

Introduction:

Today we step into our first attribute of God in our summer series, "What's God like?" Here's how this series can help you: *Increased awareness leads to increased closeness.* The more we know and the more familiar you are with God, the more willing you are to love him, trust him, and follow his leading in your life.

You said it yourself last week, the one you are more willing to trust, confide in, spend time with, and follow the advice of; is the one you know well and are more familiar with, correct?

So, it's my hope as we step through this series together, your familiarity with God will increase and that will lead to greater awareness of him, greater intimacy with him, and greater obedience of him.

Today I want to talk about the nearness of God. The more formal word for this attribute is "omnipresence." The Latin prefix "omni" means, "all, so we're talking about the presence of God in all places and spaces. God is present everywhere.

The implications of the presence of God everywhere in our lives is significant. Knowing the whereabouts of God can change the way you live your life and how you approach every situation you encounter at your work, at your school, in your marriage, even when you are all by yourself with no other person around...which sometimes the most interesting challenge.

Ask any average preschooler, "Where's God?" What do they do? Point up, right? They point to the sky and say up there...in heaven. According to the Bible, they would be correct, but only partially correct. He's there... but he's also everywhere. The idea that God's in heaven has taken root in

most of our minds so that when we think of God we think initially, up. He's up there, and we are down here. God is in heaven doing his thing and I am down here doing my thing.

But, the Bible paints a very different picture of the presence of God. Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 139. I want us to carefully examine what the Psalmist says about the whereabouts of God. We are going to look at verses 1-12. As we read through this, I want you to notice how many dimensions, directions, and locations the Psalmist covers. Read verses 7-12

The all-encompassing presence of God

First of all, I want you to notice what the presence of God is referring to. Verse 7 says, "Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? The word "presence" there is the Hebrew word for the "face" of God. The "face" of God in the Bible always refers to the very essence of God.¹ In other words, the presence of God referred to is not just God's purview...or God's jurisdiction. Rather, it means the very personal and powerful presence of God.

Now, notice from the Psalmist's personal reference point what places and spaces God fills:

- Behind and before...me.
- Up in heaven and in the depths...
- Wings of the dawn (east) and far side of the sea (west for the Psalmist).
- In the darkness.

When you plot all those out on a front view, side view, back view, top and bottom view of a person it's clear: The presence of God totally surrounds you. Front and back, above and below, left and right. There is nowhere you can be where he isn't—mentally, emotionally, and physically. The presence of God absolutely and totally encompasses the human person in every direction and dimension.

¹ Spurgeon, The Treasury of David, Vol. 7, p.240.

[Illustration] - There were some kids lined up in the cafeteria of a Christian school for lunch. At the head of the table was a large bowl of apples. The teacher posted a note on the bowl: "Take only one, God is watching." At the other end of the table was a large pile of chocolate chip cookies. One of the boys wrote a note: "Take all you want, God is watching the apples."²

Not so, the Psalmist says. God is there with the apples AND with the cookies. God is there with the fruits and with the nuts.

[Transition] - Notice what God does in all these places and spaces. Read verses 1-6.

Notice what God does in all these places.

- He searches the heart and soul and knows it.
- He perceives thoughts.
- He discerns goings and comings.
- He has laid his hand on the Psalmist.
- His hand guides and holds fast.

Do you see how active he is...God is not just there detached and uninvolved. He is actively attending to those who are desperate for his supernatural care and attention. And not only does his presence surround you, it is inside you too...searching your heart, perceiving your thoughts, guiding and protecting you.

[Transition] - Many different characters in the Bible found this graphic description of God's whereabouts to be true:

Biblical examples of God's ever-present presence:

² Pastor Tim's Clean Laugh List; submitted by Mark Moring.

1. God was present with Daniel in the Lion's Den. King Darius had issued an edict that anyone who prayed to any god or man other than Darius shall be thrown into the Lion's den. Listen to the account, Read Daniel 6:16-24. That's the power of the presence of God for those who follow him.

[Transition] - Earlier in Daniel we read of the account of the presence of God attending to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they were in the hot seat. Flip back to Daniel 3.

2. God was present with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. In this story King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold 90 feet tall and nine feet wide. At its dedication ceremony Nebuchadnezzar demanded that everyone fall down and worship it or be thrown into the fiery furnace and torched. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow to the image and Nebby was ticked. Listen to the account. Read 19-27.

3. In Jonah's case, he got a call from God to go and preach to the city of Nineveh because of its wickedness but he didn't want to go so he ran away from God's presence and he got on a ship headed for Tarshish. Listen to what happened in that situation. Read 4-17.

