Week 3

**God Is…**

Omnipresent

The central promise in the Bible is not “I will forgive you,” although of course that promise is there. The most frequent promise in the Bible is “I will be with you.” *John Ortberg*

* [Day 15: No Longer Alone](http://godis.tlc.org/day15)
* [Day 16: Practicing His Presence](http://godis.tlc.org/day16)
* [Day 17: No Solo Flights](http://godis.tlc.org/day17)
* [Day 18: The Lord is in This Place](http://godis.tlc.org/day18)
* [Day 19: He’s There In the Darkness](http://godis.tlc.org/day19)
* [Day 20: He’s There In Deep Waters](http://godis.tlc.org/day20)
* [Day 21: He’s There Through It All](http://godis.tlc.org/day21)

Day 15

No Longer Alone

Read your Bible: [Psalm 46](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+46&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.* [Psalm 46:1](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+46%3A1&version=NIV)

One of the last things Elvis Presley ever wrote was a note he crumpled up and threw away. According to *USA Today*, an aide saw him toss it into a trash can and fished it out the morning Elvis was found dead. It read in part: “I feel so *alone* sometimes. Help me, Lord.”[28](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n28)

Alfred Hitchcock, the most famous film director of his day, spoke these mysterious words on his deathbed: “I am lost in… a sea of… *alone*.”[29](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n29)

Albert Einstein, the most recognizable face of the 20th century, said: “It is strange to be known so universally and yet to be so *alone*.”[30](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n30)

My guess is that you can relate.

Tom Wolfe, author of *Bonfire of the Vanities*, said “Loneliness is the most common human experience.”[31](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n31)

Mother Teresa observed, “Loneliness is the poverty of the Western world.”[32](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n32)

Lonely Planet

And it seems to be getting worse. Despite the popularity of social media, a Carnegie-Mellon research project showed that the more time people spend online, the lonelier they perceive themselves to be.[33](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n33)

This is serious.

Dr. James Lynch is the author of another study showing lonely adults have a death rate twice as high as adults who are not lonely. Loneliness, he says, is a “lethal poison.”[34](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n34)

What’s the cure for this epidemic of loneliness?

While human companionship is essential, I believe deep down we’re longing for connection to the One who will never leave us. Our thirst is filled only by the God who is *here*, the God who always was here and always will be here.

Theologians call this the *omnipresence* of God.

He is With You

*Omnipresence* means all-present. God is everywhere. To be more precise, God is in every place, all the time.

He’s right there when you’re hurting.

He’s right there when you’re tempted.

He’s right there when you feel weak.

Omnipresence does *not* mean God is every thing. That’s *pantheism*. That equates the Creator with the creation.

According to the Bible, everything is not God, although God is everywhere and created everything. He exists independently of His creation, like an artist and his painting. If nothing in creation existed, there would still be God, who alone is uncreated.

This may be the most difficult attribute of God for humans to understand because we live in a three-dimensional world — we’re limited by space and time. So usually when we think of *omnipresence* we think it means something like this: God is so big that a layer of God is spread out over all of creation, like a blanket— as if there’s a part of God in Santa Cruz, a part of God down in Brazil, and a part of Him way past Jupiter. But that wouldn’t be *omnipresence*; that would just be *immensity*.

This is an important distinction, because most of us were raised with a sense of God’s *transcendence* — which is true. God is transcendent, higher, *beyond*. But *omnipresence* teaches God is also *always intensely near*.

Omnipresence means *all* of God is *everywhere at once*. God is free from the constraints of time and space, so all of Him can be everywhere at the same time.

Present and Present-Tense

To say that God is omnipresent means this statement is always true:

“All of God is right here, right now.”

100% of God is here with me now as I write these words.

100% of God is there with you as you read these words.

And even though I wrote these words before you read these words, God is with us both simultaneously!

Psalm 46 emphasizes this: It opens by saying God is *ever-present*.

Different commentators have tried to capture the intent of this Hebrew phrase in words like: He is always immediately present; He never withdraws; He is close at our side and ready to help.

Psalm 46 goes on to twice repeat that *He is with us*. Because he believes this, the author says, he will never fear — “even if the earth gives way!” And we know something about the fear that can grip you during an earthquake or landslide here in California!

Why Do I Feel a Distance?

