

A young boy and girl are standing in a lush green field under a dramatic sunset sky. The boy, on the left, is wearing a striped t-shirt and blue pants, pointing upwards. The girl, on the right, is wearing a colorful striped dress and has her hands clasped in prayer, also looking upwards. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds, and the sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow.

*Life Shaped By
Presence*

*Contemplative
Verse*

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Life-shaped presence (definition)

The kind of presence that doesn't pretend.
It doesn't rush to be impressive or spiritual or wise.
It simply stands where it stands,
rooted in the ground that has held it
through every season.

It carries the texture of real days —
the ache of waiting,
the relief of mercy,
the quiet courage of showing up again.

It is presence formed by living,
not by performing.
Presence that has learned to breathe
in both the light and the shadow.
Presence that trusts
that God meets us
not in the ideal,
but in the actual.



A life shaped by presence.

God as Creator: Is the origin of all existence, the One who brings life, order, and meaning. Creation flows from God's desire for fellowship, for beings who can know Him, love Him, and join Him in shaping a flourishing world. Humanity is created in God's image, capable of relationship and creativity.

Key idea:

Creation begins with God's longing for shared life and shared purpose.

Humanity's Purpose in Creation. Humans are designed to reflect God's character and participate in His ongoing creative work. Our calling includes cultivating the earth, building communities, and extending God's goodness into every corner of life. Fellowship with God is the foundation of this creative partnership.

Key idea:

Humanity (self) is meant to continue what God began — creating, cultivating, and blessing.

Sin Enters the Story. Sin is not merely rule-breaking; it is a rupture in relationship — a turning away from God as the source of life and wisdom. This turning introduced: Distortion of God's image in us. Disconnection from God's presence. Confusion about our identity and purpose. Brokenness in human relationships and society. Civilization advanced in power but drifted from its spiritual center.

Key idea:

Sin disrupts fellowship with God and fractures humanity's ability to carry out its creative calling.

The Resulting Human Condition. Without clear connection to the Creator, humanity struggles to understand:

Who God truly is. Who we truly are. What we are meant to do. The world becomes marked by striving, fear, domination, and self-centered creativity rather than God-centered creativity.

Key idea:

Humanity needed restoration, not just forgiveness, but reorientation.

Christ Enters the Story. God brings Christ into the picture as the full revelation of His heart and the remedy for sin's rupture. Jesus shows us: The true character of God. The true nature of humanity. The path back into fellowship. The restoration of our creative purpose. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Christ heals the separation sin created.

Key idea:

Christ bridges the gap sin created, restoring fellowship and renewing purpose.

Christ's Mission: Reconnecting Civilization to Its Source. Jesus doesn't simply rescue individuals; He reorients humanity toward God's original intention. He reveals: God's desire for communion, God's vision for human flourishing. God's ongoing creative project in the world. Christ restores the relational foundation necessary for humanity to fulfill its calling.

Key idea:

Christ reopens the path for humanity to live as God intended, in love, creativity, and partnership.

Humanity's Renewed Role. Through Christ, we are invited back into fellowship with the Creator. This restored relationship empowers us to: Love as God loves, Create as God creates, Heal what sin has broken, Build communities marked by justice, mercy, and beauty. The creative goal continues, now shaped by Christ's example and empowered by His Spirit.

Key idea:

We become co-laborers with God again, continuing the creative story Christ has restored.

God formed humanity for intimate fellowship and shared creativity. Sin fractured that bond. Christ heals the fracture, pointing us to closeness with our Creator and renewing our role in God's creative work in humanity: Where do we find God if we want a close relationship with Him?

We find God in Christ. If God wants to be known, He makes Himself knowable — and He did that in Jesus. Jesus is “God made visible.” He shows the heart, character, and nearness of the Creator. If you want to know what God is like, you look at Christ, His compassion, His truthfulness, His gentleness, His courage, His self-giving love. Christ is the clearest place God has chosen to be found.

We find God in the quiet places of our own heart. Not because we are divine, but because God's Spirit dwells with those who turn toward Him. In the stillness where you tell the truth, In the ache you finally name, In the longing that won't go away, In the gratitude that rises unforced. God meets people in the interior places where honesty and openness live. The God who created galaxies also whispers in the human heart.

