

## ***THE OMNIPRESENT GOD, PSALM 139:7-12***

What's God Really Like? #2

◆**Intro:** Some years back on the TV show *The New Adventures of Lois & Clark*, Lois somehow finds Superman's powers transferred to her! Rather thrilled with the notoriety of it all, the idolization of young men impressed with her prowess, Lois is excited about her newfound potency. Later however, she collapses into Clark's arms in tears. She is feeling the weight of the nagging pressures of being a super-woman. Her super ears are constantly picking up screams for help from all directions. There's a 747 going down in New York, while an infant girl is being crushed by a landslide in California. She just can't be everywhere at once. She is discovering that even Superman has physical limitations, and it is wringing her heart to tears. -Even power is not helpful if it is not available and present.

◆Presence is one of the greatest human longings. Parents worry about being there when their child needs them. Grieving families need a warm body of a friend to show up more than they need a great meal delivered, or a profound theological explanation. Fearful children want their father's big hand when they get in line at the public diving board, or when they venture down a darkened street. So if you know anything of this, you are going to like what we find out about God today. Scripture makes it pretty clear that God is the clear and present God!

◆**1. Definition:** The theological term for God's ability to be everywhere at once is omnipresence. It means that God is fully in all places at the same time. It means that God is not hampered by spacial reality like you and I are. There is no limit to his locality. While I whisper to him in my den in Lafayette, he is just as present to the sailor on the Indian Ocean.

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◆“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” Psalms 139:7, NIV.

◆A. God's all-present character is not the same thing as pantheism.

Pantheism believes that God is everywhere because God is actually part of everything. Pantheism is closely illustrated in the Star Wars sagas by the Force, a great, impersonal power said to permeate all. It is a cosmic semiconsciousness that is present in the air, the trees, the soil. According to this religious outlook, even we are part of God. Consequently there is no such thing as sin, no need for salvation; just the ability to use the Force to your perceived advantage. Pantheism claims that God is in all things. He's in the mountain and he's in the bugs in your lawn clippings, and he's in you. That makes us brothers to the bugs, by the way. Other religions take the same approach. Tiger Woods once explained that being a Buddhist was an advantage because they do not believe in a personal God, which is therefore very “freeing”. Why? With no personal God, there are no personal expectations, limitations, rights and wrongs to concern oneself with. There is merely power out there somewhere.

◆B. Pantheism isn't what we mean by omnipresence. Nor is it as comforting as it might sound. Omnipresence means that God is near, present to all things, every place, but he is distinct from those things and places, and people that he is near. God is both transcendent to reality, and immanent in reality at the same time; more than what we can see and touch, yet near us. What's more, it is not as though God was broken up into a million little parts of himself in order to be partly everywhere at once. No, God is completely everywhere at once. That's what Christian theology

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means when it says that God is indivisible. You can't break him up so that his left hand is in Ireland, and his right foot is in Florida. No, the person we call God, is spirit, and therefore unhampered by space or time, unhampered by physical boundaries. He is bigger than the Milky Way galaxy, but is the very power sustaining the flower in your vase. You cannot talk to the flower or the stars, but you can talk to him and he can answer you!

◆ *“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.” Acts 17:24, 25, NIV.*

◆ **2. God's omnipresence is my wake up call!** Now for those of us making choices that even for a few moments are in tension with God, omnipresence may not be so comforting. It means that we are never truly “alone” which comments on the state of our integrity. As they say, true character is who you are when no one else is around. Moral integrity is being able to choose right when you are alone. Mostly we are careful to do our immoral things at night. Most thieves break in at night. Why do you think that is? Most people that welcome drunkenness do so at night. Why is it that most bars do not have windows? Is it not because we intuitively know that we really don't want to be seen stepping beyond propriety? Bill Hybels said, “If we live lives without an intense awareness of the omnipresence of God, we create one illusion after the next.”

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◆“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.” Psalms 139:11, 12, NIV.

◆And Isaiah says...

◆Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the LORD, who do their work in darkness and think, “Who sees us? Who will know?” (Isaiah 29:15, NIV).

◆drama: “God knows all at 40,000’!”

◆**A.** Omnipresence is strong incentive to live reality, to live with integrity, to live in the light. Light always leads to better fellowship!

◆*“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” 1 John 1:5-7, NIV.*

◆Living in the dark is where I help myself to supplies from the office because no one is looking. Living in the dark is coming to church because you feel pretty darn good about yourself, instead of coming because you seek Jesus’ forgiveness. Living in the dark is speaking to my family at home in tones I would never display in public. I may sound like a religious book when I pray with others, but I don’t even pray at all by myself.

◆But there is no darkness with God. As we saw with his omniscience in the first six verses of this psalm, there is no part of our day that he

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isn't in on! Behind the moon, behind the bedroom door, behind the boardroom wall –God is there, present.

◆ *“Am I only a God nearby,” declares the LORD, “and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the LORD. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” declares the LORD.” Jeremiah 23:23, 24, NIV.*

◆ B. Now then, even though God exists equally near all people and things, that does not mean he is equally related to, or connected to all people and things. Sometimes it may seem as though God is not present. In the 1960's when the cosmonauts returned to Russia they reported that they had looked out in space and didn't see God anywhere! Ruth Graham reportedly quipped, “I wish they had opened a door and stepped out without a suit on. They would have met God right away!”