Most people think of God not as very present, but as very remote. I think that’s because we have an accurate a sense of our distance from God’s *holiness* — while God is everywhere, we are metaphorically a million miles away from God’s righteousness.

This is the feeling of *spiritual alienation* the Bible talks about.

When Psalmists write that they long for God’s closeness, or that it feels like God has abandoned them, they don’t mean that God’s presence is actually removed. That’s impossible. They mean that they sense a distance from Him, that they are alienated from His holy nature because of their sin.

The Bible is About Closeness

The Bible is nothing less than the story of how God bridges the spiritual gap between Him and us.

Within the Trinity, The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the three persons in one God, enjoy close fellowship forever. Then when God’s creation rebels against Him and runs away, the Trinity has a rescue plan:

The Father reveals His presence to us through creation.

But He does much more: He sends the Son.

In Jesus Christ, God not only came to be near to us for a human lifetime; He died on the cross so that the alienation between you and God can be ended forever.

When the veil in the Jerusalem temple separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the world was miraculously torn in two at the death of Christ, it showed what God had accomplished. Your sins can be forgiven and you can live in God’s closeness.

Then the Son asks the Father to send the Holy Spirit so that you have God’s guiding presence always: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.” (John 14:16)

In fact, read John 14–17, Jesus’ last message to the disciples before his crucifixion, and notice how much He talks about closeness and friendship. *Intimacy with you is high on God’s agenda*; it’s important to Him that you know about his plan to make His presence manifest to you.

And then one day all alienation between humanity and God will end, as heaven and earth are made one.

The whole Bible is the story of God drawing nearer to you and me, bridging the alienation you and I sense. And if God went to all that effort, it’s safe to say He wants you to *know* how His close He is to you *right now!*

This week let’s explore some of the amazing, life-changing implications of God’s omnipresence. I pray that God’s presence is made manifest to you as you study!

God is… here.

Questions For Reflection

Try to summarize, in one short sentence, what the omnipresence of God means to you:

When you don’t focus on God’s omnipresence, what negative or destructive thoughts or emotions do you struggle with?

In Psalm 46, what difference does the psalmist say God’s presence makes on his emotions and attitudes?

 Day 16

Practicing His Presence

Read your Bible: [Psalm 16:8–11](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+16%3A8-11&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence,
O lord.* [Psalm 89:15](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+89%3A15&version=NIV)

You might be thinking, “The omnipresence of God may be true in theory, but why don’t I *feel* God’s presence all the time?”

Well, it may be that you are sensing a spiritual alienation because of your sin. God longs to bridge that distance. You can simply receive His free, lavish, gracious gift of reconciliation through Christ.

But what about those moments when lifelong believers perceive a distance between themselves and God?

*Some* of the time I think God hides His presence from my *feelings* to develop my *faith* muscle. When I can’t see or feel Him, I need to have faith that He is there.

But much of time, I think God is *longing* for me to sense His presence. It’s just that I’m out of practice.

The Soldier Monk

Nicholas Herman was born around 1610 in France. He was a professional soldier, fighting in the Thirty Years War, where he was nearly killed and his sciatic nerve was severely injured. He was left disabled and in chronic pain for the rest of his life.

But after the war he decided to enter a monastery, changing his name to Brother Lawrence.

He had great visions of being an intellectual monk, or a Bible-copying monk, but was instead assigned to be the new monastery’s cook. A cook-monk. And then, after fifteen years, they promoted him to be… the sandal repair man. Initially he felt disappointed and insignificant, but it was while he performed these daily chores over those many years that he learned how to develop an awareness of God’s presence.

Another monk interviewed him and wrote a brilliant little book based on those conversations that is still a bestseller hundreds of years later: *The Practice of the Presence of God*. It’s long been in the public domain, so you can download a complete copy for free. It’s fascinating to me that the monk who was, technically, lowest on the ladder is the only one still remembered from that monastery to this day!

One of the things I love about Brother Lawrence is that he is very self-deprecating, and talks bluntly about how the “discipline” of daily devotions never worked for him: “He could never regulate his devotion by certain methods as some do. At first, he had practiced meditation but, after some time, that went off…”

Yet he meditated on God informally all the time. Here’s some of his advice:

We should feed and nourish our soul with high notions of God… [and] we should establish ourselves in a sense of God’s presence by continually conversing with Him… we ought to act with God in the greatest simplicity, speaking to Him frankly and plainly, and imploring His assistance in our affairs just as they happen.[35](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n35)

In these constant, almost casual conversations, Brother Lawrence had a sense of the nearness of God that has inspired millions of readers in the centuries since his book was first written.

