

The Character of God
Part 5 – His omnipresence

The God of Everywhere

Psalm 139

October 17, 1999

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If somebody could follow you for a full week and even know your thoughts, what would they say about your belief in God?

After observing you, how would they answer the following questions?

Where does Tom, believe God is?

When Kevin is at work, does he think of God as being there?

When Ashley is in school, does she think of God as being there?

When Michael prays, does he think of his prayers as having to go somewhere to be heard?

Does Michele think of God as being with her or as being somewhere else?

Again, I ask, if someone could follow you around and even know your thoughts for a full week, what would they expect you to say in answer to that question – Where is God?

350 years ago a philosophy developed in England that eventually captured the minds of many in the upper classes in Europe and America.

Eventually people like Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson adopted this philosophy.

It could just as appropriately be called their theology – their belief in God.

Some of the particulars of their belief were these:

1. There is a God.
2. God deserves our worship
3. We ought to turn away from doing wrong and live ethical, moral lives.
4. God will reward good and punish wrongdoing both in this life and the next.

5. All religions basically believe these same things and thus we must be tolerant of all religions.
6. God is the first cause of everything that exists; he created the world and established unchangeable laws, which require no further involvement by him.
7. God is there, in heaven, and we are here, on earth, and we are responsible for getting on with living the life God gave us. (Deism in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology)

Sound fairly good?

It was called Deism.

And frankly it describes, fairly well, a whole lot of American churchgoers.

They believe in a Divine power who got everything going somehow and withdrew to his heaven from where he looks benevolently on all his creatures below, expecting them to act benevolently toward each other.

God is, for them, a distant, respected, but relatively impersonal being. He is out there somewhere but has no particular relevance to life here and now.

Maybe for the more devout, they think of God as someone they go to. They go to him in prayer, as if their prayers had to cross some distance to get to him.

They go to him in worship, as if he was looking down from some distant place.

But they don't think of him as there in their geometry class, or while changing a diaper, or fixing a computer, or making a sales presentation.

In fact, in those situations, they rarely if ever even think of him.

Again, I ask you, where IS God?

Listen to God's own answer as given through the Psalmist David in Psalm 139 READ

Verses 8-9 directly address the question, "Where is God?"

In these verses David imagines the furthest distances away.

In verse 8 he speaks of the highest place above and the deepest place below.

In verse 9 he speaks of the furthest east (“the wings of the dawn”) and the furthest west (“the far side of the sea” – the Mediterranean was west of where he was).

Any direction David might go, and far as it was conceivable to go – who was there? God!

The Psalmist is declaring a truth that is everywhere taught in the Bible.

Theologians call it the omnipresence of God.

“Omnipresent” simply means he is present in all places.

You, who have grown up in Christian homes and in Sunday School, have always known that and probably even believed it.

But what is it you believe when you say God is present everywhere?

And if it is true, what difference does it make?

Again, I want to emphasize that while many of us would easily say, “God is everywhere”, many of us don’t think and act that way most of the time.

Elijah on Mt Carmel spoke to the prophets of Baal telling them to call louder to their god since he was either asleep or on a journey.

They did it, they called louder to their god.

By doing so, they revealing their belief in a god who was present somewhere else but not there at the time.

But when Elijah prayed he simply asked the God who was present to show himself powerful (I Kings 18:27, 36-37).

In I Kings 20:23 the Syrians thought the god of Israel was a god of the hills while theirs was a god of the plains and that if they fought on the plain they could beat the Israelites.

Their concept of god was that he was confined to space.

Don’t we easily make the same mistake, thinking of God as somewhere else, and not here?

We think of him as in heaven only and thus not here now.

By thinking of God as limited in that way, we think we avoid something but we actually lose much.

We avoid accountability and we lose relationship.

If we value autonomy most then we like a god who is somewhere else except when we call on him to be present.

If we value relationship then we will like a God who is present.

But back to the main question, “What does it mean when we say God is present everywhere”?

I will readily admit that what I am about to describe is difficult to describe and comprehend because we are dealing with categories outside of our experience.

For example, the concept of “eternity” is difficult for us to grasp.

Likewise the concept of “omnipresence” - one being, present everywhere - is difficult to grasp.

But as difficult as it is to comprehend, the Bible still declares it.

Jeremiah 23:23,24 “Am I only a God nearby”, declares the Lord, “and not a God far away? 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.”

To get a better grasp of this there are several things I want you to factor into your thinking:

1st God is spirit.

Like the prophets of Baal we are tempted to think of God as having a physical body and thus being limited to occupying space.

We think of his as being somewhere and thus incapable of being somewhere else at the same time.

But God is spirit.

He is every place at the same time.

2nd I want you remember that **God doesn't just exert his influence everywhere but he is, himself, everywhere.**

It is not that God just sits in one place and exerts his power in all places, but that he is, personally, in all places at the same time.