We find God in Scripture, not as information, but as revelation. Scripture is not a rulebook; it's a record of God's pursuit of humanity. When you read it with openness, you don't just learn about God, you encounter Him. Scripture is where God's voice becomes recognizable. We find God in community and relationship. Because God is relational, He often shows up through people: A word of encouragement, A moment of forgiveness, A shared burden, A surprising kindness. God's presence often comes wrapped in human presence. We find God where love is practiced.

We find God in the places where things are broken. This is the surprising one. God is not only in the beautiful and serene. He is also in: the wound that needs healing, the confession that needs courage, the relationship that needs repair, the injustice that needs confronting. Christ is always moving toward what is broken, not away from it. Where something needs restoring, God is already there.

We find God when we turn toward Him. Not perfectly. Not with eloquence. Just sincerely. God is not hiding. He is not distant. He is not waiting for you to get it right. He is waiting for you to turn — even slightly — and He meets you in that turning. God is found wherever a heart opens, even a little.

Jesus withdrew because intimacy requires undistracted presence. Crowds can inspire you. Community can support you. But intimacy is born in quiet. Jesus wasn't escaping people. He was returning to the Source. He knew that: fellowship with the Father is the wellspring of everything, clarity comes from communion, strength comes from being held, not from performing. He withdrew to stay rooted in the relationship that defined Him.

Jesus withdrew because love needs replenishing. Even Jesus, fully God, fully human, lived with human limits. He got tired. He felt pulled. He felt the weight of people's needs. So, He returned to the Father not out of obligation, but out of *need*. If the Son needed replenishment, how much more do we.

Jesus withdrew because the Father's voice is clearest in solitude. In the noise of the crowd, you hear demands. In the quiet, you hear direction. Jesus often prayed alone before: choosing the disciples, healing the masses, confronting religious leaders, going to the cross. He wasn't hiding. He was listening. Solitude wasn't escape, it was alignment. Jesus withdrew to show us the pattern of a restored life. He didn't just say, "Go pray". He lived a rhythm: Engage → Withdraw → Return → Give → Withdraw → Return. This is the rhythm of a soul in fellowship with God. He invites us into the same rhythm not as a rule, but as a way of life.

Jesus withdrew because relationship with God is personal before it is public. You can't give what you haven't received. You can't love well if you're not being loved. You can't create with God if you're not connected to God. Jesus' private communion fueled His public mission. *And He's saying to us:* "Do what I did. Come away. Be with the Father. Let Him shape you, fill you, steady you." So where do we find God? In the

same place Jesus did: In the quiet, in the stillness, in the honest, unguarded moments, in the turning of the heart toward Him. Not because God is hiding, but because we finally become quiet enough to notice Him. Jesus withdrew to be with the Father so that His life could flow from intimacy, not effort, and He invites us into the same rhythm so we can live in the closeness we were created for.

Jesus withdrew to be with the Father so that His life could flow from intimacy, not effort — and He invites us into the same rhythm so we can live in the closeness we were created for. But the thought doesn't end there. It continues: And when we follow Him into that quiet, something shifts. Not in God — but in us. Because the God we're seeking isn't far off. He isn't reluctant. He isn't hidden behind layers of mystery or performance.

Jesus is the One who has already come near. We find Him: when the noise inside us finally settles, when we stop trying to impress Him and simply let ourselves be seen, when we bring the real questions, the real ache, the real longing, when we turn our face even slightly, toward God. And in that turning, we discover what Jesus knew all along: The Father is already there. Already attentive. Already welcoming. Already speaking. Intimacy with God isn't earned. It's noticed. It's what rises to the surface when we slow down enough to receive what has always been offered

Intimacy with God is what rises to the surface when we slow down enough to receive what has always been offered. And when we begin to live from that place, that quiet, steady awareness, everything else changes. Not suddenly. Not dramatically. But deeply. Because the soul that knows it is held stops grasping. The heart that knows it is seen stops performing. The mind that knows it is loved stops scrambling for worth.

This is why Jesus kept returning to the Father: not out of duty, but desire. not to prove anything, but to receive everything. not to escape the world, but to re-enter it with clarity, compassion, and courage. And the same invitation rests on us:

To let God's nearness become the truest thing about our day, to let His voice be the one that steadies us. To let His presence shape how we love, how we listen how we carry what's ours to carry. to let our lives flow from communion rather than strain.