That is something of what it means to “walk in the light of God’s presence,” to “learn to acclaim Him.”

There’s Presence and there’s Presence

When I was younger I was very judgmental of Christian songs and hymns that expressed a desire to be “in God’s presence.” I loved to correct people, “Don’t you know you are *always* in God’s presence?”

Now I understand what those songs are talking about: You could differentiate between God’s *metaphysical* presence and God’s *manifest* presence.

His *metaphysical* presence means He is essentially always with me. Nothing can ever change that. His *manifest* presence is what those songs are about. The Bible says God’s metaphysical presence is everywhere, even in the very depths of hell. But, as A.W. Tozer put it, “It is the manifest, conscious presence of God that makes heaven heaven.”[36](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n36)

Expressing a longing to be in the presence of God is really a request that God give you the blessing of *awareness* of His presence.

Tuning In To God

Like Brother Lawrence learned, you can discover this in every minor, even mundane, moment of your day.

He practiced an awareness of the presence of God in the monastery kitchen and cobbler’s shop, two places that for the monks were places of drudgery, as far removed from the meditative environment of their chapel as they could imagine.

Maybe for you, time spent in your car commuting to work, or from errand to errand, feels something like that. So imagine trying his method on the freeway:

See the leaves on the trees just over the sound wall? The sunlight is showing through them so they seem to be glowing. Just as God shines through His creation. Think of the complicated DNA woven by God even into these common things.

The birds on the power lines? God’s spectacular design of these creatures to enable them to fly is amazing.

The clouds overhead? The water vapor they contain is among the most precious substances in the universe.

Notice the people in the cars next to you? God loves them so much that He died for them.

Hear the joy expressed in the music you are listening to? The Bible says music is part of the fabric of creation; the angels sang before there was even an earth, so music is truly a deep, mysterious way to join with all that God made to sing to His glory.

Now see it all at once. Perceive it as a reminder that it’s all a gift, that God did not need to make any of this, but He did, and that the same God who made it all longs to know you, and is all around you revealing His glories even now.

It struck me one day that the sense of God’s manifest presence, that blend of serenity and joy and peace and purpose and love that flows into and out of you in those moments, is the exact opposite of feeling guilt and shame. Like the Bible says:

*In Your presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*Psalm 16:11b (NKJV)

What a gift from God!

But you can do your part. You can develop the habit of affirming that, wherever you are…

God is… here now.

Questions For Reflection

What are some helpful ways you have found to “practice the presence of God”?

In what area of your life do you need to focus on practicing the presence of God? How could this make a difference in your life?

 Day 17

No Solo Flights

Read your Bible: [Psalm 139:7–17](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+139%3A7-17&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?* [Psalm 139:7](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+139%3A7&version=NIV)

Impossibly green banana tree leaves, deep red tropical flowers, and the dense, vine-like branches of a banyan tree frame the narrow road as my wife and I drive to the nearly hidden grave of Charles Lindbergh.

In his life Lindbergh had traveled all over the globe, achieving rock-star like fame in an era before rock stars. Millions admired him for making the first solo nonstop airplane flight across the Atlantic in May 1927.

Yet he spent his last few winters in the tiny town of Kipahulu on the jungle-like east coast of Maui, Hawaii, far from the throngs of fans that greeted him everywhere else.

His only public appearances? Every Sunday, he and his wife went to the tiny local church.

In mid-August, 1974, Lindbergh was told by doctors back in New York that his cancer-ravaged body was near death. They urged him to stay there in the hospital, but he told them, “I would rather live one day in Maui than one month in New York.”

So back to Maui he went, where he immediately began sketching precise designs for his grave. He decided it would not include a word about any of his achievements.

Only his name. And Psalm 139:9 — “If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea…”

Lindbergh died just days after his arrival back in Maui, and his gravestone was engraved precisely as he designed.

As Laurie and I stand at the grave and drop a hibiscus flower onto Lindbergh’s headstone, I wonder if he left just that one verse on his headstone as an invitation for curious visitors to find out for themselves how the quote ends.

Because the next words from Psalm 139 are:

*…even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.*

King David, the author of the Psalm 139, seems stunned by this realization.

