

GOD'S PRESENCE - OMNIPRESENCE

Early American Indians had a unique practice to train their young braves. On the night of the young brave's 13th birthday, on his threshold of manhood, after learning hunting, and fishing, and scouting skills, he was put to one final test. He was put into a dark, dense forest, and was expected to spend the entire night alone. Up until that point he had never been separated from his family and tribe where there was a lot of security for him. But on this night, he was blindfolded and taken several miles away. After taking off the blindfold, there he was in this thick woods. And after what would seem like eternity, finally dawn would break, and the first rays of sunlight would break through the dense forest. And he would look around, and to his utter astonishment he would see down the path an outline of a man standing there holding a bow and arrow. It was his father! He had been there all night, watching over his son, protecting him even though he couldn't see him.

Psalms 139:7-12 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," 12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

This is what theologians call God's omnipresence, "The Lord our God is everywhere at once." He is everywhere present all the time. Paul Little states that "God is not a substance spread out in a thin layer all over the earth. All of Him is in Chicago, in Calcutta, in Cairo, and in Caracas, at once and the same time." God is everywhere at once. There's no point in the universe where God is not. He is not limited by time or space. He is not confined to any one location.

That is a hard concept for us because we are finite creatures. Have you noticed that it is impossible for you to be in two places at once? You may have wished that you could be in two places at the same time but you can't. I face this every week as I stand at the door. I would like to greet and talk to everyone but there is only one of me. Maybe you have wished you could have said hi but there was already someone talking with me. Imagine that they invented a time machine that would allow you to go back in time 24 hours. This afternoon I get into that time machine. That would mean that this morning there would be two of me. That would certainly make things better. But then both of us go back. That means this morning there would be 4 of us. Now imagine I keep doing that until there is one of me for every one of you. I could give everyone my complete and undivided attention.

God is infinite. He does not dwell within time and space so he can be completely with and give His undivided attention to every person on earth at the same time.

When Henry Norris Russell, Princeton astronomer, had concluded a lecture on the Milky Way, a woman came to him and asked: "If our world is so little, and the universe is so great, can we believe that God pays any attention to us?" Dr. Russell replied, "That depends, madam, entirely on how big a God you believe in."

Saying that God is omnipresent does not mean that God is IN everything. That's called pantheism. Don't confuse the creator with His creation. I am not saying that God is part of everything, but He is everywhere at once and can be with every person at once.

This scripture tells us three things about God's presence;

1. DEPTH (vs. 8) – God is with us spiritually

It says here that “if I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.” The word here used for depths is the Hebrew word SHEOL or hell. David is not saying here that God is in hell. There is no way while we are still living to visit heaven or hell. There are times when we may feel like it. All of us have good days and bad days. The good news is that God is always with us no matter how we are feeling. The Holy Spirit is in us – connected with our spirit. David once wrote;

Psalms 25:16 Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

Have you ever felt like David did? Have you ever felt lonely and afflicted? There may be someone in this room that is lonely right now. Some of the loneliest times in my life is when I was surrounded by people. It is interesting that we live in a world where there were never before more people in the world yet there are more lonely people. For all our ‘social networking’ loneliness is on the rise.

There are many different kinds of loneliness. There is loneliness that comes from a new SETTING. You move to a new place (our country) and you have a hard time learning the culture and making friends. You miss your home. There is the loneliness that comes from SICKNESS and the death of a spouse or friend. There is the loneliness of the SITUATION that you are in. Maybe you are single and think that marriage would help but there are a lot of lonely married people as well. There is even the loneliness of SUCCESS. Life at the top can be a very lonely place.

There are many different kinds of loneliness. There will be times when you are lonely in life. God made the universe and declared it good, but the Bible says that there was one thing He found in it that was not;

Gen 2:17 It is not good for the man to be alone...

So what do you do when you are lonely? You recognize God's presence and you rest in His promises. He is our companion and He is always with us.

