

GOD IS ABOVE EVERYTHING, IN EVERYTHING, AND IS EVERYWHERE

PSALM 139:7-10, et al

INTRO: *Aleksander Solzhenitsyn was a great Russian novelist and dissident who managed to survive the evils of Communism although he suffered a great deal under it. He was once asked why the Communist revolution was successful in his country. This atheistic, oppressive form of government dominated Russia and much of eastern Europe for over seventy years in the 20th century. It enslaved tens of millions of people making so many of their lives miserable. Solzhenitsyn had a short but profound answer: “Men have forgotten God.” When you forget God – either through outright hostility to God like the old Soviet system practiced, or massive indifference to God which is the preferred option in our country – you put yourself on a path to destruction and meaninglessness ultimately. The most important thoughts you have are your thoughts about God. Who you believe Him to be – or not to be – defines your life and how you live it more than you can possibly imagine. Truly, it affects everything else.*

We continue today through a series of messages I’ve entitled *What’s Most Important About You? What You Think About God*. It’s a study of God’s attributes. An attribute is something we can know about God’s nature and character based on Scripture. I’m going to reference several Bible passages today. If you want to find them in your Bible for yourself go to our website. Click on the Stay-At-Home Resources button. Then, click on the Worship button. Finally, click on the Message Notes button. You’ll see there an outline of my message and all the verses I mention today. I’d like us to reflect on three fascinating attributes of God today that are related to each other. The first attribute is God’s transcendence which means God is above everything. The second one is God’s immanence which means God is in everything. The last attribute is God’s omnipresence which means God is everywhere. Just as important as it may be to better understand what those three attributes mean, it’s just as important to answer this question, “So what?” What difference does it make to my life if God is above everything, in everything, and is everywhere? Let’s start with an explanation.

AN EXPLANATION

What do these three attributes mean? Let’s talk about the last one first: the fact God is omnipresent or everywhere at the same time. One of the clearest statements in the Bible about this attribute is Ps. 139:7-10 (NLT) where David, the author, said, “I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.” God is everywhere meaning He is close to everywhere all at the same time. He’s equally near to everyone and everything that exists. Right at this moment God is just as present with you and me as He is in the farthest point in the universe from either one of us. Concepts like far and near mean nothing to God. He can’t be far away from anything simply because He is near to everything.

ILLUS: *Did you hear about the kids lined up for lunch at a Christian school? On one table some apples were available. One of the teachers said to the kids, "Take only one; God is watching." On another nearby table were some chocolate chip cookies for lunch. One boy in the line whispered to his friend, "Take all you want; God's watching the apples!"* Sorry, kids, but God can watch apples and cookies all at the same time! It's never a problem for God to be anywhere because He's already everywhere. God isn't partly here and partly there. He is fully present everywhere all at the same time. Right at this exact moment, God is fully present in this sanctuary, fully present wherever you are as you watch this live stream service, fully present in the most remote village in China, fully present on the planet Saturn, and fully present on some star beyond the most powerful telescope on Earth.

Imagine taking a common household bucket and going out about a mile into the Atlantic Ocean on a boat. Imagine, then, dropping that bucket off the side of the boat and letting it sink 1000 feet below the surface of the water. That very little bucket is like the physical universe in which we live and the ocean itself is like God in comparison. With one important difference! The ocean – even as immense as it is – has a limit. God has no limit. He's immeasurable. Just like that ocean water fills the bucket and surrounds it on every side, so God fills the universe and is in no way contained in it or by it. God can't be contained. Instead, He contains everything that is or will ever be. How can that be, you might ask? God isn't a liquid like ocean water. Jesus Himself said in Jo. 4:24 (NLT), "God is Spirit." Obviously God took on a human body in the person of Jesus. But, in His essence God doesn't have a physical body; He is a spirit Being. That allows Him to fill the entire universe everywhere at everyplace all at the same time.