◆ God is present with his children in ways he is not with those who chose little interaction with him. Lets say we don't experience gifts of God, or fruits of his Spirit; or we don't feel his convictions, or notice his activity in our world much– we can conclude that something is getting in the way. It is probably not God creating the obstacle. When we chose to disagree with God's good will, whether it's a movie choice or a response to a neighbor, our spiritual state is affected. For example, Isaiah says

◆ *“Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things. No-one calls for justice; ...“So justice is far from us, and righteousness does*

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*not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness; for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows.” Isaiah 59:1-4,9, NIV.*

◆ Building on what we looked at last week, when we come clean with God we are not filling God in on anything he didn't already know. He was there. He knows. What we are doing is breaking the power of the wrong over us and retying relationship with God. People say sometimes, “Well, I needn't spell out any particulars with God, he knows it all already.” The latter is true, the former is not. If you want to break the power of dark habit you need to spell it out in prayer.

◆ Did you know that guilt is not all bad? Criminals in general hate cops even though cops are all about helping and keeping the peace. They hate them because they are guilty and they don't want to feel guilty. It's also why roughneck teens make fun of straight-laced teens for not being jerks like them. The well-mannered ones make them look like what they are, bad-mannered. Ok then, so God's presence while it is a wake up call to help us notice ourselves, it is a positive one. There is more good about it than that.

◆

◆ 3. Omnipresence shows me how interested God is in my moments.

◆ “If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.” Psalms 139:8, NIV.

◆ The furthest galaxy discovered by spectroscopy is z8\_GND\_5296.

6 No, that's not an old AOL screen name. It's a galaxy that is 13.8 billion light-years old, or 13.8 billion light-years away. Spatially speaking, it's the highest height. The deepest depth is the Challenger Deep, part of a trench 6.85 miles beneath the U.S. Territorial Island of Guam. From the zero gravity of space to the 1,000-times atmospheric

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pressure of the deep seas, God's love is present and accounted for.

You can't escape it, even if you could escape time and space. His love goes beyond the borders of space, beyond the boundaries of time. Mark Batterson, *If* (Baker Books, 2015), page 281

◆ Sometimes Sandi is relating about her day and I'm looking right at her, and I'm nodding my head so that she thinks I'm engaged. But she'll stop and say something like, "Let me know when you get home." And I say, "What!" and I'll even repeat her last two, maybe three words max. Am I right guys? But she still knows I wasn't present. To be present is a gift of love.

◆ Take fathers for example. The father that is present with his child is the father that likes her! Not just "loves" in the sense that he is willing to be responsible for, provide for, knows the he should... No. The present father is the one who likes, enjoys his children. The father that does not find other things to do: more work, read, golf, shop.

◆ Now I want you to think about your heavenly father. He has a trillion whole solar systems to run, galaxies beyond counting (astronomers count over a million just in the bowl of the Big Dipper alone!). God has a lot of places to be. He has important things to uphold like gravity, interstellar emissions, even the cycles of rain and evaporation. But above all this, he is present with human people.

◆ You don't have to go on pilgrimage to a sacred place to get his attention, though such a trip may be beneficial. He likes you, even when you don't like yourself.

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◆ God's omnipresence is a comfort. If God is everywhere, then God is affecting people everywhere. Then God has family everywhere too! And God brings blessing wherever he is. Suppose God was only there for you at your house. Suppose God only lived in the North, or only in the South? But God is with you at the mall. He is with you on vacation. He is right next to your child who's off in Spain for a semester. God is still God in Europe! God owns the African continent as well. God is present in Brazilian rainforests. And once again, of all the fascinating creatures and things in those places, people are his top interest!

◆ Conclusion: Unlike Superman, God *can* be everywhere at once. God is even present in hell, which could well be the meaning of v8b ( *if I make my bed in the depths*). It's just that hell is to be ever cut off from noticing, or realizing the presence of God. Like a diver with an air tank at the bottom of the ocean, who has intentionally thrown away his mouthpiece. The air is there. Its just not available.

◆ Lee Eclov writes: "I used to think that living in "the fear of the Lord" is like driving down the street while watching the policeman in your rearview mirror. But actually there's a better picture for the fear of the Lord. It's like a teenage driver who suddenly spots her father's car in her rearview mirror.

1) Seeing him back there puts her on notice to be on her best behavior—to use her blinkers and stop at the yellow light, and to keep both hands on the wheel. (Wake up Call) 2) But it also tells her that her father cares enough to follow her. It tells her that she's safe. Her father isn't trying to trap or trick her. He's trying to help her develop good habits; not just to be careful on

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this trip, but to obey the laws and stay safe until she gets home. She's driving on her own, but not completely on her own. So it is for the people of God. The fear of the Lord (and I'll add, the omnipresence of God) means we live life with our heavenly Father always in our rearview mirror. We glance up and see his brilliant holiness but also his care and love. Our response, the fear of the Lord, is a mix of reverence, trust, and love.