

## **The Nearness of God**

### **Acts 17**

Last week I tuned in to a livestream of a Bible Conference that had a speaker I had never heard of. He had a great speaking voice and an accent that made him seem smarter than me. So I thought, I'll take a few moments and tune in and listen. To my surprise as God often does, the preacher gave a message on the "Nearness of God". At that particular time in my week, I needed that. I needed to hear again, that God is near.

When your heart is heavy, when your burden is difficult and it seems that it is all closing in around you and there is no escape.... it is so good to hear that God is near.

That sermon repeated in my mind for a number of days following the actual delivery of it and really met a need I had at that time to be assured of God's nearness.

Now for clarity, I am not going to plagiarize the man's sermon, but I am going to take his title and speak to you today on the Nearness of God. Theologians call this the Immanence of God. God is Infinite and vast yet small. God is transcendent yet here with us. God is in all things yet is not all things.

God is in us, and with us and near us and everywhere else at the same time.

As the Psalmist says,  
Psalm 139:7–10 (NKJV)

- 7 Where can I go from Your Spirit?  
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
- 8 If I ascend into heaven, You *are* there;  
If I make my bed in hell, behold, You *are there*.
- 9 *If* I take the wings of the morning,  
*And* dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
- 10 Even there Your hand shall lead me,  
And Your right hand shall hold me.

There is nothing that can be so precious as the  
Nearness of God in the midst of difficulty and  
trials.

But there is nothing so sobering and fearful to  
know than that God is Near.

Acts 17:23–28 (NKJV)

<sup>23</sup> for as I was passing through and considering the  
objects of your worship, I even found an altar with  
this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: <sup>24</sup> God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. <sup>25</sup> Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. <sup>26</sup> And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, <sup>27</sup> so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; <sup>28</sup> for in Him we live and move and have our being,.....

In this one sermon, Paul gives a Theology Proper of God to these Athenian philosophers and idolators.

He tells them that God is

Creator, Omnipotent, Sovereign, Transcendant, All sufficient, the Sustainer of all things, Ordainer of all things, Omnipresent and present

And in my discussion with you this morning, I am not talking about the Omnipresence of God. That he is everywhere at the same time is clearly taught.

Whether you are here or there, where you are in

heaven or on earth, or even Hell, God is there. But I'm not talking about Omnipresence but presence....nearness. And not so much a sense of his nearness, but rather the fact of it.

A.W Tozer- The Knowledge of the Holy, wrote

Canon W. G. Holmes of India told of seeing Hindu worshipers tapping on trees and stones and whispering

"Are you there? Are you there?" to the god they hoped might reside within. In complete humility the instructed Christian brings the answer to that question. God is indeed there. He is there as He is here and everywhere, not confined to tree or stone, but free in the universe, near to everything, next to everyone, and through Jesus Christ immediately accessible to every loving heart. The doctrine of the divine omnipresence decides this forever.

The certainty that God is always near us, present in all parts of His world, closer to us than our thoughts, should maintain us in a state of high moral happiness most of the time. But not all the time. It would be less than honest to promise every believer

continual jubilee and less than realistic to expect it. As a child may cry out in pain even when sheltered in its mother's arms, so a Christian may sometimes know what it is to suffer even in the conscious presence of God. Though "always rejoicing," Paul admitted that he was sometimes sorrowful, and for our sakes Christ experienced strong crying and tears though He never left the bosom of the Father (John 1:18).

But all will be well. In a world like this tears have their therapeutic effects. The healing balm distilled from the garments of the enfolding Presence cures our ills before they become fatal. The knowledge that we are never alone calms the troubled sea of our lives and speaks peace to our souls.

That God is here both Scripture and reason declare. It remains only for us to learn to realize this in conscious experience.

## **Lesson**

The Loss of Nearness

The Lethality of Nearness

The Legalization of Nearness

The Loyalty of Nearness

## I. The Loss of Nearness

Genesis 1:26–27 (NKJV)

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” <sup>27</sup> So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 2:15–18 (NKJV)

<sup>15</sup> Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

<sup>18</sup> And the Lord God said, “*It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.”

Genesis 3:6–10 (NKJV)

<sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree

desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

<sup>8</sup> And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

<sup>9</sup> Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, “Where *are* you?”

<sup>10</sup> So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

Charles Spurgeon stated,

Adam sinned, and at once we see the first stage of our own distance from God as we perceive Adam in the garden without his God. In the garden, in the very midst of Paradise, flowers shedding their sweet perfume, fruits hanging ready to his hand on every side, and yet man is wretched, miserable, and cowardly; he hides amongst the trees of the garden until the Lord God calls to him, “Adam, where art thou?” Here is the first stage of distance, and it is sad and terrible

## Genesis 3:21–24 (NKJV)

<sup>21</sup> Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.

<sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” —<sup>23</sup> therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup> So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

This is the second stage of distance

### I. The Loss of Nearness

## II. The Lethality of Nearness

### Exodus 19:9–24 (NKJV)

<sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.”