Remember the Psalmist's question? Where can I flee from your presence? Jonah found out the answer is "nowhere." In fact, here's what God says through the Prophet Amos about evil people who think they can escape his justice.

*"Not one will get away,
none will escape.*

*² Though they dig down to the depths below,
from there my hand will take them.*

*Though they climb up to the heavens above,
from there I will bring them down.*

³ Though they hide themselves on the top of Carmel,

*there I will hunt them down and seize them.
Though they hide from my eyes at the bottom of the sea,
there I will command the serpent to bite them.
4 Though they are driven into exile by their enemies,
there I will command the sword to slay them.” Amos 9:1-4*

This is why God asks the rhetorical question in Jeremiah 23:23-24,
*“23 “Am I only a God nearby,”
declares the LORD,
“and not a God far away?
24 Can anyone hide in secret places,
so that I cannot see him?”
declares the LORD.
“Do not I fill heaven and earth?”
declares the LORD.*

The presence of God being everywhere is mostly a comforting truth. However, there are situations where it is not so comforting. The presence of God is a dreadful, maybe even an irritating reality when you are running from him or rebelling from him. But, know this, while it might seem annoying or dreadful to us...the presence of God always seeks our best and seeks to restore and correct, reconcile, and heal.

The Bible makes it clear that God never moves away from us, he does not withdraw. Instead, we withdraw from him in our sinful rebellion. We stiff-arm his presence...we reject it and run from it or try to hide from it.

When we take that posture toward God, WE drive a wedge between our hearts and the presence of God. A heart committed to sinful patterns and habits seeks to isolate itself from the presence of God and reject it. So, when our hearts are bent on some sort of sinful, destructive behavior, we in effect insulate our selves from the presence of God that always remains just on other side of our hard heart.

But the presence of God always seeks our best and seeks to restore and correct, reconcile and heal. The Bible says that while we were alienated from God, stiff-arming his love and insulated from his presence, he loved us and sent his Son Jesus to save us.³ The presence of God became tangibly near in the person of Jesus. Even his title, “Emmanuel” means “God with us.”⁴

He came near to pay the penalty we owed for our sin and he came near to reconcile the relationship between the human heart and God. He came near to forgive and cleanse the heart of every man, woman and child who placed their faith and trust in him. And the moment they believe in him, his presence moves into them through his Spirit, and becomes something they revel in, rather than run from.

[Transition] - Where are you with the presence of God this morning? We know where God is because of our study today. But where are you?

Embrace the Presence of God

Is the realization of the presence of God being everywhere a bit unsettling to you this morning? If it is, here’s how you can change that. All you need to do is stop where you are, admit that you have been avoiding God and that there is sin in your life you need forgiveness for. Openly confess your need for him to cleanse you and heal you. Tell him you don’t want to avoid his presence anymore. Instead, you want to be free to embrace it and revel in it.

The moment you admit your sin and ask God for forgiveness and begin trusting in him as the Lord and leader of your life is the moment that the ministry of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for God’s presence to be unleashed in us, not just present all around us, but unleashed inside us.

³ Romans 5:8.

⁴ Matt. 1:23.

Are there any of you here today need and want to open your heart to God today? Will you let me know before you go today? You can come up to the front, or you can let me know of the Connect Card in front of you. There's a space on one side labeled, "My Response." If you want to open your heart to God's presence today, mark that on your card and drop it in the black boxes on the wall by the doors on your way out, or take it to the folks at the Welcome booth.

[Transition] - Knowledge and awareness of God's presence in your life can enable you to revel in it and enjoy its benefits. In the rest of my time this morning I want to talk about the difference awareness of God's presence can make.

The benefits of God's presence:

- **The presence of God can comfort you.**

What a remarkable reality it is to know that we are never alone in anything we face. The presence of the God of all comfort who knows everything about what you are facing is near you and even in you to fill the anxious, unsettled parts of your heart.

God is especially near us in the uncertain times in our lives. Psalm 34:18 soothes the aching heart with these words, *"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*

Paul gives testimony to the comforting work of God's presence when he was discouraged, fearful and alone. In II Cor. 7:4b-7, *"I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds. ⁵ For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. ⁶ But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever."*

Sometimes God comforts us directly through the presence of his Spirit, but as Paul testifies...sometimes he uses those around us.

