

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,
on Sunday, January 10, 1993, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

PSALM 139:7-10; JEREMIAH 23:23-24 (GN)

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your Presence? If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I ride on the wings of the dawn; if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there Your hand will guide me; Your right hand will hold me fast.”

“I am a God Who is everywhere, and not in one place only. No one can hide where I cannot see him. Do you not know that I am everywhere in heaven and on earth?”

GETTING TO KNOW GOD

(2) Where is God when you need Him?

If I were to ask you, “Where is God?”, how would you answer? Some would say, “He’s in Heaven”. Others would say, “He’s in my heart.” Now, the Bible says that God is all over the place, and David says here in our text from Psalm 139 that you simply cannot escape from God’s presence. It’s kind of mind-boggling to realize that God doesn’t need to go anywhere because He’s already there! God is everywhere. There’s no point in the universe where God is not, as our Jeremiah text affirms.

So, this morning we’re going to consider what theologians call God’s omnipresence. God is here, He’s there, He’s everywhere. Now, this is difficult for us as finite creatures to comprehend. You can’t be in two places at the same time, although often we wish we could! But, it’s no problem for God because He is a Spirit, so He can be everywhere at the same time.

Now that does not mean that God is everything – that’s pantheism. Pantheism says that God is the mountain; God is the little flower; God is the sky and the sea. No, that’s not God; that’s His creation. Don’t confuse the Creator and His creation. God is not everything, but He is everywhere. Look at Acts 17:27b-28, “He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being.” That means that I cannot lift a finger apart from God. I wouldn’t even exist apart from Him. God holds me together! He is the cohesive Force in all of the universe.

Now, if God is everywhere, I just need to recognize that fact. At this moment this room is filled with radio and television waves. You don’t see them, but they’re here. But, if you bring a radio or T.V. into this room and tune in to those waves, you’ll get a message. Likewise, God is here. You don’t see Him, but He’s here, just like those radio waves. And, if you can learn to tune in to the presence of God, it will benefit your life immeasurably.

God is everywhere. But, my reaction to a doctrinal statement like that is, “So what? What difference does that make in my life?” So, this morning I would like to look with you at some verses from God’s Word that deal with the implications of the fact that God is present everywhere. What does that mean to me? Let’s take four common experiences of life – loneliness, worry, temptation and discouragement – and look at some verses that say that God’s

presence in your life will make a difference in those four areas if you will let Him. The Bible says that:

1. When I'm lonely. God is my COMPANION, if I just tune in and recognize it. In Psalm 25:16 (GN) it says, "Turn to me, Lord, and be merciful to me because I am lonely." Some of you may be lonely this morning. It's ironic that there have never been such teeming multitudes of people in the world as there are today – over 5 billion of us – and yet never have there been more lonely people.

There are many different kinds of loneliness. There's the loneliness caused by death or divorce. There's the loneliness of the business trip. It's no fun eating your meals alone in a city far from home. There's the loneliness of a new school; the loneliness of growing old. There's the loneliness caused by the husband who won't listen to you! And, the loneliness of feeling that you're not understood. And, of course, there's the loneliness of success – life at the top is lonely. There are many different kinds of loneliness. And, you will be lonely at some time or other in your life. Can you be lonely in a crowd? Of course you can.

When God created Adam, He said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him." (Gen. 2:19 GN) It's a beautiful word, that word "companion". It comes from two Latin words, "cum" which means "with", and "panis" which means "bread". A companion is literally one with whom you eat bread! It's no fun eating alone, is it? I think that's why the Bible has so much to say about "feasting" where people meet together in companionship. Dr. Horatius Bonar in his magnificent Communion hymn says,

"Feast after feast thus comes and passes by,
Yet, passing, points to the glad feast above,
Giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy,
The Lamb's great bridal feast of bliss and love."

There will be no lonely people in Heaven because we'll all be "companions."

But, what do you do when you have those moments of uncontrollable loneliness; when you can't do anything about it? You recognize God's presence – that He is your Companion. It suddenly dawned on me as I prepared this message that this sheds a beautiful light on Rev. 3:20, where Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and (what?) EAT with him and he with me." Once you open the door of your life to Christ, you have a "Companion" for life! Look at Hebrews 13:5, "God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" You remember the song that says, "You'll never walk alone." It's true. You have a constant Companion – God is always with you.

When we face a challenge, we like to have somebody with us. Do you remember your first day at school? I remember how I wanted my Mom to go with me, and of course, she did! We like to have reinforcements. When you are lonely, you need to remember that Christ is your Companion Who is always with you and Who never asks you to do anything by yourself. King David got lonely sometimes, and look at his antidote, Ps. 16:11 (GN) – "Your presence fills me with joy!" Now, here's the first benefit of recognizing God's presence – when I'm lonely, God's

presence cheers me up. It makes me feel better.