This was a totally new idea for religions of David’s era, about 1000 B.C. People then thought of their gods as limited by space and time: There was the god of the sky, the god of the sea, the god of the underworld. They had bodies, and they could only be in one place at a time.

But through divine revelation David understands this is not true of God. He is the God of *all* those places, and *all* of God is *always* in *all* of them.

There When You Were Formed

Maybe the hardest verses for you to believe for yourself are the ones about God’s presence with David even in his mother’s womb.

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous — how well I know it.*Psalm 139:13–14 (NLT)

Christian counselor David Seamands writes about a woman named Betty. Her parents felt forced to wed because her mother was pregnant with her. It was an undesired marriage and Betty was an undesired child. When Betty was three and a half, her father left.

She carried the sense of being an unwanted accident with her for her entire life. Then one day at the end of a counseling session Dr. Seamands gave her some homework.

He said, “I want you to imagine the very moment of your conception, the instant that cell from your mother was fertilized by that cell from your father. As you think about that, ask yourself one question: *Where was God at that moment?*”

When they met a week later, Betty told him that at first she thought the whole assignment was crazy. But about the third day, when she really began concentrating on it, she began to cry. And she wrote down this prayer in her journal:

O God, my heart leaps with the thought that you, my loving father, have never forsaken me. You were there when I was conceived in earthly lust. You looked upon me with a father’s love even then. You were thinking of me in my mother’s womb, molding me…

You were there when my mother gave birth to me, standing in the vacant place of my father. You were there when I cried the bitter tears of a child whose father has abandoned her. You were holding me in your gentle arms all the while, rocking me gently in your soothing love.

Oh, why did I not know of your presence? God, my dear, dear Father, my heart had turned to frost, but the light of your love is beginning to warm it.[37](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n37)

God’s *metaphysical* presence was made *manifest* presence for her in retrospect, as the Holy Spirit helped her think back on that time in her life.

It goes for you too.

Anything you went through in your life? God was there.

Anything you’re going through now? He’s there too.

Anything you will go through? God will be there.

Omnipresence means God was with you in your past, and it means He will be with you in the future.

After his solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean, reporters asked Lindbergh how he handled that all alone. He answered, “*Is* he alone who has courage on his right hand and faith on his left hand?”[38](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n38)

While he left no explanation for his gravestone, I imagine that while Lindbergh was preparing for his final great solo flight, he was reminding himself of that very truth, thinking something like: “It’s ok. God was with me on those flights, God is with me now, God will go through my final journey with me, and God will be waiting for me on the other side.”

My own father experienced this. When he was dying of cancer, his last words were:

“It’s like a dream… God is all around me.”

And then he died.

Lindbergh. My dad. They learned: You *never* really fly solo.

As you go through your day today, remind yourself:

God is… with me, and will be with me, always.

Questions For Reflection

What intrigues or impacts you about Psalm 139:7–17?

These verses speak of God’s presence in various places and times in life. Which of these images has the most impact to you right now? Why?

How could it change someone’s attitudes and emotions to really believe God will be present with them through death?

 Day 18

The Lord is in This Place

Read your Bible: [Hebrews 13:5,6](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+13%3A5%2C6&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.* [Deuteronomy 31:6](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+31%3A6&version=NIV)

One day when I was in grade school my mother found me crumpled in the hallway crying. The next day was “Bring Dad To School Day” — and I didn’t have anyone to bring.

As I mentioned yesterday, my dad died of cancer. That happened a month before my 4th birthday. Loneliness, and I mean *bone-deep* loneliness, soon set in, lasting for years, and resulting in many scenes like the one in the hallway that day.

I will never forget what happened next.

My mom, who had not been a Christian for very long, sat down on the floor next to me, hugged me, and spoke words of deep theology:

You know, René, most kids don’t have what you have. You have not one, but *two* fathers in heaven! And while your dad Fred can’t be with you anymore, your Heavenly Father is always with you.

He is with you every time you walk to school,
and every time you are on the playground,
and every time you play a sport,
and every time you eat lunch,
take a test,
walk home…
He will *never* leave you.

She was explaining one practical result of believing in the *omnipresence* of God: He is not just there as an omnipresent *Watcher* — He is a *participant*. He is my Savior. My Comforter. My ever-present Helper in times of trouble.