Yes, God is everywhere, but He's also in everything. In other words, He penetrates and permeates everything. The word for that attribute is immanence. In Scripture, we read this statement about God in Acts 17:27-28 (NLT), "He is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and exist." Some eastern religions – Hinduism, for example – and western New Age faiths believe in a concept called pantheism: everything is God and God is everything. Pantheism denies God is a personal being with a nature and a character. That's something very different than the truth God is immanent or in everything. The biblical concept is that, yes, God is in everything that exists while still completely retaining His unique personhood and individuality.

God is everywhere. God is in everything. But, God is also above everything. The word for that attribute is transcendence. The Bible says in 1 Chr. 29:11 (NLT), "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours." The psalmist said in Ps. 145:3 (NLT), "Great is the LORD! He is most worthy of praise! No one can measure his greatness." Again, physical distance is irrelevant to God. To say God is transcendent – that He's above and beyond everything – means feet, meters, miles, kilometers, or even light years mean nothing to Him. Transcendence means God is completely different than anything and anyone else in the entire universe. Everything and everyone else has been created. But no one created God. He has always existed. Yes, God is everywhere present in all the different "stuff" that makes up the universe. But there's additional

“stuff” (what’s a better word?) that pertains only to God. God also transcends it all. He’s above and beyond it while being in it all – like the great ocean filling, surrounding, and yet dwarfing that little bucket I asked you imagine earlier.

Christian pastor and author, A.W. Tozer, gave us a mind-boggling description of God’s omnipresence, immanence, and transcendence. “God is above all things, beneath all things, outside of all things, and inside of all things. God is above, but He’s not pushed up. He’s beneath, but He’s not pressed down. He’s outside, but He’s not excluded. He’s inside, but He’s not confined. God is above all things presiding, beneath all things sustaining, outside of all things embracing, and inside all things filling.” Now, I’ve tried to explain briefly what it means that God is above everything, in everything, and is also everywhere. That explanation leads to an insight we all need to heed.

AN INSIGHT

Precisely because God is above everything, in everything, and is everywhere, you can never deceive God, escape His presence, or discover Him without His help. Because God is in everything and everyone, He obviously knows and observes all things. He’s like the ultimate Central Intelligence Agency or the ultimate Google platform. Here’s what God Himself said through the prophet Jeremiah in 23:23-24 (NLT), “‘Am I a God who is only close at hand?’ says the LORD. ‘No, I am far away at the same time. Can anyone hide from me in a secret place? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?’ says the LORD.” There is no such thing as privacy when it comes to God. God is closer to you than your own thoughts and nearer to you than your own breath. He knows everything you do, everything you think, and every where you go.

ILLUS: *A pastor called the home of some recent visitors to his church. A voice on the other end of the phone answered with a whisper, “Hello.” The pastor asked, “Who is this?”... “Jimmy”... “How old are you, Jimmy?”... “Four”... “Jimmy, can I speak to your mom?”... “She’s busy”... “Then, can I speak to your dad?”... “He’s busy”... “Are there any other adults there at your home?”... “The police”... “Then, let me speak with one of the police officers”... “They’re busy”... “Jimmy, who else is there”... “Firemen”... Well, can you put one of the firemen on the phone?”... “They’re busy”... “Jimmy, what are they all busy doing?”... “They’re all busy looking for me!” Jimmy was quite the precocious, determined little guy, wasn’t he? Like Jimmy, a lot of people think they can hide from God successfully. You can never hide from God. You can never deceive God. You can never escape God. You can never insist on privacy with God.*

Because God is everywhere, you can never be anywhere that He’s not there already. Do you remember the story of Jonah in the Old Testament? God wanted him to go and tell the people of Nineveh to repent, but Jonah refused at first. He hated the people of Nineveh. He had no desire to be God’s instrument of grace and mercy to them. So, he got in a boat and literally headed in the opposite direction of Nineveh. Jonah should have known better. You can’t ever get to some place where God is absent. Jonah got a unique lesson on God’s omnipresence. God was even present in the stomach of a great fish God directed to swallow Jonah until he was willing to do God’s will.

