attainable. Yet, in seeking to know God more fully, we become more of who Christ created us to be, we have a greater understand our pilgrimage on the earth, we adopt more of the fruits of God's spirit, and we begin to possess a sense of joy and fulfillment deep in our heart.

### The Journey Began

In 1996 after having been a Christian since my college days, my life changed one evening, an evening that began no different than any other. I was sitting at ***Thank God Its Friday Restaurant*** with the man of my dreams. The man I thought I would spend my life with. As we were talking amongst the busyness and buzzing in the room I began to sense a strange feeling. It was like everything came to a standstill and God put the spotlight on me. Then he said in a voice so clearly, "Rhonda, what are you doing here, this is not the life I have called for you." He said it again. Although I behaved as if nothing happened. God spoke to me that night and within one month my relationship ended and my life spiraled down into deep despair. Then God began to build me back up. This Ebook is about my journey to wholeness and eventually ministry.

I've been a Christian for over 20 years now. My salvation began at the age of 20. I didn't grow up in a Christian home and rarely attended church. I was a child of the world, fully indoctrinated in the ways of sin and polluted by the world's concepts and principles. Giving my life to Jesus truly transformed me into a new person and sent me down a new path of discovery.

From the day of my salvation I was an avid church goer. I never missed a Sunday Service, attended mid-week bible study, participated in outreach meetings, taught Sunday School, was a member of the Young Women's Group, and hosted small group meetings. I could go on and on, but to limit space, let's just say I was deeply involved in every facet of the church at one

time or another. I made many friends, enjoyed ongoing fellowship with the saints, and loved being a part of a large extended family.

Yet, about 12 years into my high profile church existence a longing began in my heart. In the deepest crevices of my soul, something was missing. I began to find fault with the church and blame my discontentment on my surroundings. It wasn't anything the pastor was or wasn't doing or the church wasn't offering. The messages become mundane and lost their excitement. So I went on a journey to find the perfect church or environment that would restore that missing piece. Several years past and I never found it. Going to church became routine for me. I went because I had always gone, except the enthusiasm wasn't there any more. Each week to me was like sitting through Algebra class. I couldn't wait until it was over and questioned why I was even there.

But it was also during this time that transformation and change began. As I spent less time in church, I spent more time with God. I spent more time in silence. I spent more time listening. It was also a time characterized by pain and aloneness, sometimes loneliness, a somewhat desert and barren experience. It was during this time that God's voice became clearer to me. Then one day, many years ago, He said as I stood in a crowded room, "Rhonda, what are you doing here, this is not the life I chose for you." And within 2 months of that calling my life changed forever.

I can't say that I've been happy about all that has occurred during that time, but I can tell you that my love and intimacy with God has increased, and interestingly it had nothing to do with attending church. Instead my greatest growth and maturity came from depending on God through what appeared to be unbearable circumstances, times of isolation, hours of devouring the scriptures, and learning to "be still and get to know God" for myself. That is why I wrote this book, which is an chapter of a larger (unpublished) book I wrote in 2001, title, **"Don't Go Back to Egypt."** Creating Greater Intimacy with God will provide you with tools and knowledge to draw closer to God and give Him the opportunity to draw closer to you. I'm sure that you will identify with many of my experiences as God courts us to a greater love relationship with him.

The book incorporates my personal experience, the Word of God, and biblical principles to enhancing your relationship with God. Subchapters include the following topics:

***Developing Intimacy with God,  
Moses on the Mountain top,  
The Holy Spirit the Messenger of Truth,***

***Journaling Your Spiritual Progress,  
Finding Time for Solitude,  
Purified By the Word,  
Quieting a Restless Mind,  
Prayer-the Catalyst for Change,  
Spiritual Breathing,  
The Company You Keep,  
Forgiving Yourself  
Entering God's Presence Through Praise  
Ever Increasing Faith.***  
*(may not be in this order).*

### **Developing Intimacy with God**

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) It is only through abiding with Christ that we can do anything of significance in this life. But what exactly does it mean to abide in Christ? Webster's definitions of "abiding" mean to "rest" and "reside." When you reside with someone you occupy the same space. You spend time with that person both formally and informally. You talk to them and enjoy their company. Christ is not to be like a next-door neighbor that we visit from time to time. He wants to live in your house with you. Your house referring to your mind, body, and spirit.

It is only by God's grace and unmerited favor that blood flows through our bodies and air through our lungs. However, God wants to do more in our life than to sustain our physical body. Just as the vine produces the nourishment and growth for the branches, God wants us to rely upon him for all that we need.

You would never consider ignoring a family member or special guest who lived in your home. Yet, how many times are we guilty of neglecting our relationship with God except on Sunday morning or when a crisis arises? I began to make a mental checklist of how much time I devoted each day to

knowing God and growing my spiritual muscles. Even as Christians, we can go days, weeks, even months without spending quality time in this area.