[Quote] - Henri Nouwen said, *"Our life is full of brokenness - broken relationships, broken promises, broken expectations. How can we live with that brokenness without becoming bitter and resentful except by returning again and again to God's faithful presence in our lives."*

The personal presence of God is always with us. It is so valuable to cultivate our awareness of that reality in our lives.

[Illustration] - Brother Lawrence was a monk in Paris in the 1600's. He worked in the kitchen in the monastery, calling himself "a servant of the servants of God." In his own life he determined to be an experiment of living every moment "in the presence of God." His attempts to create a habitual state of communion led to new heights of spiritual living for him. No task was too trivial for Brother Lawrence, for he was able to transform mundane chores of the kitchen into glorious experiences of heaven as he blended work with prayer practicing a heightened sense of God's presence. His journal entries were compiled into a book entitled, "The Practice of the Presence of God" which, describes so wonderfully the joy he discovered living each moment practicing the Presence of God".⁵

Think about your life. How "aware" are you that God is near you even inside of you every second of every day in absolutely everything you do? How could you increase your awareness?

Try setting that alarm on your phone to chime each hour...and when it does let it trigger your awareness of God's presence with you. Just for a couple of days this week, practice increasing your awareness of the presence of God.

⁵ Devotional Classics, p. 81.

[Transition] - The presence of God can not only comfort us...the presence of God can strengthen you.

- **The presence of God can strengthen you.**

The presence of God can help strengthen your resolve to follow God's will in your life. In other words, it can help you obey God more consistently. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

[Illustration] -Now, don't answer this out loud. But if you are going down the freeway how likely are you to allow your speed to drift over the limit? Maybe you have a radar detector or somehow you are confident that there are no Highway Patrolmen nearby. How likely are you to ignore the speed limit signs and let your speed climb to 10 or 15 miles over the limit?

Now, what happens to you when you catch a glimpse of a black and white car with those little red and blue lights on top?

Now do you understand how much presence matters. Honestly, I've been driving and just sailing along talking and not paying very close attention to what I'm doing, speed climbing, then...see one of those CHP cars out of the corner of my eye...and wow, you ought to see me straighten up and pay more careful attention to my behavior. It's funny, when I am aware of the presence of a cop, I am so able to drive more appropriately. Presence matters!

Knowing that God is present with us in every moment we face can be an incredible resource and motivation to turn from the temptation of sin and obey God's will for us. Knowing that he is with us and sees everything we do and discerns everything in our hearts and minds means that we can call out to him when we are facing temptation and we can call on his power to fill us and enable us to say "no" to destructive choices and patterns in our life.

- The next time you're at that point of decision on whether or not to say that mean spirited thing to your spouse remember God is there to minister to you and strengthen you hold your tongue or just walk away or find something more constructive or productive to say.
- Or the next time you face that tense moment and feel yourself just wanting to have a drink or use that drug to ease the pain, remember God is there with you and you can call out to him...you might as well... he already knows all about what's going on for you and he wants to strengthen you and give you the courage and patience or whatever you need to make it through that temptation.
- Guys, the next time you face that moment where you feel the pull to give in to the pseudo intimacy and fantasy of internet pornography. Remember God is right there with you, fighting for you, and longing to bring all his resources to bear to give you the strength to say "no" to unhelpful, damaging choices in your life.

Knowing that his presence is with us—seeing all and knowing all—is a huge accountability factor. Knowing that we're never completely alone is a good motivation for us. It keeps us from believing the lie, "it's okay...no one will see me."

[Illustration] - On my laptop I have subscribed for years to an Internet monitoring service. It is called Covenant Eyes. This service monitors my every move on the Internet and sends my activity report to an accountability partner of my choosing. I have chosen two individuals who I trust and who I know love me and care for me and they receive this report. They can take one look at it and see if I've been anywhere that is unhealthy for me.

It is a tangible expression of the presence of God. Now, I know that God sees my every move on the computer and in all of life, but the eyes of my accountability partners are a tangible expression of the eyes of God and it is an extra layer of defense against the enemy who would love to lead

me down a destructive path to destroy me, destroy my family and destroy the reputation of this church.

Conclusion:

As you move into this week...set that alarm...let it help you stay mindful that the presence of God always with you. He's with you and aware of everything going on in you and around you.

If you and I will practice the presence of God, if you'll allow yourself to increase your awareness of God's presence you will experience an incredible closeness with God that will provide comfort and reassurance for the challenges we face, as well as increased inspiration to resist the temptations you face.

Let's live in the awareness of God's presence...and drawn on its comforts and strength.