Because God is above everything, you can't just go out and find God by your own efforts. Many people assume God is accessible to them on their own terms. They're wrong about that. God can only be found when He wants to be found and in the way He's already decided to be found. God said this about Himself through the prophet Isaiah in 55:8-9 (NLT), "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts, and my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." The Bible makes it very clear you can only come to God, find God, and know God when you come through Jesus. Please don't arrogantly assume you don't need Jesus, or that you can find God through some other means than through the death and resurrection of Jesus. God can only be found when we seek Him in the way He wants and the way He has provided. That's leads us to a question.

A QUESTION

If God is everywhere and in everything and everyone, why does He seem so far away from me at times? Let's admit we can feel like that on occasion. God can seem very distant from us. You don't always feel His nearness or sense His presence. Why is that? Here's one possible answer. We're still unlike God in many ways. Because God is omnipresent and immanent, we know by faith and by logic that God is just as close to a person who is hostile or indifferent to Him as God is to the greatest Christian saint who walks the planet today. But the non-believer has no consciousness of God's presence while the believer feels God's nearness spiritually in a powerful way. Why? There's little to nothing the non-believer shares in common with God, while the believer already has something of God developing in him or her. He or she is being gradually transformed spiritually into the likeness of Jesus. But we've got a ways to go, yes?

The great news is that God made it possible for us to have a relationship with Him. He sent His Son, Jesus, to us. When you put your faith and trust in Jesus, God gives you the gift of His Holy Spirit within you so you can now sense His presence and communicate with Him. The Bible says in 2 Pt. 1:4 (NLT), "And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature." We share God's divine nature. That doesn't mean we somehow become God. No, instead, it means we can now communicate with God, know God, and become more like God.

It's only because God has put His very self into you – the Holy Spirit – that any of us ever feel His presence close and near to us. The closer you stay to God spiritually, the more you will feel His presence. The feeling that God is absent or is very far away is often – now, not always, but often – because we refuse to confess our sins to Him, or because we're resisting His will in some area of our lives, or perhaps because we rarely crack open a Bible or approach God in prayer. God sometimes withdraws that wonderful sense of His presence because He wants to get our attention. The fact is this side of Heaven, all of us are going have those moments when we feel God very near and other moments when we feel like He's on vacation. We all have to wait for that wonderful day in the future when He will change us inside and out making us like

Himself completely and totally. Indeed, because God is above everything, in everything, and is everywhere, you and I can be encouraged.

AN ENCOURAGEMENT

We acknowledge by faith in God's Word that God is always closer to you than you are to yourself. Nothing can change that fact. He can never truly leave you or forsake you because God can never be less than who He is. Be encouraged by these wonderful truths today and every day. First, you can never be truly alone. Loneliness is a very real, genuine feeling. God has created us for deep, meaningful relationships with other beings. The worst kind of loneliness is the feeling God has somehow abandoned you. No, He has not. No, He can never abandon you. The Bible says in Ps. 16:8 (NLT), "I know the LORD is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me." God Himself said in Is. 41:10 (NLT), "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God." Of course, there are many times in life when you might be genuinely lonely for the people you love and are separated from for whatever reason. In fact, this pandemic experience may have increased feelings of isolation and loneliness from family members and church friends. Remember, God never leaves you. He's always there. Other human beings might forsake or abandon you. But God cannot and will not do so. You're never truly alone. So, be encouraged!