Your Past and Your Future

Maybe, like me, you experienced the loss of a parent through death. Or there was a different loss, through divorce or separation.

Maybe you moved so much while growing up that you never had a chance to make lasting friends. You were always the new kid.

Maybe you’ve always felt like the odd person out in school, at work, and even in your family. You’ve been left more times than you care to recount.

And now, when meeting new people, you’re crippled by a sense of suspicion and inevitability. You wonder who is going to hurt you this time. You look at the future and see not a promised land of new friends and relationships but just the likelihood of more broken dreams.

In Deuteronomy 31, the people of Israel are on the edge of the Promised Land. After 40 hard years on the move in the desert, they’re terrified. Moses is dying, they’ve got a new leader, everything’s changing, they’re afraid of their future, and they’re afraid of their enemies. Then Moses raises his hands and as part of his final pep talk says:

*Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.*Deuteronomy 31:6

He will *never* leave you or forsake you.

Nothing and no one else can say that.

To the people of Israel God is saying, “Even when Moses dies, I’ll still be right here. I will **never** leave you.”

And God is saying the same thing to you.

*Even if your leader dies*

*Even if your family leaves you*

*Even if your spouse abandons you*

*Even if your children reject you*

*I will never, ever leave you nor forsake you.*

*Ever.*

Contentment and Omnipresence

In today’s reading in Hebrews, the writer quotes that verse from Deuteronomy, and his application is this: Keep your life free from the love of money and a desire for stuff you don’t have. Because *God will never leave you nor forsake you.*

How is *contentment* related to the omnipresence of God?

Well, when you have abandonment issues, it can be easy to find comfort in your *stuff*. It makes you feel like you’ve arrived in some sense, and it can be an attempt to show those who’ve judged you that you’ve made it — or an attempt to gain their approval.

But if you know that God is with you, the need for that fades.

The Lord Is In This Place

Writing on the omnipresence of God, Bill Hybels suggests a phrase to say out loud when afraid or lonely: *“The Lord is in this place.”*

That phrase comes from the story of Jacob in the Bible. He sees a vision of God and says, “Surely the Lord was in this place, and I knew it not!” (Genesis 28:16)

That was his trouble. And that’s our trouble. The Lord is always here, but we know it not.

Tempted? Say it. Scared? Lonely? Intimidated? Overwhelmed? Try repeating that phrase until its truth comforts you…

“The Lord is in this place.”

“The *Lord* is in this place.”

“The Lord is in *this* place.”

Questions For Reflection

In what areas of life do you need to be “strong and courageous” right now?

How can an awareness of God’s presence make the difference?

Day 19

## He’s There In the Darkness

Read your Bible: [Psalm 23:1–4](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+23%3A1-4&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* [Psalm 23:4](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+23%3A4&version=NIV)

One of the most profound letters I’ve received recently was from a man who heard me speak at a summer conference:

I first heard you speak a couple years ago. At the time it had been 9 years since my son had died (at 4 months old) of a genetic disease. For 4 months, I asked one question: Why my son?

After the funeral I stood there like so many have done before me and yelled at God: Why my son? Why? Why? Why? My God, who saved my soul and loved me, tell me the %$&!ing reason!!!

I was so mad, and so focused on wanting things in my own control, that I stood there for a long time, defiant, thinking “I will not give one inch until I get an answer!” But I didn’t get an answer.

Right after this, I went downhill. I went into depression, lost my job, took medication to keep me sane. My wife and other son stood there wondering why I had flipped out and couldn’t accept what happened.

“Come on, Daddy, you know Brady’s in heaven,” my 3-year-old son would say! “You know that Jesus and His Dad are taking care of him!” A 3-year-old would say this, but a grown adult wouldn’t accept it.

As you can imagine, life was not too good at home. There were constant battles.

Well I have to tell you, the service that night two years ago touched not only my mind, but my soul deep inside. I felt like my whole soul was being exposed and opened up. All the rotting stench that I had carried with me and even worshipped was all in front of me. Nine years of standing there, gritting my teeth and growling at God — how could I have even heard Him if He was talking to me?

Later at communion I sat in the back pew with my wife waiting for the service to get over with… I bowed my head… and all of a sudden it was like everything changed around me. I don’t know if you can understand, but it was like everything else disappeared and I was sitting in the pew all by myself with no one there. I sat there crying with my head down and then had a sense of the warm Spirit of God touching me.