Because the Father who met Jesus in the quiet is the same Father who meets us there. Already attentive. Already welcoming. Already speaking. Already offering Himself. All that remains is the turning, the smallest opening of the heart, and the noticing of the God who has never been far.

And when we turn, even slightly, something begins to realign inside us. Not because we've mastered prayer. Not because we've finally "gotten it right." But because we've stopped running long enough to be found. This is the quiet miracle of grace: God meets us before we have the words. God holds us before we have the courage. God welcomes us before we have the confidence. God speaks before we know how to listen

And as we linger in that nearness, a new way of being begins to take shape, slowly, gently, almost imperceptibly: The anxious places loosen. The defended places soften. The weary places breathe again. The hidden places feel seen, not shamed. This is the life Jesus lived from: a life rooted in the Father's presence, steady because it was surrendered, fruitful because it was connected, peaceful because it was held. And this same life, this same intimacy, is what He extends to us.

Not as a reward. As a relationship. As the natural overflow of a God who delights to be near His children. All He asks is the turning. The noticing. The willingness to let ourselves be loved. This is the transformation Jesus promised — not a life free from difficulty, but a life rooted in communion.

A life where love becomes the starting point, not the reward. A life where we move through the world not trying to earn God's affection, but carrying it. Because the God who meets us in the quiet is the God who walks with us into the day. The God who steadies us in stillness is the God who strengthens us in the ordinary. The God who loves us in secret is the God who

empowers us in public. All of it begins with the turning. The noticing. The simple, courageous act of letting ourselves be loved.

This is where the real transformation begins — not in our effort, but in our consent. Because love does not force itself. It waits. It invites. It whispers our name until something in us finally says, *“Alright... I’m here.”*

And when we allow even that small surrender, something holy begins to happen: The places we’ve kept guarded start to feel safe. The parts of us we’ve hidden begin to breathe. The wounds we’ve carried alone begin to soften under the warmth of being held. This is the way God heals, not by demanding strength, but by offering presence. Not by asking us to climb toward Him, but by meeting us exactly where we are.

And slowly, almost imperceptibly, we begin to live differently: with less fear and more trust, with less striving and more rest. with less self-protection and more openness, with less proving and more belonging. Because once we’ve tasted what it’s like to be loved in our unguarded places, we stop trying to earn what has already been given. We start to live from love, not toward it. From communion, not performance. From the Father’s embrace, not our own effort. And this — this quiet, steady, surrendered way of being, is the life Jesus came to share with us. A life rooted in nearness. A life shaped by presence. A life carried by love

Prayer: Father, You who met Jesus in the quiet, meet us here now. We turn — even slightly, and we find You already present. Already attentive. Already welcoming. Already offering Yourself without hesitation. Teach us the courage of openness. The grace of slowing down. The humility of letting ourselves be loved. Where we are anxious, steady us. Where we are defended, soften us. Where we are weary, breathe rest into us. Where we are hidden, draw us gently into the light.

Let Your nearness become the truest thing about our day. Let Your voice be the one that settles our hearts.

Let Your presence shape how we live, how we love,
how we carry what is ours to carry. Root us in the same intimacy
Jesus lived, from a life held, a life connected, a life surrendered.
Not earned but received. Not achieved but welcomed. Here we
are, Father. Not impressive. Not polished Just open. Love us into
the people You've always known we could become. And let our
lives flow from the quiet miracle
of being held by You. - Amen.

“You are already in the presence of God.”

Not because you've earned it. Not because you've prepared
well. But because He has already come near. Feel the weight of
that. Let it soften you. With your next breath, imagine the
smallest turning of your heart — not dramatic, not heroic, just a
simple leaning toward the One who loves you.

And in that turning, notice what meets you:

A Father who is already attentive. Already welcoming.
Already speaking. Already offering Himself without hesitation.
Let yourself rest in that nearness. If your mind wanders, let it
wander. Then gently bring it back with a single phrase: “Here I
am, Father.” Say it slowly.