In the gospel of John, chapter 14, Jesus explained to his disciples that he was physically going to leave them.

The Bible tells us that God the Son took on a human body.

That body was limited in the ways ours are. It was capable of being in only one place at a time.

Jesus, in his body, could not be in both Capernaum and Jerusalem at the same time.

He said he was leaving his disciples via his death, resurrection and ascension.

But to comfort them, he makes a truth clearer than it had ever been before – God would be with them even after Jesus' body ascended into heaven.

Listen to Jesus' words:

14:16-23 "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you... On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you... If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Jesus does **not** say **only** that his prayers would be with them or that he would **watch over them from a distance** and protect them.

He says he would be with them!

When the Bible says that God is everywhere, it does not mean he just exerts his influence everywhere but that he, himself, is present everywhere.

He is not distant - he is here – "at home" here – "dwelling" here – not just showing up from time to time – but "at home" here, now.

And as hard as it is for us not to think spatially, in terms of space, we must not think of God as some kind of huge cloud that spreads out over everyplace and everything.

It is not that one part of God is in one place, while another part of him is in another.

God says that he is personally, fully, wholly, everyplace at the same time.

The 3rd thing I want you to remember about the “omnipresence” of God is that **though he is present everywhere he is distinct from it.**

Pantheists and their “new age” counterparts would want us to believe that we are really saying, what they are saying - that God is everywhere means that everywhere and everything is God.

The Pantheist says “God minus the world = nothing.”

The Theist says, “God minus the world = God.”

In Colossians 1:16-17 the distinction between God and his creation is clear and at the same time his immediate involvement in his creation is equally clear: “For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth...all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

God is everywhere in his creation but he is distinct from it.

In summary, God as Spirit, is personally everywhere present at the same time and yet he is distinct from all that he has created.

Here’s the way the Apostle Paul described it in Acts 17:24-28

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands...” God “is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being.”

As a fish lives in the presence of water, so we live in the presence of God.

As a bird flies in the air, so we live in the presence of God.

He is everywhere, which means he is here!

300 years ago Stephen Charnock wrote concerning the Acts 17 passage:

“In him we live and move and have our being” God is “not absent from anything, but so present with (everyone), that they live and move in him, and move more in God, than in the air or earth wherein they are; (God is) nearer to us than our flesh to our bones, than the air to our breath; he cannot be far from them that live, and have every motion in him. The apostle did not say, “by him” but “in him” to show the inwardness of his presence.” P367 Stephen Charnock A.D. 1682 published The existence and attributes of God Discourse VII is on God’s Omnipresence.

From the eloquent to the cute, listen to the way one near-poet declared it:

“He was just a little lad, and on a fine Lord’s day,
was wandering home from Sunday school and dawdling on the way.
He scuffed his shoes into the grass; he found a caterpillar;
he found a fluffy milkweed pod and blew out all the filler.
A bird’s nest in the tree o’erhead, so wisely placed and high,
was just another wonder that caught his eager eye.
A neighbor watched his zigzag course and hailed him from the lawn,
asked him where he’d been that day, and what was going on.
“Oh, I’ve been to Sunday school”, (he carefully turned the sod,
and found a snail beneath it) “I’ve learned a lot ‘bout God.”
“M’m, a very fine way,” the neighbor said, “for a boy to spend his
time.

If you’ll tell me where God is, I’ll give you a brand-new dime.”
Quick as a flash his answer came, nor were his accents faint,
“I’ll give **you** a dollar, Mister, if you can tell me where God ain’t.”

(Strauss The Joy of Knowing God 104-5)

God declares in his Word that he is everywhere, **but what difference does it make?**

If it is true truth that God is personally everywhere, meaning that he is personally, fully, wholly here right now, then that truth **confronts** us, **challenges** us and **comforts** us.

First of all the “omnipresence” of God CONFRONTS us.

How many live today as if God does not see, does not care, or does not even exist?

How many assume God does not see or understand their actions of sin against him.

Adam said, "I heard your voice in the garden and hid myself."

Did he think God could not find him or that God was absent from the place? (Charnock 397)

Again I quote Charnock:

"Ask the thief why he dares to steal? Will he not answer, "No eye sees me?" Ask the adulterer why he strips himself of his chastity and invades the rights of another? Will he not answer, "No eye sees me?" He disguises himself to be unseen by man, but slights the all-seeing eye of God." (Charnock 397)

Do we have greater regard for the eyes of others than for God's eyes?

We treat with greater respect the eyes and knowledge of parents, spouse, friends, even complete strangers than we treat the all-seeing, everywhere present God.

Even children, at least older children, have the good sense to disobey only out of sight of their parents or teachers.

But do we think so little about the presence of God, or think so little of God himself, that we disregard his wishes right in his very presence?

If we go on sinning in the very presence of God, how can it be called anything but rebellion?

We can no longer say, "I didn't mean what I did to be against God." It cannot be anything but against God, for he is everywhere.