Then it was as if God’s Spirit whispered to me, “It’s ok, it’s ok… he is with me… I will take care of him, and he will be very well taken care of, so don’t worry. And I am always here for you, too. So don‘t worry.”

I sat there and cried — like my whole being was being transformed and healed with this warmth throughout my body and soul.

The next thing I knew, I was aware of being in the communion service again, with all the noise and the people around me. I went up and took communion, and for the first time in nine years understood again what communion was about.

Now, to the depths of my being, I understood the answer to my question.

Jesus did come and die for us, but more than just dying like my son, he was raised again and is living in heaven by his Father, while He is also sitting next to me all the time, loving me, and while He is loving me, he is loving my son Brady too!

I understand that no matter what, God’s love for me is always there, even when I stood for nine years rejecting it. He loves me.

Well, now every time I take communion I cry a little bit. I cry because of what I know is so very true! My life has passion again!

Even though you walk through the darkest valley, He is right there with you.

The Lord does not always lead you around the valley of the shadow of death, But when you are in it, He is right there, leading you all the way through to green pastures, quiet waters, and His house, where you will dwell forever.

God is… with me in my darkest times.

### Questions For Reflection

How does this man’s letter impact you?

Name all of the benefits of God’s presence listed in
Psalm 23.

Day 20

He’s There In Deep Waters

Read your Bible: [Isaiah 43:1–5](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+43%3A1-5&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown.* [Isaiah 43:2a NLT](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+43%3A2a&version=NLT)

Deep waters. When I read those words in today’s Bible verse, I think of my friend Phil’s sister Kathy.

She was on a sailboat off the coast of Santa Cruz Island near Santa Barbara, California, when huge swells capsized the boat and knocked her into the water.

She was lost at sea. Clinging to one small square seat cushion.

The U.S. Coast Guard sent a ship and a helicopter to look for her. She could see the helicopter circling above, but the crew couldn’t see her.

An hour went by. Then six, seven, eight hours. And finally, at midnight, the search for Kathy was called off. They phoned her brother, my friend Phil. He still calls it “The night Kathy died.” The caller told him, “No one can survive in these waters for this long. We are now looking for a body, not a survivor.”

When I talked to Kathy about what happened next, she began to cry as she remembered, “The presence of God was so real to me — it was like God was right there with me.”

Kathy told me, “I almost felt cheated when I was rescued. I was praying, singing hymns… first I panicked, but then the peace of God took over.”

In the Deep

Notice in today’s reading, God never says you won’t go through deep water and great troubles.

What’s the promise?

*When you do, I will be with you.*

Maybe you’re going through deep rivers right now. You can relate to Kathy: You feel like you’re treading water, your feet can’t touch bottom, all you can see all around you is the deep blue sea. None of us can predict the problems we’ll face in life, or how they’ll end. But of this you can be certain: God’s going through it with you.

God Is Where?

Josh McDowell put a long word on the screen during one of his lectures. I was puzzled as I read it:

GODISNOWHERE.

Josh let us try to figure it out for a minute. Then he asked, “What does that say?” Most people answered, *“God is nowhere.”* But as Josh pointed out, you can just as easily read, *“God is now here.”*[39](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n39)

It’s all about keeping those eyes wide open. When you pray and it seems like nothing is happening, you might be tempted to conclude, “God is nowhere.”

But that’s not when God *leaves.* That’s when God *takes over.* So relax, knowing you’re always in the palm of His hand.

How was Kathy rescued?

When the Coast Guard called off the search and turned to go back to port, they literally bumped right into her. The bow of the ship almost ran her over, and she slapped weakly on the hull as the ship went past. A crew member thought he heard something and yelled for a full stop.

When they finally hoisted her on board, they asked, “Who are you?”

She said, “Well, I guess I’m the one you’ve been looking for!”

And Kathy tells me one crew member then exclaimed, “Wow! I’ve never actually found anyone before!”

The God of Closeness

Kathy’s rescue seems miraculous. But she told me, “René, the greatest miracle of the night by far was God’s amazing closeness to me.”

*When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you…*

What I love about today’s passage is that it contains so many awe-inspiring attributes of God that we’ve looked at already in this study: It reminds me that He’s Holy, the Lord, the Creator… yet the predominant promise is about His*closeness*. He wants me to hear, “Fear not… you are mine… I have redeemed you… I will be with you.”