Second, your prayers have credibility. **ILLUS:** *Have you heard or read about various websites to which people submit their prayers? One site says, "Simply click on the 'Pray' button and transmit your prayers to the only known location of God." The only known location of God? What is that about? This website claims that it can send prayers via radio transmitter to God's last known location – a cluster of stars called M13 believed to be one of the oldest locations in the universe. Crandall Stone, an engineer and freelance consultant, set up this website some years ago after a conversation with friends. Someone suggested that if everything that now exists was in one place at the time of the Big Bang explosion, then God must have been at that location, too. Maybe He was still there! Stone reasoned that this star cluster was one place where we can be sure God was located so maybe it was worth it to send God messages via a radio transmitter. After consulting with NASA scientists, Stone and his friends settled on M13. They chipped in about \$20,000 and built a radio wave transmitting website. Stone reported it transmitted about 50,000 prayers a week from people all over the planet.*

Aren't you glad you don't have to depend on some website and radio waves to get your prayers to what might be God's last known location? Ridiculous. God is everywhere and in everything; therefore, you can be confident He hears every prayer you pray – no matter how unpolished, theologically questionable, or grammatically incorrect it might be! He even hears every inarticulate groan of your spirit even when you can't put your prayers into words. I'm not saying God will answer every prayer request the way you want it to be, but He does know and He will answer. He Himself said in Is. 65:24 (NLT), "I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!" Your prayers have credibility

because they're offered to a God whose greatness is beyond our comprehension and who can never leave us. Be encouraged!

Third, you can be sure God is in every situation and circumstance in life. Do you remember the Old Testament story of Jacob who stole his brother's birthright and the blessing of being the first born son? He knew Esau was going to kill him, so Jacob ran away from home. On his trip, God gave Jacob a very powerful dream and when he woke up, he said in Gen. 28:16 (NLT), "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it!" I could say that about some events in my own life. How about you? Surely the Lord is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it. We control so very little of what happens in our lives. The older I get and the more experiences I go through, the more I find myself reflecting like Jacob did, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it."

It's easy to see God's hand in the good stuff that happens along life's journey, but how about the bad stuff? As we follow Jesus, there will come those trial moments, those storm moments, and those adversity moments when we recognize, "Surely the Lord is in even this difficult place, and I wasn't aware of it." It might be physical illness. A failed marriage. A broken relationship with your rebellious child. Abuse you - or someone you love - has suffered. Financial disaster. A career setback. Even a personal, moral failure you've confessed to the Lord. If you keep following Jesus, inevitably you will come to that place where you can take a step back, observe, evaluate, and say genuinely, "Surely the Lord was in even this hard, painful, unhappy place, and I wasn't aware of it." I believe followers of Jesus will be able to say that once we get on the other side of this pandemic. Right now it makes no sense and it's painful to us in a variety of ways. But God is allowing it for some reason. One day we will be able to say about even this pandemic, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it!" It's not that God caused this pandemic. But it's a fact that God is spiritually present and active in anything and everything that happens. Be encouraged!

ILLUS: *Ruth Campbell lived in Pittsburgh. In the first few years of her marriage, she discovered she and her husband were unable to have children. This was devastating, because Ruth dearly loved babies and children. All of her friends were having babies. Her arms ached to hold a baby of her own. Night after night she wept. This was back in the 1930s. World War 2 came along and Ruth's husband went off to war. Ruth saw an ad in the newspaper asking for someone to take care of a baby while her mother went to the hospital. For some reason, the mother was never able to take care of her baby. So, Ruth raised the child as her own. That little girl grew up to become a nurse and the assistant director of a cardiac rehabilitation center. Taking on that one little baby girl changed Ruth's life. It led to taking in another, and then another, and still another. Sometimes it was having a child just for a day or a weekend. But over many years, Ruth Campbell took care of over a hundred children. Some turned out great and caused Ruth much joy.. Other caused Ruth, others, and themselves enormous pain. But when Ruth reflected on her journey, she realized God had indeed heard her back then when she felt so forsaken and devastated. God showed up in Ruth's life because*

God was there all the time. Ruth looked back on her life and could say with Jacob, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it!"

CONCL: God is above everything, in everything, and is everywhere. Those are far more than awe inspiring truths about God's attributes. It means you're never alone. It means your prayers have credibility. They matter. God is listening and He will answer. And it means the Lord is in every situation and circumstance of your life and mine spiritually. So, let's be encouraged this and every day!