Say it honestly. Say it without trying to be impressive. Here I am
— with my questions, my ache, my longing, my unfinished
places. Here I am — open enough for You to meet me.

And now, simply allow yourself to be loved.

Feel the way love steadies you. Feel the way love softens
what has been tense. Feel the way love holds what has been
tired. Feel the way love brings breath into the places that have
felt closed. Let it loosen what has been tight. Let it soften what
has been guarded.

You don't have to strive. You don't have to perform. You
don't have to fix a single thing. Just be here. Just be held. Just be
loved. And as you rest in this moment,
let this awareness settle into you like warmth spreading through
your chest: Let this awareness settle into you: You are not

reaching for God. You are resting in the God who has already reached for you.

Feel the steadiness of that. Feel the relief of not having to hold everything together. Feel the quiet strength that rises when love becomes the ground beneath your feet. Let your breath come slowly. Let your shoulders drop. Let your heart unclench. And as you breathe, notice this: *You are safe here. You are seen here. You are welcomed here.*

Nothing in you is too much. Nothing in you is too little. Nothing in you is hidden from the One who delights in your nearness. Let the Presence that holds the universe hold you. Let the love that shaped Jesus' life shape yours. Let the peace that hovered over the waters hover over your own inner landscape.

Stay here for a moment.

Let the silence become a sanctuary.

Let the stillness become a blessing.

Let the nearness of God become the truest thing about you.

And when you rise — rise slowly, rise gently, rise knowing you do not leave His presence. You carry it. You walk in it. You breathe from it. You live rooted in the love that has always been yours.

Let your heart rest in *shalom*, the quiet miracle of a God who delights to be near you.

And as you rise, notice this:

Shalom is not a feeling you chase. It's a Presence you carry. It's the inner stillness that remains even as the world moves around you. Shalom goes with you into the ordinary: into the kitchen, into the conversations, into the small tasks and hidden moments that make up a day. Shalom is the gentle reminder that you are not alone, not unseen, not unsupported. It is the quiet confidence that the One who met you in stillness walks with you in motion. So, step into your day slowly. Let your breath stay soft. Let your heart stay open. Let the nearness of God be the ground beneath your feet. And as you

move, carry this truth like a blessing: Shalom is not behind you. Shalom is within you. Shalom goes where you go.

The Abundant life is:

The phrase “abundant life” comes straight from Jesus’ words in John 10:10: “*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*” But the biblical vision of abundance is far deeper—and far quieter—than the modern idea of success, comfort, or material overflow. It’s a way of living that fills the inner life rather than the outer one.

Abundant life is life rooted in relationships, not achievement. In Scripture, abundance is always relational: With God, a life lived in His presence, not at a distance. With others, love, forgiveness, reconciliation, belonging Within yourself, integrity, wholeness, peace. Abundance is not “more stuff.” It’s *more connection.*

Abundant life is the restoration of what was lost in Eden Biblically, abundance means: Walking with God without fear. Living without shame. Receiving love without earning it. Giving love without fear of losing it. It’s the return of *shalom*—a deep, integrated peace where everything is aligned with God’s heart.

Abundant life is freedom from the inner tyrants. Scripture frames abundance as freedom from: Anxiety, Condemnation, Shame. The need to prove yourself. The fear of not being enough. Paul describes it as “the glorious freedom of the children of God.” Not freedom to do whatever you want, but freedom from what once controlled you. Abundant life is a life that bears fruit. Jesus uses the image of a vine: Abundance = fruitfulness. Fruitfulness = love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control Not productivity. Not busyness. Not success. But *becoming a person whose life nourishes others.* Abundant life is a life that can hold both joy and suffering

Biblically, abundance doesn't mean: No pain, No loss. No struggle. Instead, it means: God's presence in the valley. Hope that suffering cannot extinguish. A life that grows even in hard soil. Abundant life is receiving love, not earning it. This is the heart of it. Abundance is not something you achieve. It's something you *receive*. It's the life that flows when you stop striving to be worthy and start living as someone already loved. Scripture's vision of abundance is not about "more blessings" but about freedom from the inner forces that shrink your life.