You could say He is *the God of eternal intimacy.*

Eternal Intimacy

You see this in the Trinity.

See, God is all about relationship, closeness, intimacy, love. But could those attributes simply go unexpressed for inconceivable stretches of time before anything was created? If there was a time when He had no one to love or be close to, then how can we say His presence and intimacy and love are eternal attributes?

That is why, to me, it makes sense that there is the Trinity. One God, three Persons. So that even before anything else existed, the attributes of God were always being expressed perfectly within the godhead. There was relationship, intimacy, love, omniscience, presence, all right there, in ages past.

And you see the Trinity in the plan of redemption.

Intensifying Intimacy

The Father’s plans from before creation are all about diminishing the distance between us and God. He reveals Himself in creation and through Scripture…

Then the Son comes to Earth and walks among us and dies for us so that the alienation between man and God would end….

Then the Holy Spirit is sent to walk with and within us every moment, guiding, teaching, sanctifying…

And the Father’s plans are fulfilled when one day heaven and earth are one, the dwelling of God is with men, and there is no longer even need for a temple because *God is with us*.

*The intimacy keeps intensifying.*

It all means that there is hope for the future. And help for the present.

No matter what mess you find yourself in, whether it’s your fault or not, whether others are aware of it or not…

God is… with me and within me.

Questions For Reflection

What is promised in Isaiah 43:1–5?

What is **not** promised?

What “waters, rivers, fires,” as Isaiah 43:1–5 puts it, have you gone through during which an awareness of God’s presence made a difference for you?

What “waters, rivers, fires” are you passing through now?

Thank God for His presence there with you, right now. Throughout the day, remind yourself again: “The Lord is in this place!”

Day 21

He’s There Through It All

Read your Bible: [Joshua 1:7–9](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joshua+1%3A7-9&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”* [Joshua 1:9](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joshua+1%3A9&version=NIV)

The amazing story of explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton and his famous ship *Endurance* has been the subject of a best-selling book and an award-winning film.

During his voyage to the South Pole, ice trapped and crushed his ship. Shackleton and three of his sailors left the rest of the crew and made their way in an open lifeboat over 800 miles of stormy Atlantic sea.

They then crawled over slippery glaciers and forbidding mountain peaks until they finally reached a manned outpost — and then the next day they turned around and went back to rescue every single person who stayed behind near the shipwreck.

That journey through hundreds of miles of the most alien landscape on earth is still a stunner. But how did he do it? Neither the book nor the movie will tell you what Shackleton himself said was key.

After his return to London, Shackleton revealed where he found the strength for his amazing trip. He said in a speech, referring to the biblical story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3:

We all felt that there were not three, but four of us. When I look back upon those days, with all their anxiety and peril, I cannot doubt that our party was divinely guided… afterwards Worsley said to me, “Boss, I had a curious feeling that there was another person with us.” I can honestly say that it wasn’t bad. We always felt that there was something above… you all know the words, “If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me…” That 139th Psalm exactly fitted our case.[40](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n40)

He knew the ever-present help of God.

You Can Rest Secure

Before his death, Moses pronounces blessings on each of the twelve tribes of Israel, and he says something beautiful about Benjamin that is true of every believer:

*Let the beloved of the lord rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the lord loves rests between his shoulders.*Deuteronomy 33:12

I think of a small child asleep even while riding on Daddy’s shoulders, his drowsy head resting on his father’s head. Or a little helpless lamb carried on the broad back of a kind shepherd. Like them, you rest “between His shoulders.”

When Shackleton left on his last adventure, years after his amazing rescue of the *Endurance* crew, he knew he would probably not return alive. Intriguingly, he insisted on taking with him a primitive recording of a woman singing the hymn, *Abide With Me*. Some of the lyrics:

“I need thy presence every passing hour;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!”

He listened to that record as he died, apparently confident that the God who had been with him through the icy waters near the South Pole would lead him through the valley of the shadow of death.

God is… with me through the valley of the shadow of death.

Questions For Reflection

Read Deuteronomy 33:12 out loud. Have you ever thought of yourself as “resting between the shoulders” of a loving God? What do you think this image is intended to convey?

Particularly if you’ve been feeling anxious and abandoned, what steps can you take to practically change your thinking to reflect the truth that the “Fourth Man” is with you? (More on that tomorrow!)