2. When I'm worried. God is my CONFIDENCE. Some of you are worried this morning and you need to hear Isaiah 43:2-3 (LB), "When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up."

That makes me think of those three gallant Hebrew young men – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego ("Your shack, my shack and a bungalow", as a little boy *said!*). You remember how those three godly fellows walked through the fiery furnace. It says that God walked through it with them, and when they came out, not one hair of their head was even singed because they were protected (Daniel 3:1-30).

You're going through the fire, perhaps. Some of you will be going through difficult times this week, and none of us can predict the problems we're going to face. But, we can be certain of this – God will go through it with you.

When I'm worried, God is my Confidence. God told Moses one day, "Moses, you're going to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt on their way to the Promised Land." And, Moses began to make excuses – "I can't do that, God. I'm insecure. I'm nothing. I'm not even a good speaker." And, God gave one answer to his excuses, "I will be with you. My presence will go with you." (Exodus 33:14) Look at Ps. 16:8-9 (GN), "I am always aware of the Lord's presence. He is NEAR, and nothing can shake me. So, I am thankful and glad, and I feel completely secure!" Isn't that a wonderful testimony?

Now, here's the second benefit – when I'm lonely, God's presence cheers me up. But, when I'm worried, God's presence calms me down. It gives me stability. It's a stress reliever. It gives me confidence because I know "I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). He is with me; therefore, I can handle anything, even death itself. Look at Ps. 23:4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me."

Now, this kind of confidence does not come from psychology, or the power of positive thinking. It comes from knowing that God is with me. That's why the Psalmist can say, "Nothing can shake me. I'm completely secure."

So, when I'm lonely, I have a Companion.
When I'm worried, I have a Confidence.

3. When I'm tempted. God is my COUNSELOR. He is ready to give me advice. He is ready to help me through the temptation. 1 Cor. 10:13 says, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And, God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But, when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." Isn't that encouraging? It says that when God is with you, He provides a way out.

Notice a couple of things about this verse:

a. It says that temptations are “common” to us. We all have the same problems. Sometimes someone will say to me, “Pastor, you know, I have this unique problem”, and they will tell me what it is. And, I say, “Oh, I’ve had that problem lots of times!” We all have the same problems. And, if there are these common problems, there are also common solutions, and they’re found here in God’s Word.

b. It says that God is with me when I’m tempted. I don’t know about you, but that’s a motivation to me not to give in. After all, God is looking over my shoulder. You remember that little verse in Genesis 16:13 that says, “Thou, God, seest me.” And, I don’t want to sin right in front of God. But every time I do sin, it’s just as if I’m doing it right in front of His throne.

And, the real benefit is that God’s presence not only cheers me up and calms me down; but God’s presence helps me out. He knows exactly the struggle going on in my soul; and He’s pulling for me; He’s preparing an escape route. And, that’s good news, folks!

Job 13:27 says, “You (God) watch every step I take” (GN). That just means that God is an eyewitness to every single thing I do. As much as I would like to do what Jonah did and “run from the presence of the Lord” (Jonah 1:10), it doesn’t work. A song came out some years ago entitled, “No One Knows What Goes on Behind Closed Doors”. Surprise! God knows. You see, there’s no such thing as a locked door to God. You can’t lock Him in, and you can’t lock Him out, because He’s everywhere. Psalm 139:11-12 says, “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will hide me...’, even the darkness will not be dark to You; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to You.” In other words, God has night vision. His radar is just as effective at night as in broad daylight. The Bible says that “men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil” (John 3:19). A lot of things go on at night that don’t go on during the day, because people think they’re being hidden. But, God sees everything. He sees right through the darkness.

Have you noticed how much easier it is to control yourself when you know that other people are watching? You know, you go up to the salad bar at “Sizzler”, and you see this huge bowl of chocolate mousse, and you think, “Oh, I’m receiving an answer to prayer!”; and you’re just globbing it on your plate. Then you look behind you, and there’s this slim, attractive lady standing next to you, and her look says, “What a pig!” So, you start heaping it back into the bowl – because somebody’s watching!

Our, son, Trevor, is playing ice hockey this year for a team in Rockford, Illinois. He told me that at the beginning of the season, in the locker room, as they got suited up, the language was what you usually hear in a locker room. Now, only one other player knew that Trevor was a minister, but during the game he obviously passed the word around; and Trevor said he really cracked up at the end of the game – same fellows, same locker room – but all they talked about was how well-behaved their kids were in Church last Sunday, and what a fine message the preacher gave! A couple of weeks later, a new player joined the team, and in the locker room before the game, he turned the air blue: And there was stony silence! He said, “Hey, did I say something wrong?” And, a voice piped up – “Ask the Reverend over there!”