Everything- children, husbands, jobs, hobbies, even church activities choke out spiritual nourishing time. But Christ made an absolute statement. "Apart from me you can do nothing." We may be expending a lot of time and energy on what we consider meaningful pursuits, but if it's not God directed it may not count for much.

Often times we're spinning our wheels devoting our energy on efforts that God may have never intended us to do. We're just doing what we do today because we did it yesterday and the day before, never taking inventory as to what our true purpose might be. If we want to bear fruit, God's joy, peace and blessings, we must learn to abide. "This is my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." (John 15:8)

We have become a generation of doers. But branches don't do, they abide. Branches can't even bear fruit without the vine. We can't "do" for God until we know God in a personal way. It is only through intimate and close encounters with God that we can even comprehend God's leading and direction. Without it, we're just hitting and missing. Sometimes were on target, but more often than not, were totally missing the mark. As our intimacy with God increases as we learn to abide in him, out of our being will come meaningful doing. God said we will find him when we seek him with all our hearts. (Jeremiah 29:13) The good news is that God is just waiting to reveal himself to us. We don't have to look that far.

Zacchaeus a tax collector climbed up in a tree. It was an obscure place to be found, but He wanted to see Jesus. No doubt there were a multitude of people around who desired the attention of almighty God as well, but there was a need in Zacchaeus that out-weighted the others. (Luke 19)

Out of the entire crowd, Jesus headed for Zacchaeus in that tree. He said to him, "Zacchaeus come down, today I will spend time with you at your house." God wants to come to your house too. Inside your house you shut out the rest of the crowd. You see Jesus face to face. No buffers, no preachers, no music, no sermon. Just you and Jesus. Zacchaeus could have stayed in the tree and just listened, but that wouldn't have been the same as a personal visit at home. When Zacchaeus became acquainted with Jesus he was a changed man. If we haven't changed, then maybe we just know about Him, but we don't really know him.

When we know Jesus we have a compelling desire to live righteously and holy. When Zacchaeus met him, he told Jesus that whomever he cheated he would pay back double and if he had wronged anyone he would make it right again. There is no indication that God told him to do these things. There is no indication that a long sermon preceded Zacchaeus's decision. When we have a true encounter with God we will never be the same.

But why do many people hear a potentially life changing message and walk out the door and keep doing what they've always done. It's because they've never had a real encounter with God. We may go to church, but never know God in a personal and intimate way.

Take the example of a pastor of a large church. Each week he prepares powerful messages to encourage and inspire us. He may use his life as an example and tell us anecdotes about his experiences. You know his name, his family and even where he lives. You may see him occasionally at the shopping mall and recognize him but he may vaguely know you at all. You volunteer at the church, busy trying to make an impression and give of your time and service. You see him, hear him speak, are in his vicinity most of the time, and may exchange a pleasant word now and then.

In reality you are no more of an acquaintance. You know of him, but you don't really know him. Though he may see you from time to time, he doesn't know you either. He probably doesn't even know your name. You could continue to be in this church for 5 years, faithfully attending services and in his immediate presence and never really know this man of God. Even if you pass the acquaintance mark and become friends, unless you spend a considerably amount of time with him, you still only know bits and pieces about the man.

That is how most of us who profess to be Christian live our lives. We're around Christian circles, hear Christian messages, can speak Christian jargon, and know Christian tradition, without the opportunity of ever really getting to know the founder of Christianity in a personal way. Jesus came not only to establish His kingdom on earth, but also to come into our house as well as our heart and give us the opportunity to know him personally!

It's mind-boggling that in the last days many will say, "Lord, Lord did I not do all these wonderful works in your name. Then God will say, depart from me...I never knew you." (Matthew 7:23) Some Christians think because they go to church from time to time, read a few Bible passages now and then, say prayers before eating and going to bed at night that they're really doing something. All we're doing is fooling ourselves.

Contrary to what we might believe, our spiritual growth is not just predicated on church attendance either. It's not easy to get personal with another person in a crowd of people. Intimacy develops from being alone, talking at length, and being genuinely interested in the other person.

In some cases, I believe church attendance can become a hindrance to our spiritual growth if we solely rely upon it for the spiritual nourishment we need in order to grow. For the most part, many churches are nothing more than weekly social clubs. They do not deliberately set out to stifle our intimacy with God, but if we're not careful that is exactly what can happen.

We can get so bogged down doing for God and the church that we neglect the very relationship we say we want to cultivate.

Moses spent forty days on a mountain with the Lord, listening and conversing with Him. In fact, God told Moses that no one could come upon the mountain with him. God wanted Moses all to himself. When he came down from the mountain God's presence was all over him.

