

New Vision

Not God Enough • God's Presence • Psalm 139:1-16 • 06/10/2018

Main Point

Because God is always present, He is always with us and invites us to live in His presence.

Getting to Know Me

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the most isolated place you have ever visited? What does it feel like?

Are you an introvert or extrovert? How would you describe your experience of introversion or extroversion in one sentence?

Some of us love to be around people as often as possible. We enjoy the company and are energized by relationships. Others of us need alone time to feel rejuvenated, even though we enjoy the company of good friends. But it is safe to assume that no one likes to be alone all the time. Loneliness can be a scary feeling, and it oftentimes leaves us feeling insecure and isolated from others. One of the attributes of God is His omnipresence—His presence everywhere, at all times. Through the Holy Spirit living in us, we are always in God's presence, a good reminder for those times when we feel alone.

Into the Bible

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

In Psalm 139, we see a God who knows all, loves all, and is actively involved in each of our lives. As you read about God's attention to the details of your life, know this: You matter to God.

| Have a volunteer read Psalm 139:1-16.

What do we learn about God's involvement in our lives from Psalm 139:1-6?

What factors might prevent you from feeling close to God?

Which of the statements we read about God's presence means the most to you, and why?

How does this psalm make you feel about yourself and your value to God?

One theme of Psalm 139 is God's presence in all places at all times. The psalmist felt blessed to enjoy an intimate relationship with his Creator. The psalm reinforces God's careful, thoughtful work in the creation of

each and every person. Everything in the psalmist's life was under God's all-seeing eye. He could only respond in light of his own limited knowledge: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me" (v. 6). This stands as an expression of David's awe and wonder as well as a recognition of his personal limits.

What part of our lives is God concerned about and involved in?

Why would the God of the universe choose to be intimately involved in the details of our lives?

The psalmist acknowledged that God knew everything about him. God also surrounded him and kept His hand on him. It's hard for us to comprehend unconditional love, but that's how God loves and cares for us. Nothing we could do would take us away from His loving presence. In Romans 8, the apostle Paul spoke similar words of encouragement to a church that would face intense persecution.

| Have a volunteer read Romans 8:31-34.

What situation in your life has required the most perseverance and determination from you? What motivated you to go the distance?

At what times do you find it the most challenging to persevere in your relationship with God and the work He has called you to? What factors make perseverance so tough in those moments?

What does it mean to you to read that God is for you? If you are "for" someone or something, what does that entail?

No matter where we are in current struggles or difficulties, we must remember that God is always with us, and He has made the ultimate sacrifice to guarantee we can be in relationship with Him. God will not withhold anything from us that we need to persevere in our relationship with and ministry for Him.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 8:35-39.

Have you ever felt abandoned by God? Describe that experience.

What in this passage gives you evidence of God's immovable presence in your life? How does that truth make you feel?

Paul affirmed that nothing has the power to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. The list of potential separators includes physical danger, spiritual beings, present and future occurrences, and powers above us and below us. To clearly indicate that absolutely no thing or person can come between the Lord and His people, Paul concluded his list with "anything else in all creation." Absolutely nothing can come between us and our Lord. Nothing can remove us from His family.

Of the things listed in these verses that cannot separate believers from the love of Christ, which stands out to you the most, and why? Share an example from your own experience that relates to that point.

How can you apply this passage to times when you might feel like God is absent?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Is God's omnipresence unsettling to you in any way? Why or why not?

How does the fact of God's omnipresence comfort you personally? How does it expand your amazement at divine grace?

What evidences of God's presence do you see in your day-to-day life?

What difference does trusting in God's presence make as you try to persevere through difficult times?

How does the fact of God's omnipresence change the way you think about your secret sins?

In what situation will you rest in God's presence this week?

Pray

Lead your group in prayer, thanking God for His work on the cross that is the ultimate example of His unwavering love for us. Thank Him for His continued faithfulness to and presence with us. Pray that no matter what we face this week, we would be able to cling to the promises of Romans 8 and trust in His love for us.

Commentary

| Psalm 139:1-16

139:1-4. The Hebrew verbs can be interpreted as timeless truth: "You search me and You know me." God's attributes are not restricted to time. The words "know... understand... observe, and are aware" speak of God's omniscience. The word "observe" comes from the Hebrew root zarah, which means "measure." The Hebrew word for ways does not necessarily denote literal walking but daily behavior.

