

# Practicing the Presence

*How to make our Heavenly Father real in the melee of everyday life*

## "OUR PART in Making God Real-1"

Dr. Desmond Ford

**D**o you remember Woodstock? Some years ago hundreds of thousands of young people gathered for the rock music festival in New York state.

Some of those young people were Christians. Some Christian songs were even performed.

But there were many other things at Woodstock that were not Christian. There was much drug use, some promiscuity—many unhappy things. One young man was asked by a reporter, "Why did you come? Why are all these young people here?" The young man answered, "We've come in the hope of learning how to live."

That's the problem facing all of us: How to live.

### Madame Curie

I think of two outstanding women. Both were women of great courage and unselfishness, who did much for humanity. Yet although they did many things identically, they did many other things very differently.

The first is Madame Curie.

Madame Curie was a great scientist, the discoverer of radium. She lost her husband in a street accident in Paris while he was still a comparatively young man. This loss was devastating to Madame Curie. She did not know how to handle death. She was already uncertain about life; death she couldn't handle at all.

### Not cope with death

One night, when her sister Briny came home, she found Madame Curie opening a bloody package. It was full of the stained clothing her husband had been wearing when he was killed. Some flesh still clung to the clothes. The widow was cutting the pieces. Briny rushed forward, took the package, and threw it in the fire. Madame Curie collapsed into her sister's arms, weeping.

Madame Curie never referred to her husband in the following years as she raised the children. Her diary is filled with self-pity and tragedy. But the pages contain no discussion of the incidents of the children's early life.

Madame Curie was a great woman, a wonderful woman of courage. But at that time in her life she did not know the reality of God. That's why she found life so unmanageable—and death more so.

We also can't go through life without coming into contact with death. Life is full of many deaths along the way: heartbreaks,

*The greatest problem facing us is:*

*How are we to live?*

*Two women, Madame Curie and  
Susanna Wesley, embody two oppos-  
ing approaches. Famous writers tell  
us life is hard. Only the loving pres-  
ence of God can help us.*

disappointments, discouragements, pain.

### Susanna Wesley

The second woman, Susanna Wesley, is a contrast to Madame Curie.

Susanna was the twenty-fifth child in her family. She had 19 children herself, though only nine lived to maturity.

Susanna, who was one of the loveliest women in England, was also about the smartest woman in England. She knew Hebrew and Greek, Latin and French. She could argue any minister out of the house. She married a

minister, but she was much smarter than he was and far more practical.

Susanna herself was a true minister. She held services in the huge kitchen at Epworth Rectory. She was a farmer, and she cared for the cattle. She was a teacher. (She taught her children for six hours a day, over a period of 20 years.) She was a writer. She wrote her children's textbooks.

When her son Johnny grew up, he said, "Mother, I wish you would write down the principles on which you acted in training us children." That's because all of her children grew up with a love for purity, truth, and learning.

Between 1697 and 1701, Susanna lost five children. Her firstborn, Samuel, did not speak a syllable for years. This silent son was on her heart every hour of every day. One day he wandered off. Susanna went everywhere around Epworth looking for him. She went outside, hurrying around the outbuildings, calling, "Sammy! Sammy!"

At last she heard a very clear, distinct voice she'd never heard before: "Here I am, mother." It was Samuel, speaking for the first time at nearly six years of age.

### Coped with death

Here is a woman who wrestled with death. (She lost ten in death.) She once confided to a friend, "I can hardly stand bread. It is such a battle to get it, and it is so difficult to pay for it after I've got it." Her husband was consigned to prison over debt. (She sent him her wedding ring to pawn, but he refused.)

When John asked her to write down how she had trained the children, she said, "Few would follow my method, which is, 'You must die to the world.'" Not many women would give the prime of their life to train their children in righteousness.



Susanna regularly took one hour with each child to talk about the things of the Spirit. If you ask, "How did a frail woman burdened with debt and all those obligations survive?" the answer is this: She spent two hours every day in personal devotions with the Savior.