My church I attended had awesome praise and worship unto the Lord and dynamic teaching. I always left church filling full and uplifted. But if two hours per week was the only time I devote to spending time with God, then I'm going to be spiritually starving most of the time. In some ways, we've become too dependent on church for our spiritual diet. What would happen should church buildings disappear tomorrow? Would we walk away and back to our old life, or desperately begin to seek God to attain a new level of intimacy on our own?

It's sad to say, but church has limited power because too many of its members are spiritually bankrupt. We've been living on the sensationalism and bright lights of Christianity without any real depth. True spiritual growth is usually the result of hardship, suffering, and time spent alone with God. Life changes usually occurred in solitude and separation. Jesus withdrew alone to the mountains every morning for extended prayer. (Matthew 14:23)

Church creates an atmosphere for us to fellowship with other Christians, receive encouragement, meet the needs of the saints and community, disciple new believers, minister to the lost, and learn more about God through his word. Many times pastors can help us to interpret difficult passages and discover teachings about God's word that were formerly unfamiliar to us. Thank God for churches and all the needs they meet in the lives of saint and unbelievers! Unfortunately, too many Christians rely only on the presentation from the pulpit to help them grow

spiritually in Christ, and by doing so never develop into the men or women of God, Christ intended us to be.

Though we never want to put God in a box, we're less likely to hear all God wants to say to us in a church service. A word in due season may inspire us to seek more knowledge in a particular area, but before that knowledge can become a part of us, we must apply it to our life through practical application. Through these growing pains we see our life deepening in its relationship to our creator. As we go to God in times of needs and distress, His word says that He hears and comforts us

Without experiencing God working directly on our behalf, our walk is all based on theory. It's hearsay. We don't really know what God can do for us because we've only heard what others have testified. If we are to grow spiritually, we must experience the love and power of God for ourselves. Job who had only known God on the peripheral before suffering great loss said at the end of his encounter, "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you." (Job 42:5)

Knowing about God, instead of actually knowing God characterizes the life of too many believers. I knew what it meant to be a Christian, I knew many scriptures, I even knew how to live a relatively moral life. But knowing God, talking to God when I wasn't asking for something, and fellowshiping with God? How can you know or do that with someone you can't even see? I could sense God's prompting and leading from time to time but still He was a long way off, up in heaven somewhere.

It wasn't until I reached the end of my rope and had no where else to go to find peace and comfort that I turned my attention wholeheartedly to Jesus. It was then that I discovered the possibility to know God as a Father and friend. In the past when I needed advice or comfort I'd turn to earthly friends, but they could no longer take away the pain I was experiencing. So I did what I've heard over and over again in songs and the Bible, take all my

troubles and cares to the Lord. As I did this, I felt comforted. As I did it more, I experienced God speaking to and ministering to my spirit. It finally came to a point that I took everything to the Lord. Some days I'd sit on the couch and say, "Lord, we need to talk. I'm not feeling too good right now and I need to tell you about it." I may sit there for 20 minutes having a heart to heart with Jesus. He had become like my best girlfriend. My love for him grew more than I ever thought possible. Jesus is more real to me now than my circumstances. I sense his presence throughout my day. But for years prior he was a God who lived off in the distance.

When God speaks to me, it's not in an audible voice, though I suppose he could, but more often than not it comes in impressions in my heart and spirit. Sometimes without even a word, I know exactly what he's telling me. I submerge with his consciousness in brief moments and share in his wisdom and understanding. But it took landing in the desert to finally see him, recognize him and get to know him. And I could never live my life with him in the shadows again.

Our spiritual growth is predicated on us spending time alone with ourselves and our God. A branch is in constant connection with the vine for protection, nourishment and in essence, life. The branch can't support itself. Cut the branch off and it will wither up and die. There's more to life than physical death. The majority of the human race is spiritually dead; cut off from the truth. Walking with God is not a ritual; it's not a habit or even a tradition. It hasn't much to do with whether you are a Baptist, Methodist or Pentecostal. It's a way of life. A life that seeks its direction, substance and support from the only qualified source.

Walking with God is a lifestyle. It's not a crash course or even a temporary diet. You don't stop once you think you've reached your plateau. You can't cram in enough spiritual knowledge to carry you through the rest of your

life. It's depleteable. Why? Because almost everything in life is pulling you in the opposite direction. Just look around you. Western civilization values what they can see (which is temporary) over what can't be seen (which is eternal.) You are going against the grain to break away from this predetermined course.

It's easy to lose your way if you are not in constant connection to the source, which is also characterized by the truth. As human spirits in a physical body, we are limited in our knowledge. The Bible says we see through a glass darkly. What looks good and feels good may not be good for us. In fact, it can be disastrous. It's egotistical to rely on our human wisdom for all the answers.