139:5. God's omnipresence guarantees protection. The first line is literally, "Back and front, You enclosed me." Your hand on me denotes absolute control over the psalmist, who was subject to the Lord's loving care and discipline.

139:6. God's attributes of omniscience and omnipresence are beyond human comprehension.

139:7. The psalmist could not remove himself from the realm of God's transcendence, nor could he run from God's immanent and personal engagement with him (Jer. 23:24; Amos 9:2-4; Heb. 4:13). The concept is both frightening and comforting.

139:8. The notion of escaping to heaven and hell finds its roots in ancient Near Eastern mythology. The Old Testament acknowledges God's ability to access Sheol because He is sovereign (Job 26:6; Amos 9:2), but banishment to the underworld removes a person from God's blessing (Ps. 6:5; Ecc. 9:10).

139:9. Live at the eastern horizon is literally "take up the wings of the dawn". The phrase, "if I lift my wings to the dawn," reinforces the concept of flying a long distance to avoid God's presence.

139:10. The Lord's authority extends beyond the cosmos, and His sovereignty recognizes no limits. Every human being is under the power, protection, and authority of God.

139:11. Evildoers cannot conceal their deeds from God (Job 22:11-14; 34:22).

139:12. Light and darkness are artificial distinctions for the Lord, who transcends creation.

139:13. Humankind is the Lord's possession and His creation (Gen. 14:19,22; Deut. 32:6). Inward parts (lit "kidneys") often denote the seat of emotion or affection (16:7; 73:21; Job 19:27).

139:14. The expression wonderfully made is a forceful rendering of the text. God's creation testifies to His power and majesty (Rom. 1:20).

139:15. The phrase depths of the earth is normally associated with death (63:9; Ezek. 26:20), but here it is figurative for the concealment of the womb.

139:16. The concept of the Lord's book that records the existence of all human beings reinforces God's sovereignty over life and death (69:28; Ex. 32:32-33).

| Romans 8:31-39

8:31. If God is for us expresses not a hypothetical scenario, but a sure reality: God really is for us. This well summarizes the gospel, and serves as a concise summary of 3:21-8:30 (Romans, 1:434). Old Testament believers had the same assurance: "I fear no danger, for You are with me" (Ps. 23:4; cp. Ps. 27:1). "This I

know: God is for me” (Ps. 56:9). Who is against us? The opposition seems like a lot sometimes—the world, the flesh, Satan, secularists, false religions, our enemies—but God loves us and is sovereign. Yahweh is our Shepherd, Maker of heaven and earth!

8:32. In contrast to Abraham who was permitted to spare his only son, God did not spare His Son. If God did the greater (gave His Son), will He not do the lesser and give us all that is necessary for life and godliness? Of course He will.

8:33. Our accusers are numerous, but God the Judge has already pronounced the final verdict.

8:35-36. God’s people have always faced persecutions and hardships, as vividly portrayed in the complaints of Psalm 44. Will such things separate us from the love of Christ?

8:37. We are more than victorious not by our ability but because God loved us.

8:38-39. Paul’s “grand persuasion” is in the perfect tense, which indicates a past action that has ongoing impact. Having been persuaded (by God), he stood firm in the belief that nothing could separate him from the love of God. Jesus conquered death and Satan on the cross, ensuring that nothing can change God’s love or purpose for us. We “are being protected by God’s power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (1Pet. 1:5).

Many interpreters have been puzzled by this section of Romans. Anti-Jewish interpreters argue that God is finished with the Jews (9:1-29), while other interpreters view these chapters as a digression from Paul’s exposition of the gospel. But K. H. Rengstorff of Germany recognized otherwise in 1949: “During the years of its sufferings, the Confessing Church learnt that Romans 9-11 held the key to the understanding of the New Testament.”

This is because these chapters help answer tough questions about how Jesus could be the Jewish Messiah and yet suffer rejection by the majority of Israel. Was the glory of the Davidic Messiah not supposed to excel the glory of David himself? Also, the Jewish expectation was that when Messiah came, Israel would be delivered from Gentile oppression and would hold priority over the nations. Since these things had not happened, many people assumed either that Jesus was not the promised Messiah or else that God had broken His promises to Israel. Furthermore, if Jesus really was Messiah and yet God had not delivered Israel, how could anyone trust Him to keep His gospel promises? And so the trustworthiness of God seemed to be on the line.

Paul overturned these doubts by answering from three perspectives: (1) from the viewpoint of divine sovereignty (chap. 9), (2) from human responsibility (chap. 10), and (3) from God’s final purpose (chap. 11).