Susanna Wesley said, "Religion is not a matter just of the closet or church. Religion is the awareness that we are in the presence of God all the day long." That's what made the difference between her and Madame Curie.

Both Madame Curie and Susanna Wesley were great people. But only Susanna could face pain and death. Can you imagine losing ten children? Her husband died before she did, yet she could face all these things because she knew God. God was a reality to her.

My friends, when we talk about how to live, obviously, we must first get the facts—and the greatest Fact is God. Every other fact is dependent on that one Fact, and that dependence includes you and me. Everything depends on the Fact of God. Even unbelievers have recognized the dimensions of this problem.

### Hemingway quotation

Let me offer a few illustrations of my point.

Ernest Hemingway was no friend to Christianity. He was drunk, dissolute, bad tempered, selfish—and wonderfully gifted. He wrote:

"If people bring so much courage to the world, the world has to kill them to break them. Sometimes it kills them. The world breaks everyone. Afterwards many are strong at the broken places, but those it will not break it kills. It kills the very good, the very brave, the very gentle, impartially. If you are none of these, you can be sure it will kill you too. But there will be no special hurry."

### McClaren quotation

I think of Alexander Maclaren, a man as opposite in moral disposition to Hemingway as the north pole is to the south pole. He was one of the greatest Baptist preachers.

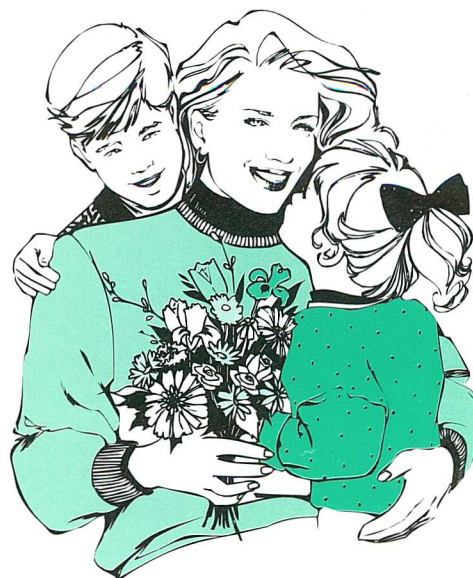
He said:

"I sometimes wonder how it is that godless men front the facts of human life and do not go mad. Here we are, naked, feeble, alone, plunged into a whirlpool from the awful vortexes of which we cannot extricate ourselves. There foam and swirl all manner of evils, some of them certain, some of them probable, any of them possible."

### Cowper quotation

Lord David Cecil who wrote a biography of William Cowper. (Cowper wrote the hymn, "God Moves in Mysterious Ways His Wonders to Perform.") He wrote such wonderful books as *The Task*, and *John Gilpin*.

But Cowper had breakdown after breakdown. He was a mass of uncertainties and fears and doubts. This is what his biographer, Lord Cecil said about him:



Life is precarious, tragic, surrounded by dangers, and if delicate and highly-strung people are peculiarly conscious of this, it's because they alone are fully alive to the real situation, not like the healthy, the dupes of their own good digestion.

Youth, unacquainted with the world and dazzled by the enchanting prospects before it, is proverbially unaware of the possibilities of failure and death. Cowper's only abnormality was his premature delivery from the delusions of youth.

### Emerson quotation

Life is hard. The greatest American literary hero is probably Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Emerson was married to a beautiful young woman. She died in the first year of their marriage. She died of tuberculosis.

Emerson nearly went mad. Months later, he had the grave opened; he couldn't believe she was dead.

He wrote: "Life is walking over molten lava."

### One way to live

I submit to you that there is only one right way to live, and that is to walk in the light of God's loving and wise presence and providence.

Unless we believe we have a loving, heavenly Father who is wise in all he does or all he permits, life will become intolerable to us. Unless we believe God is not only wise but loving, it's easy for us to grow bitter.

Don't expect life to be fair to you. Life has never been fair in the past, it isn't fair in the present, and it will never be fair in the future—until Christ returns. Unless we know that God is love, it will be hard to avoid bitterness.

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