Hebrews 13:5 ...God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

God's Spirit is with ours. He is our constant companion. Remember the song "You'll Never Walk Alone" -- it's true. You have a constant companion; God is always with you. No matter if you feel like you are in heaven or in hell right now, God is with you. You may not feel like it, but it is true.

Yuri Gagarin from Russia was the first man to reach outer space. He orbited the earth in the Vostok spacecraft on April 12, 1961. It was widely reported that he said after he returned to earth “I flew into space and didn't see God.” Just because he didn't see Him does not mean that He was not there. As one pastor said when he read that quote to his congregation the Sunday after it had first been announced "Well, if he had stepped out of his spacecraft, he would have met him in a hurry!" On a side note, it was actually Khrushchev who said it. Yuri Gagarin was a Christian.

2. DISTANCE (vs. 9-10) – God is with us physically

This passage goes on to say “If I rise 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.”

God is with us not just in every SITUATION but also in every SETTING. No matter where we go in all creation we know that God goes with us.

Maybe you have heard the story about the lady with a son named Doug. Her young son Doug was looking at a full moon one night, and he asked, 'Mom, is God in the moon?' The mom explained that God is everywhere. 'Well, is God in my tummy?' 'Well, I suppose so' she responded not sure where these questions were leading. Then little Doug declared, 'Mom, God wants a banana!'

I am not sure the theology of that story, the point is that God is EVERYWHEE. There were times the nation of Israel forgot this truth. At times they felt that God was far off and had left them.

Psalms 137:1-4 By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. 2 There on the poplars we hung our harps, 3 for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" 4 How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?

God is always with us. I have been in some very scary places in my life. I have run out of air scuba diving over 60 feet down in shark infested waters. I remember the day our car lost control on black ice on the 401 and spun completely out of control. I once got lost and found myself walking in a dangerous Palestinian area outside of Jerusalem that was really unsafe. I remember the night we landed in Kuwait and the realization of what we had just done began to sink in. Through all of these experiences I have always had the peace and assurance that God was with me.

Jonah learned this lesson the hard way. He thought that he could run and hide from God, but even in the belly of the whale, God was with him. Keith Green once had a song that said "Well, you can run to the end of the highway and not find what you're looking for. No, it won't make your troubles disappear. And you can search to the end of the highway and come back no better than before. To find yourself you've got to start right here."

When we lived in Kuwait I saw this lesson in the lives of many people. One guy I knew had come to Kuwait trying to run away from God. He had been burned by the church in the past and figured he would leave his Christian background. He ended up attending the church and getting saved in Kuwait.

3. DARKNESS (vs. 11-12) – God is with us emotionally

This passage ends saying "If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you."

Isaiah 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Reminds me of the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, or as we learned in Sunday School, Your shack, My shack and a Bungalow. They walked through the fire and found God was with them. They were protected. No matter what fire you may be facing, God is with you as well.

Moses had dark days. He led the nation of Israel out of the promise land, but there were difficult days when he felt the burden of leadership.

Exodus 33:12-18 Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' 13 If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." 14 The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." 15 Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. 16 How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" 17 And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." 18 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

How do you practice the presence of God? How do you remind yourself that God is always with you? You do what Moses did, you seek God's glory. How do you do that?

First, invite Jesus into your life if you haven't done that already. God is around you, God is by you, He wants to be in you. He wants to put His Spirit inside of you. Accept him into your life today.

Second, learn to be quiet. Close your mouth and don't talk. I believe why so many people never feel God's presence is because they're too busy and distracted. Take time to just be quiet and listen to God.

Thirdly, talk to God about everything. Pray continually. Learn to spend time with God throughout your day as you go about your business.

Lastly, develop the habit of praise. Praise means to thank God for who He is and what He's done for you. Nothing will help you become aware of God and His presence in your life faster than developing the habit of constant praise.