Freedom from Anxiety, Biblical abundance is not the absence of things to worry about, it's the presence of Someone stronger than the worry. It's the shift from: "*I am responsible for holding my world together*" to "*I am held.*" Jesus repeated "Do not be afraid" is not a command to perform calmness. It's an invitation to trust that you are not alone, not abandoned, not unprotected. Abundance is the spaciousness that comes when fear no longer dictates your decisions or steals your sleep.

Freedom from Condemnation. Romans 8:1 says, "*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" Condemnation is the voice that says: "You're disqualified." "You've blown it." "You're beyond repair." Abundance is the quiet, steady truth that God does not speak to you that way. It's freedom of knowing: our failures don't define you. Your past doesn't own you. Your story is not over. Abundance is living from grace instead of guilt.

Freedom from Shame. Shame is deeper than guilt. Guilt says, I did something wrong. Shame says something is wrong with me. Abundance is the restoration of your true name. It's God meeting you where you hide and saying: "You are seen." "You are wanted." "You are mine". Shame isolates. Abundance brings you home. Freedom from the Need to Prove Yourself. This is one of the most exhausting prisons. The biblical abundant life frees you from: Performing for approval. Hustling for worth. Achieving to feel lovable. Being terrified of disappointing others, Jesus' baptism happens *before* He performs a single miracle.

The Father says, “You are my beloved Son... in you I am well pleased.”

Abundance is living from belovedness, not toward it. Freedom from the Fear of Not Being Enough. This fear is ancient. It's the whisper from Eden: *“You are lacking. You must grasp for more.”* Abundance answers: You are enough because God is with you. You are enough because love is given, not earned. You are enough because your worth is not measured by your performance, productivity, or perfection.

Abundance is the courage to show up as your true self—unmasked, unpolished, unafraid. The Thread That Ties It All Together, every one of these freedoms is relational. Abundance is not a life with fewer problems. It's a life with more Presence—God's presence, your own presence, and the presence of those you love.

It's life where nothing inside you must hide anymore. Parts of us work on our behalf even when we're not consciously attending to them. There's a kind of grace in that — a reminder that not everything in us requires vigilance or strain to be meaningful. An eyelash: Protects without demanding attention. Belongs without needing to be noticed. Does its work simply by being what it is. There's a parallel to the inner qualities we often overlook: The small instincts that keep us safe. The quiet tenderness that shapes how we show up. The unnoticed resilience that carries us through. These are like eyelashes — humble, unannounced, yet essential.

Not all goodness is loud. Not all care is conscious. Not all protection is dramatic. Some of the most important parts of us are the ones we barely noticed, until they're gone or disrupted. And often, the work of spiritual formation is simply learning to *notice* what has been faithfully working in us all along. *“Like an eyelash, some parts of us protect and guide without asking to be seen. They do their work in the background, steady and unassuming, reminding us that not all goodness requires my attention to be real.”*

God is quietly, faithfully doing good on our behalf even when we're not paying attention. There are aspects of God's presence that work like that eyelash: Protecting us in ways we rarely see. Sustaining us without demanding our attention. Holding us even when we're distracted or unaware. This is the God Scripture describes as the One who "neither slumbers nor sleeps," the One whose mercies are "new every morning," the One who "upholds all things by His word." These are quiet, steady actions — not loud, not dramatic, but constant. Just like the eyelash doesn't stop doing its job because we forget it's there, God doesn't stop being present, attentive, or active when we're not thinking about Him. God is the steady one in the relationship. Can you imagine if we followed Christ's directive to hear his Father. *Learning* how to hear is a wall constructed by Satan, our enemy. It's much easier to simply have faith than to find God in the quiet, stillness.

Trusting God is simple; learning to hear Him is costly. And the cost isn't because God is distant or cryptic. It's because something in us — and something opposed to us — resists the stillness where His voice becomes clear. Jesus' directive to "hear His Father" wasn't poetic language. It was the center of His life. But for us, several forces make that kind of listening feel difficult: Inner noise — our minds are crowded, restless, constantly pulled outward. Old patterns — we're used to solving, striving, managing, not receiving. Fear of what we might hear — surrender is beautiful, but it's also vulnerable. Spiritual opposition — anything that draws us into intimacy with God will be resisted.