So Moses told the words of the people to the Lord.



<sup>10</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. <sup>11</sup> And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. <sup>12</sup> You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, ‘Take heed to yourselves *that you do not* go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. <sup>13</sup> Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot *with an arrow*; whether man or beast, he shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain.”

<sup>14</sup> So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. <sup>15</sup> And he said to the people, “Be ready for the third day; do not come near *your wives*.”

<sup>16</sup> Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. <sup>17</sup> And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. <sup>18</sup> Now Mount Sinai *was* completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like

the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. <sup>19</sup> And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. <sup>20</sup> Then the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

<sup>21</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the Lord, and many of them perish. <sup>22</sup> Also let the priests who come near the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them.”

<sup>23</sup> But Moses said to the Lord, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, ‘Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it.’ ”

<sup>24</sup> Then the Lord said to him, “Away! Get down and then come up, you and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break out against them.”

Exodus 33:18–34:1 (NKJV)

<sup>18</sup> And he said, “Please, show me Your glory.”

<sup>19</sup> Then He said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will

have compassion.”<sup>20</sup> But He said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.”<sup>21</sup> And the Lord said, “Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock.<sup>22</sup> So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by.<sup>23</sup> Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.”

Yet with all of this, and many other examples, in the old testament of not being able to get close to God, for fear of death, there are plenty of verses that talk about drawing near to God. So obviously, there are clear indicators that you could not physically draw near to God the near.

Yeah, there are plenty of verses that talk about drawing near to God. Like these verses,  
Psalm 73:28 (NKJV)

<sup>28</sup> But *it is* good for me to draw near to God;  
I have put my trust in the Lord God,  
That I may declare all Your works.

Psalm 145:18 (NKJV)

<sup>18</sup> The Lord *is* near to all who call upon Him,  
To all who call upon Him in truth.

### Isaiah 29:13 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup> Therefore the Lord said:

“Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths

And honor Me with their lips,

But have removed their hearts far from Me,

And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men,

### Isaiah 55:6 (NKJV)

<sup>6</sup> Seek the Lord while He may be found,  
Call upon Him while He is near.

We simply understand this to mean that in the Old Testament it was impossible to physically be in the presence of God without being consumed. But they could come near to God through their worship through the obedience and through their trust in that nearness was more mental and spiritual and physical. But that all changes with the coming of the son of God. The Bible specifically says in John

### John 1:18 (NKJV)

<sup>18</sup> No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*.

## John 1:14 (NKJV)

<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us. Philippians chapter 2 indicates that this is the God who who is the creator of all things the God of the Old Testament the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob were god of Moses and Joshua yet he is also the same God who came in the flesh and walked among us.

I. The Loss of Nearness

II. The Lethality of Nearness

## **III. The Legalization of Nearness**

The problems with being Near to God are illustrated by Temple itself.

The veil of the temple --- separation brought near by the blood.

New Testament scholars point out that there were curtains in numerous places (18) in the Temple. But the Gospels surely mean the curtain most notable, most impressive, and most significant of them all. This was the curtain that separated the holiest place within the Temple proper (the naos) from the rest of the naos, and the surrounding structures of the Temple precincts. For it to be seen, the 30-foot-tall naos doors would have to be open, as we might expect them to be when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered in front of them, and the court of Israel was filled with men in three consecutive waves. These Israelites would have been able to look up and see that the Temple curtain toward the back of the naos had been torn.

And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. – Matthew 27:51 (ESV)

The curtain contributed to the splendor of the Temple. From Josephus and rabbinic texts we can gain some idea of its appearance. Within that central structure of the Temple, the curtain covered the entrance to the Holy of Holies which was 40 by 20 cubits, or 60' high by 30' feet wide.

The curtain is described in Mishnah Shekalim 8:3. (The Mishnah is the oral tradition of Jewish Law, first put in writing about the end of the Second Century AD. It is the foundation of the Talmud.) Some interpret this to mean the curtain had 72 squares joined together. Perhaps the tear happened at the central seam.

Josephus, who had seen the curtain, wrote:

“It was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful. Nor was this mixture of colors without its mystical interpretation, but was a kind of image of the universe; for by the scarlet there seemed to be enigmatically signified fire, by the fine flax the earth, by the blue the air, and by the purple the sea; two of them having their colors the foundation of this resemblance; but the fine flax and the purple have their own origin for that foundation, the earth producing the one, and the sea the other. This curtain had also embroidered upon it all that was mystical in the heavens, excepting that of the [twelve] signs, representing living creatures.” – The Jewish Wars 5:2, Whiston translation

The embroidered heavens on the curtain will surprise some, but this curtain represented the boundary between this world and the heavens. It was as though crossing that boundary brought the High Priest into the presence of God. It was “as though,” because the presence of God was never acknowledged to be in Herod’s Second Temple as it had been in Solomon’s Temple. The Holy of Holies no longer contained the Ark of the Covenant. Still, this was the holiest place from of old, and it was treated as such.<https://www.patternsofevidence.com/2021/04/02/torn-temple-curtain/>

The legal problems are illustrated well by the design of the Temple. The Veil is an indicator of the separation of God from Man

But Jesus death rips the veil from top to bottom and opens the Holy of Holies to all men who trust in Christ.