On Sunday 7, 1941 at around 8:00 in the morning the Japanese pilot Captain Mitsuo Fuchida spoke the words "Tora! Tora! Tora!" initiating the attack on Pearl Harbour. He stayed in the battle until the second wave of Japanese planes had attacked and with great pride announced over the radio that the US battleship fleet had been destroyed. His plane had been hit 21 times by flak and it was a miracle that his plane made it back to the carrier.

While Fuchida was attacking Pearl Harbour there was an American soldier named Jake DeShazer who was on kitchen duty in an Army camp in California. When the radio announced that Pearl Harbor had been attacked and that 5 Battleships had been sunk and over 3000 men had been killed Jake hurled a potato at the wall vowing revenge. One month later he volunteered for a secret mission with the Jimmy Doolittle Squadron -- a surprise raid on Tokyo from the carrier Hornet. On April 18, 1942, DeShazer was one of the bombardiers, and was filled with elation at getting his revenge. After the bombing raid, they flew on towards China, but ran out of fuel and were forced to parachute into Japanese-held territory. The next morning, DeShazer found himself a prisoner of Japan.

Fuchida was a national hero because of his actions at Pearl Harbour and was granted an audience with Emperor Hirohito himself. He went on to lead many other successful battles in the South Pacific. Then came the defining moment for the American Navy at the Battle of Midway. Fuchida was unable to fly that day since he was recovering from an emergency appendectomy a few days before. He was on the bridge of the Japanese aircraft carrier Akagi as it was hit and exploded. Again, miraculously Fuchida survived the attack but was wounded. He spent the rest of the war as a staff officer.

In August of 1945 he was attending a week-long military conference in Hiroshima but received a long-distance call from Navy Headquarters asking him to return to Tokyo. That was one day before the city was destroyed. Again, Fuchida had miraculously cheated death.

Back in China, Jake DeShazer was cruelly treated in the prisoner of war camp. His violent hatred for the Japanese guards that mistreated him almost drove him insane. It was then that someone gave him a Bible. As he read it the DeShazer accepted Christ and the power of Jesus changed his life. His entire attitude toward his captors changed to love and concern, and he resolved that should his country win the war and he be liberated, he would someday return to Japan to introduce others to this life-changing book. He wrote a pamphlet "I Was a Prisoner of Japan" telling his story and the love he had found in Christ.

After the war ended Fuchida was called on to testify at the trials of some of the Japanese military for Japanese war crimes. This infuriated him. He believed that Japanese prisoners of war had also been mistreated by the Americans and determined to bring that evidence to the next trial. In 1947 went to meet a group of returning Japanese prisoners of war. He was surprised to find a man he knew who he believed died in the Battle of Midway. When questioned, the man told Fuchida that they were not tortured or abused. He went on to tell him of a young lady, Peggy Covell, who had served them with the deepest love and respect. Her parents were missionaries and had been killed by Japanese soldiers in the Philippines but, instead of being filled with hatred, she served those who had hurt her.

Fuchida could not understand why or how anyone would treat their enemies with love and forgiveness. In the fall of 1948, Fuchida was at a Japanese train station when he was handed a copy of pamphlet that Jake DeShazer had written. He told his story of imprisonment, torture and his account of an "awakening to God." This experience increased Fuchida's curiosity of the Christian faith. In September 1949, after reading the Bible for himself, he finally gave his life to Jesus.

In May 1950, Fuchida and DeShazer met for the first time. Together they went on to proclaim Christ. Many lives were changed by their stories.

Why do I tell this story? It reminds me that God is always with us. He was with Mitsuo Fuchida in the air over Pearl Harbour and at the Battle of Midway and at Hiroshima. He was with Jake DeShazer in that raid over Tokyo and that prisoner of war camp. In the darkest days of their lives, God was with them, and had a plan for their lives. God was able to take these experiences and to use them to proclaim His glory.

Maybe you are here today and you feel like God has abandoned you. Maybe you are in a place of darkness, wondering why God has left you. I just want to tell you today that God has never left you. He is here now in this place and has a plan for your life.