When people watch us, and see us and hear us, it is indeed a motivation. Do we always remember that God is always watching us?

So, when I'm lonely, God is my Companion; when I'm worried, He is my Confidence; and when I'm tempted, He is my Counselor. And finally,

4. When I'm discouraged, God is my COMFORTER. Ps. 34:18 (GN) says, "The Lord is near to those who are discouraged; He saves those who have lost all hope." The Living Bible says, "The Lord is close to those whose hearts are breaking." If you're here this morning, and you're discouraged, even to the point of being broken-hearted, there's one thing I can say with all confidence – God is with you. Indeed, He is nearest to you when you need Him most.

Philip Yancey wrote a great book a few years ago entitled, Where is God When it Hurts? The answer to that question is, "He's with you. He feels your hurt. He understands your discouragement. He knows when you're not making it." Some of you may be ready to throw in the towel, I don't know what you're going through, but whatever it is, God is going through it with you. You're not alone. And, His presence is there because He wants to be your Comforter.

God is not some impersonal "Force". ("May the Force be with you!") He is not some far away Power. He's very personal, and He's right there with you. Jesus said in John 14:16-17 (KJV), "The Father... shall give you another Comforter that He may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth." So, no matter what you will be called upon to go through this next week, God will go through it with you. When the roof caves in, God is with you. He's never too busy to listen. He never says, "I'm on another line. Call back later."

Some of you may think that this is just intellectual truth, or even wishful thinking. But, others of you know, from your own experience, what I'm talking about, because you have felt God's presence when you really needed Him. He has comforted you and given you the strength and the encouragement to keep on going.

Frankly, I don't know how people make it without the Lord. The fact is, they don't. They hurt much more deeply and severely than those who know that God is working out His loving purpose even through their pain and sorrow.

Look at Psalm 116:8-11 (GN), "The Lord... stopped my tears and kept me from defeat. And, so I walk in the presence of the Lord in the world of the living. I kept on believing, even when I said, 'I am completely crushed...'" I know that verse has applied in my life dozens of times when I have been discouraged. Without the sure knowledge and the encouragement of knowing that God was right beside me, with His hand on my shoulder, I would not have made it.

You see, the presence of God not only cheers me up when I'm lonely; it not only calms me down when I'm worried; and helps me out when I'm tempted; but, when I'm discouraged, God's presence sees me through! It gives me the motivation and the power to keep on keeping on.

But, you have to tune in. Now notice, the key to overcoming loneliness, worry, temptation and discouragement is the phrase, "I walk in the presence of the Lord." How do you do that? Here are the keys to practicing the presence of God.

1. You need to invite Jesus into your life if you haven't done that already. God is around you, but He wants to be in you. He wants to put His Spirit inside you so that you can handle the stress around you; because when you get stressed out and feel all of this pressure coming in on you from the outside, you must have an equal pressure from the inside in order to cope. I have noticed that when people get under pressure, they always begin to fill themselves with something to equalize the stress. They start eating more; or they fill themselves with alcohol or drugs. They put something on the inside to equalize the pressure on the outside. Paul says, "Do not get drunk on wine. Instead be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). Go for the Spirit, not spirits! And, as you are filled with God's presence in your life, it equalizes the pressure on the outside, and you can cope. So, the starting point is to invite Christ into your life.

2. Be quiet before the Lord. The reason so many people don't feel God's presence is because they're too busy, too distracted. The Bible says, "Be still and know that I am God." (Ps. 46:10). Pascal said that most of man's problems come from his inability to sit still! So, several times a day, take little breaks to tune in to God; to realize that He is with you. James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." He's always there, but you've got to be aware of it.

3. Talk to God about everything. 1 Thess. 5:17 says, "Pray without ceasing." How do you do that? It means maintaining a continual conversation with God. You wake up and look out and say, "Thanks, Lord, for a beautiful morning!" At work you say, "Lord, I thank You for enabling me to deal with this difficult situation." As you enter your home after work, you say, "Thank You Lord, for giving me such a wonderful spouse and children." You just keep on speaking to God all through the day, knowing that He is right there with you. And,

4. Develop the habit of praise. Thank Him for Who He is, and for what He has done for you. Ps. 100:4 says, "Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise." That means that we move into an awareness of God's presence through praise. Nothing will help you become aware of God's presence in your life faster than developing the habit of praise. And, since He is present everywhere, I can praise Him everywhere.

A whole new life can open up to you if you will become aware this next week that God is always with you. It will cheer you up, it will calm you down; it will help you out; and it will see you through!

When things get tough, just say, "The Lord is in this place!"; because He is!

AMEN.