

Facing [Deeper Sheet 9.06.09]

Why are you here, doing what you are doing, in this moment? Or why are you reading this Deeper Sheet? Why do people drag themselves out of bed to go to church, week in and week out? Each of us might answer differently, but all of our responses are connected to a deep desire to make contact with something beyond ourselves. We want to have an encounter with God. We're not interested in simply hearing about God, we're driven by an infinite longing to experience God's presence. Lives are sometimes spent as unconscious quests to fulfill that infinite longing. And when the longing proves elusive, it's not uncommon for us to turn to all kinds of substitutes and counterfeits.

King David, a man who had virtually everything, says, "Your face LORD, I will seek." Humans are hard wired to seek after a face. Infants instinctively search for facial contact, and at the earliest stages of human life, only one face will do: Mom's. Her face is a reassuring presence. It's the center of reality for the child. Her face orders the entirety of the child's life. A mother's face also imprints her child with identity. To seek God's face is to be met, to experience God's reassuring presence, and to be imprinted at the core of your being with the glory and love of God.

In the Jewish tradition, the face of God was synonymous with life, wholeness, healing, and *shalom*. Moses asks to see God's face: "Lord, show me your glory." But God replied, "You cannot see my face and live." So Moses hid in a rock and looked at the place God had just been. He was allowed to see the aftermath of God's glory. The aftermath left Moses' face radiant, so radiant that the Israelites were afraid to come near him. To face God is to be imprinted with his glory. When Christ who is the light of the world is imprinted in our hearts, that light begins to shine in our lives and in our hearts. We radiate. Sadly, sometimes we haven't been imprinted with glory but with lies and shame. When that is the case, looking into the face of another can be horrifying. So we avert our gaze and hide our face.

The Hebrew word "*panim*" means face but it also means *presence*. To see God's face is to be in God's presence. We know when someone is not fully present. They look beyond us. They're here but not here. Prayer is fundamentally about presence: waking up to the reality of God's presence and having our world re-ordered by God's goodness, glory, and love. In this way, everything we do can be prayer. We're made to face God, to engage God's presence, and to be transformed by that presence.

What substitutes and counterfeits have you fallen prey to in your quest to fulfill the infinite longing of being connected to God?

Think about the faces that have shaped who you are today. How have some of these faces imprinted you with lies and shame?

Where and when do you experience people not being fully present with you?

Who have you known who radiates the goodness, love, and glory of God?

If we're honest, we often radiate things like anger, stress, irritation, and impatience. What do you think it means to wake up to God's presence around us and in us?