The Psalmist said, Psalm 139:1-4

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.

The omnipresence and omniscience of God confronts us, forcing us to either repent or acknowledge our rebellion.

The omnipresence of God also challenges us.

It challenges us to live in relationship with God at all times.
God is in your schoolroom, your home, your office, your work tomorrow and he longs for you to know him, experience him, to love him as he loves you.

The truth is that when we live each day **as if** God were somewhere else, we deaden the relationship.

Someone wrote:

“Love calls many times each day but finds me preoccupied, not able to make the time to be at home for her.

I let the signs of her visitation come and go unnoticed:

and am not nourished by a love that is not recognized or named.

So I continue to live in a world that deadens with its indifference:

Alas, that I cannot be here when you call and have time to be at home together.”

(297 Peter Hannan [Nine Faces of God](#))

But how can anyone think of God all the time?

Wouldn't it be burdensome to try to keep God constantly in focus in the middle of our fast-paced and complex days?

A.W. Tozer quotes another who wrote,

“The wings of the dove do not weigh it down, but they carry and support it. And so the thought of God is never a burden; it is a gentle breeze which bears us up, a hand which supports us and raises us, a light which guides us, and a spirit which (enlivens) us though we do not feel its working.” (In Tozer [That Incredible Christian](#) 67)

Those, down through history, who have lived with a daily, moment by moment awareness of the presence of God tell us it is a discipline that must be cultivated, **but once cultivated** it becomes as natural as responding to someone we love.

Having someone you love deeply, unexpectedly show up at your place of work or in a time of trouble is not a burden but a delight.

Their presence pulls you out of the near-sightedness of the moment and gives you a broader perspective on the important.

So consciously experiencing the presence of God gives a peace.

Thinking about the presence of God is not a burden but a burden carrier.

Brother Lawrence wrote: “In order to form a habit of conversing with God continually, and referring all we do to him, we must first apply to him with some diligence; but that after a little care, we should find his love inwardly excite us to it without any difficulty.” P15 [Practicing the Presence of God](#)

The truth of God’s omnipresence **challenges** us to live in relationship with him continually.

That is what King David was expressing in the Psalm.

Psalm 139:1

“O Lord you have searched me and you know me”.

He goes on to say, as we have read:

You know everything about me.

You are always present no matter where I go.

You even knew me intimately in my mother’s womb.

You ordained my life from beginning to end.

Psalm 139:23-24

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there be any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Don Williams, pastor in California, said about this prayer of David:

“This is the intimacy that God wants to have with us. He formed us in the womb. He knows our frame. He sees our embryo. He fashions our days. He knows our thoughts. He hears our words. He knows when we sit down and when we stand up. He protects us. His hand is upon us. He who inhabits all things is near to us. We cannot escape his presence. In the light he sees us. In the dark he sees us. We are the continual objects of his thoughts. He searches us. He changes us. Here is true intimacy...” (Don Williams in [The Communicator’s Commentary Psalms 73-150](#) p488)

God challenges us to live in that kind of intimate relationship with him.

Lastly the truth of God’s omnipresence comforts us.

Last week I spoke of Jerry Sittser who about 8 years ago lost three members of his family in an automobile accident.

In the aftermath of it, Jerry struggled greatly with his relationship with God.

But what he discovered in the process, is that while he thought he was moving away from God, God was there all the time.

“Loss may call the existence of God into question... In our pain we are tempted to reject God, yet for some reason we hesitate to take that course of action. So we move toward God, then away from him. We wrestle in our souls to believe. Finally we choose God... We decide to be in a relationship with God. And then we discover that God, in his sovereignty, has already decided to be in a relationship with us.”

God has said, “I will never leave you, or forsake you.”

He is always and everywhere present.

Here is how he said it through the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 43:2ff “Fear not for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you... For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...”

Thomas Goodwin, a Puritan preacher of the 1600s described the relationship of a father with his son as an illustration of God’s presence with us.

A father is walking down the road with his son’s hand in his own and the child is enjoying the presence of his father and knows that he is loved.

Then, without the child doing anything special, moved only by the father’s love, the father reaches down and scoops his son off his feet and up into his arms.

He hugs the child tightly, showers him with kisses, tells him he loves him more than life itself and sets him down again.

The child already knew his father loved him, there was no doubt.

But oh the added measure of assurance, the joy of knowing that love is not based on anything you have done but simply flows out of the heart of the father.

That is what it means to have God near. (found in Lloyd-Jones Joy Unspeakable 95-96)

In the past few weeks I have emphasized the majesty, the transcendence, the otherness, and the power of God.

God truly is all of that and more.

But he is also very present – the God who is near, even right here, now.

He is the God we worship – not some distant deity but the God who is with us and will never leave us.

If we would allow that truth to saturate our minds it would truly confront us, challenge us and comfort us.

What will you do with the truth of the omnipresence of God?