John 12:17–21 (NKJV)

<sup>17</sup> Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. <sup>18</sup> For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He



had done this sign. <sup>19</sup> The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, “You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after Him!”

<sup>20</sup> Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast. <sup>21</sup> Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”

John 12:28–33 (NKJV)

<sup>28</sup> **Father, glorify Your name.**”

Then a voice came from heaven, *saying*, “I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again.”

<sup>29</sup> Therefore the people who stood by and heard *it* said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him.”

<sup>30</sup> Jesus answered and said, **“This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. <sup>31</sup> Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. <sup>32</sup> And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”** <sup>33</sup> This He said, signifying by what death He would die.

Romans 3:23–26 (NKJV)

<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified freely by His grace through the

redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, <sup>26</sup> to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

As a result of the Death of Christ.

Acts 2:38–39 (NKJV)

<sup>38</sup> Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

Ephesians 2:13 (NKJV)

<sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Hebrews 10:19–22 (NKJV)

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and

living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, <sup>21</sup> and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

As the hymn writer wrote,

We are—

“So near, so very near to God,  
We cannot nearer be,  
For in the person of his Son,  
We are as near as he.”

I The Loss of Nearness

II The Lethality of Nearness

III The Legalization of Nearness

**IV The Loyalty of Nearness**

**Evangelism**

Matthew 28:19–20 (NKJV)

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the

Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.” Amen.

### **Acts 18:9–11 (NKJV)**

<sup>9</sup> Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.”

<sup>11</sup> And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

### **2 Timothy 4:17 (NKJV)**

<sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

## **Discipline**

### **Matthew 18:20–21 (NKJV)**

<sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

## Cleansing

James 4:8 (NKJV)

<sup>8</sup> Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded.

## Comfort, Assurance, Strength and Perseverance.

### Philippians 4:5–6 (NET)

<sup>4:5</sup> Let everyone see your gentleness. The Lord is near! <sup>4:6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God.

There is no greater source of spiritual stability than the confidence that **the Lord is near**. *Engus* (**near**) can mean near in space or near in time. Some take *engus* in a chronological sense, either as a reference to Christ's return (3:20–21; James 5:8), or to believers' death, which ushers them into the Lord's presence (1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8). While those are comforting truths, it seems that Paul's emphasis here is on the Lord's nearness in the sense of His presence. He is near both to hear the cry of the

believer's heart, and to help and strengthen them. In Psalm 73:28 the psalmist declared, "The nearness of God is my good" (cf. Pss. 34:18; 75:1; 119:151; 145:18). Because of God's nearness, believers should not be fearful, anxious, or wavering. They should not collapse, but be strong and stable (Josh. 1:6–9; Pss. 27:14; 125:1).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2001). [\*Philippians\*](#) (pp. 276–277). Moody Press.

### **Mark 4:35–41 (NKJV)**

<sup>35</sup> On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, **"Let us cross over to the other side."**

<sup>36</sup> Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. <sup>37</sup> And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. <sup>38</sup> But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

<sup>39</sup> Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, **"Peace, be still!"** And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. <sup>40</sup> But He said to them, **"Why are you so fearful? How *is it* that you have no faith?"** <sup>41</sup> And they feared exceedingly, and said to

one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!”

Isaiah 41:10 (NKJV)

<sup>10</sup> Fear not, for I *am* with you;  
Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God.  
I will strengthen you,  
Yes, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’

Psalms 34:18 (NKJV)

<sup>18</sup> The Lord *is* near to those who have a broken heart,  
And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

Psalms 145:18 (NKJV)

<sup>18</sup> The Lord *is* near to all who call upon Him,  
To all who call upon Him in truth.

Psalms 46:1–7 (NKJV)

<sup>1</sup> God *is* our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.  
<sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear,  
Even though the earth be removed,

And though the mountains be carried into the  
midst of the sea;

- 3 *Though* its waters roar *and* be troubled,  
*Though* the mountains shake with its swelling.

Selah

- 4 *There is* a river whose streams shall make glad  
the city of God,  
The holy *place* of the tabernacle of the Most High.

- 5 God *is* in the midst of her, she shall not be moved;  
God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.

- 6 The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved;  
He uttered His voice, the earth melted.

- 7 The Lord of hosts *is* with us;  
The God of Jacob *is* our refuge.

Selah

Piper, reflecting on J. Edwards: "He believed great thoughts about God without great love toward people are sure evidences of hypocrisy and the pathway to hell."