But God didn't intend for us to. Christ didn't leave us on this earth alone, but sent us a comforter to live and abide in us and teach us all truth that he heard from the Father.

God is not some pie in the sky. The Bible tells us not to look for God in heaven or even under the earth, but that the kingdom of God is within us. (Luke 17:21) Within us is the answer to all life dilemmas. It doesn't come from us, but from God, whose spirit is dwelling within us, once we invite Him in.

### **Moses on the Mountain Top**

Moses and God had one of the most unique relationships in the Bible. He had found favor with God and spent a generous amount of time in His presence. Moses said to God in Exodus 33:12- "You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' 'If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you.'" In verse 19 the Lord said to Moses, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence." Moses went up to Mount Sinai early in the morning as the Lord commanded.

"Then the Lord came down and proclaimed His name." (Exodus 34:5) What he found was a God who is full of love and who hates evil.

Moses went many times upon the mountain of Sinai to dwell with the Lord. During that time God gave him the Ten Commandments along with other statutes the Israelites were to follow. Exodus 34:27-28 tells us, "Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant -the Ten Commandments. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hand, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord."

You can not spend time with the Lord and not be affected by His presence. Scriptures tell us every time Moses came down from speaking with the Lord that his face so shined he covered it with a veil. I often hear people ask how do you spend time with the Lord and develop this type of intimacy? We don't know because we've spent so much time relating to everything on a physical and rational plane, that the idea of truly living as spiritual beings seems foreign to us, and it is.

It feels much more natural to watch television, eat a good meal, listen to music, spend time with friends, work, have fun, work on a project, and even sin. When did we learn in all this programming that we need to develop our spiritual muscles as well? For many of us not until we were adults and it's difficult making that transition from a purely earthy being to one predominately led and dominated by God's Spirit, even if we know how.

I remember one day driving in my car thinking how nice it would be to be famous one day, to be recognized and applauded by people for my work in the Lord or ministry. Then the very next thought was, "Now how does this idea of fame relate to the principles of God and His purpose. We can't measure our success in this life by the world's standards, even in Christendom. The most successful person in God's eyes may not be

someone of high honor or prestige, but a person you'd never even noticed. Someone who is walking in faith, love, and obedience to Christ on what we might consider a smaller scale. There are times I used to visualize myself being this great speaker admired by many people. One day while doing this I realized this didn't measure my success as a Christian nor God's approval. Prestige, pride, power, and fame are indulgences and by-products of our flesh, not our spirit.

God said a humble and contrite heart is more valuable than all the fame in the world. I then understood that it didn't matter if anyone ever saw or noticed my exploits for the Lord as long as He saw and approved of them. We will be surprised when we get to heaven and see those we esteemed on earth getting less glory or rewards than many nameless and faceless individuals. From then on what mattered most was what I did out of my love and commitment to my creator. In that He would be well pleased.

### **The Holy Spirit, the Messenger of Truth**

When the Holy Spirit comes he will guide us into all truth. (John 16:13) Jesus said that we will no longer need a teacher but when the spirit of truth has come, He will tell us all things. Do you hear that! God says we don't need a teacher. That's good news. The problem is we've relied so long on the preacher and others telling us how to live a godly Christian life, we have no confidence in God's spirit living in us and guiding us. We're afraid to follow His promptings and teachings and instead give in to rational thought and what makes sense. Read the Bible and you will find that not much makes sense in there. I don't mean from a spiritual point of view but from a logical one. Water into wine, dip in the Jordan River, and lose your life to save it? Come on!

But how do we hear God in all the hustle and bustle of rational thought and the mental noises that plague us from dawn to dusk? Ephesians 6 tells us that Satan's battlefield is in our mind. "Cast down thoughts and imaginations that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Many of us can't hear God because we're either on a constant diet of sound or distractions or we can't quiet the voices in our head long enough to get another thought in edge-wise. We can't hear God through all the noise and activity we surround ourselves with. Do you think God is going to shout over the music videos, the hip-hop or your favorite television show?

In most every instance in the Bible when God wanted an individual's attention it came during a time of quietness and stillness. The Lord told Elijah, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went and stood at the face of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" God doesn't create thunder and lightning to get our attention. He speaks to us in a still, quiet voice.

When Samuel was a small boy, God woke him up three times wanting to speak to him. Each time he ran to the prophet thinking he had called him. Finally the prophet told him to listen, God wants to speak to you. God comes in the stillness and quietness, unobtrusive and non-abrasive.

If you are like most people you are probably wondering when do I find the time to be still in the presence of God, and even if I did my mind is still plagued with a host of other thoughts that keep me from fully connecting to

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