This resistance isn't imaginary. Scripture consistently describes an enemy who works not by overpowering us, but by *distracting* us, *numbing* us, and *filling the quiet with noise*. Resistance is often built out of subtle things: hurry, anxiety, self-reliance, shame, busyness, comparison. None of these feel dramatic, but they are incredibly effective at drowning out a whisper.

Why simple faith feels easier than quiet listening. Faith, in the sense of trusting God's goodness is foundational. But listening

requires something more: Slowing down. Letting go of control. Facing our own interior world. Becoming available. And availability is costly. It means we stop running long enough for God to touch the places we'd rather avoid. It means we let Him speak into our desires, our wounds, our assumptions, our habits. Faith can be held at a distance. Listening brings God close. And closeness is where transformation happens — which is exactly why it's opposed.

Jesus didn't just tell us to hear the Father; He showed us how: Withdrawing, quieting, opening, receiving, obeying. He wasn't escaping the world. He was tuning His heart to the One who loved Him. And He invites us into that same rhythm, not as a burden but as a gift. Because when we learn to hear, even imperfectly: fear loses its grip, lies lose their power, shame loses its voice, the enemy loses his leverage

Finding God in the quiet is harder than simply believing He exists. But it's also where the deepest joy is found — the joy of being known, guided, and loved in real time. And the wall you feel? It's not impenetrable. It's not permanent. It's not stronger than the One who calls you. The inner noise that drowns out God.

That inner noise isn't just random thoughts. It's usually a mix of: old habits of self-protection, anxiety loops that try to keep us safe, self-talk shaped by past wounds, the urge to stay in control, the subtle pressure to perform or prove. These are the things that fill the interior space where God's voice would normally be heard. They're not "evil" in themselves — but they become the raw material the enemy uses to build that wall described.

Creation is an overflow of divine joy. Humanity is invited into the rhythm, not judged from outside it. Salvation is participation, not transaction. Intimacy with God is joining the dance already happening. This is the conviction that the deepest rhythm of the universe is the mutual self-giving love of Father, Son, and Spirit. Not a hierarchy. Not a static throne room. A movement. A flow. A giving-and-receiving that is the source of all creation

The Great Dance as a theological metaphor

In Christian theology—especially in Trinitarian spirituality—the phrase “the Great Dance” is used to describe the mutual, self-giving movement of Father, Son, and Spirit. C.S. Lewis gestures toward this in *Perelandra*, and later writers (like Baxter Kruger) develop it as a picture of divine communion.

Key themes: God as an eternal movement of love, joy, and reciprocity. Creation invited into that movement—life as participation, not performance. Human relationships mirroring the rhythm of giving and receiving.

“The Great Dance” often resonates with people who sense that intimacy with God is less about striving and more about joining a rhythm already underway. At its core, The Great Dance metaphor says that God is not static. God is not a solitary monarch seated on a distant throne. God is relationship, movement, mutual giving and receiving. Father, Son, and Spirit are not three beings but three *motions* of one love—each turning toward the others in joy, generosity, and self-offering. This is why early theologians used the word *perichoresis*—a circling, an interpenetration, a choreography of love. In this frame: The Father eternally pours Himself into the Son. The Son eternally receives and returns that love. The Spirit is the shared life, the breath, the movement between them. It is not a dance God performs. It is who God is.

The dance as the shape of spiritual life. When the metaphor becomes lived experience, it reshapes how we imagine intimacy with God: Prayer becomes joining a rhythm already underway. Obedience becomes alignment, not appeasement. Holiness becomes participation, not performance. Community becomes a shared movement of giving and receiving. Mission becomes extending the dance outward. It’s a spirituality of flow, not strain; participation, not perfection

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"A Life Shaped by Presence gently reminds us that the heart of the Christian life is not striving, but living in communion with the God who has already drawn near through Christ. If you've ever felt weary or wondered how to truly hear God's voice in the noise of life, this read is a balm for your soul."

Rev. Paul Cheng. Pastor (Retired) & Commissioner

"'A Life Shaped by Presence' speaks to the heart and soul of God's message to us. It is intimate, personal, it is unconditional love. The kind of love we all seek without knowing what it is and why we seek it. When we read the Bible the way God intended us to read it, we receive this love, and it permeates every part of our lives. Thank you, Rich. It was a moving read."

Bill Cohen- Christian author, Businessman.

