



## Daily Devotionals: God Is Near | September 26, 2021

### Day 1 – Devotional

One of the characteristics of God that you often hear about focuses on the theological term “omnipresence.” It’s a big word that simply conveys this idea that God is in all places all the time.

Since WE are limited to one place at one time, this can be hard to wrap our minds around.

One problem—as we grasp the omnipresence of God, it may then be a difficult thing to understand that God is near to each one of us. The vastness of God and His presence being everywhere can make it difficult to grasp that God is present, near and interested in our daily lives. And along with that, another problem tends to be that at times, any semblance of God’s presence that we do feel in our lives often can be squelched by the worries and throes of life.

So, while we may claim that God is near *with our minds*, it’s a whole other ballgame to know that God is near *experientially*—on the mountaintops and in the valleys.

The topic this week is “God is near.” When we look in the Scriptures, we see that God is near to His people over and over and over again. Take for example a passage like **Psalm 145:8** when the Psalmist says, “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.” Or try on for size James’ promise in **James 4:8** that if you, “Come near to God...He will come near to you.”

Or just consider God’s nearness to the people of Israel all throughout their journey—from the time they were established through Abraham to their time in Egyptian slavery to their time as pronounced kingdoms in the Middle East to their time in Babylonian captivity and to the time when God became flesh and became “ultra” near (as NEAR as you can get!!!) in the person of Jesus Christ.

We see it all over the Bible. We know that God is near.



Because of this, some people can easily look to different times in their lives when God's presence felt so near to them, or they can look back at a time when God may not have felt near, but they can see how God worked in a situation.

Others, however, may have a difficult time recognizing God's nearness to them or are praying to feel God's presence, and it seems like there is no response. It feels like their prayers go up, hit the ceiling, and fall right back down.

Regardless of where we find ourselves, we are going to explore what Scripture says about God being near to us this week. Below is the poem "Footprints in the Sand" that speaks to God's nearness and to the feeling of God being distant when we need Him most. It is likely that you are familiar with this poem, but even if that's the case, read it slowly and think about some difficult circumstances you have come through in life and think about how God was near even if it felt like he wasn't.

### **Footprints in the Sand**

*One night I dreamed a dream.  
As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.  
Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.  
For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,  
One belonging to me and one to my Lord.  
After the last scene of my life flashed before me,  
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.  
I noticed that at many times along the path of my life,  
especially at the very lowest and saddest times,  
there was only one set of footprints.  
This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.  
"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,  
You'd walk with me all the way.  
But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life,  
there was only one set of footprints.  
I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me."*



*He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you  
Never, ever, during your trials and testings.  
When you saw only one set of footprints,  
It was then that I carried you."*

**Questions for reflection:**

1. When has God felt near to you? When has God felt distant?
2. How would you describe what God's nearness feels like to you right now in this season of life?
3. Looking back on the times when God felt distant in your life, can you look back now and see that He was working and near to you and the situation? How so?

**Practice for this week:**

The practice this week is what we're calling a "Nearness Experience," and it's pretty simple.

As Christians, we hold to the fact that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, resides within each and every one of us. Therefore, God is always with us. He is with us when we're alone, and He is with us when we are typing on our phones, when we're driving to get groceries, when our kids are acting crazy, and when circumstances arise that we don't know what to do. He's with us through it all.



As a practice this week, try and find God in the ordinary, everyday stuff of life. Where is He as you're grocery shopping? Where is He as you're out on the golf course? Where is He whenever you're with your family? Or maybe with your life group? Where is He when you're driving?

You get the idea. It is often the case that the felt sense of God's nearness is a function of our attention. Just like when you get a new car and you're suddenly aware of all the other cars on the road just like yours, we are aware of God's presence all around us whenever we have eyes that are looking for it.

You'll have space at the end of this week to note where you saw God and how God spoke to you this week!



## Day 2 – Look at the Book

For today's work, let's look at the main text for this week, **Psalm 139**. Here, you will read a song that David wrote praising God for creating him and knowing him.

As you read, do three things:

1. Underline what connects God's nearness to you
2. Circle any time you see a response to God's nearness
3. Star any personally significant words or phrases

## Psalm 139

For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.

- 1 You have searched me, Lord,  
and you know me.
- 2 You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- 3 You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.
- 4 Before a word is on my tongue  
you, Lord, know it completely.
- 5 You hem me in behind and before,  
and you lay your hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.
- 7 Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?
- 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
- 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,



- 10 even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.
- 11 If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me  
and the light become night around me,”
- 12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;  
the night will shine like the day,  
for darkness is as light to you.
- 13 For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
- 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.
- 15 My frame was not hidden from you  
when I was made in the secret place,  
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
- 16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;  
all the days ordained for me were written in your book  
before one of them came to be.
- 17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God!  
How vast is the sum of them!
- 18 Were I to count them,  
they would outnumber the grains of sand—  
when I awake, I am still with you.
- 19 If only you, God, would slay the wicked!  
Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
- 20 They speak of you with evil intent;  
your adversaries misuse your name.
- 21 Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord,  
and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?
- 22 I have nothing but hatred for them;  
I count them my enemies.
- 23 Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.



24 See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Questions for reflection:

1. How would you describe the way David talks about God's nearness?
2. Are there aspects of God's nearness that you need to reflect upon in your life? How are you making yourself aware of God's presence around you?
3. Take some time to write a short journal entry depicting your current sense and experience of God's nearness. If He feels close to you, how does that feel? What is that like? What metaphors might you use to talk about it? *Note: AS you do this, don't just do it abstractly. Take some time and attune yourself to the presence of God with you. Write this TO Him.*

If God doesn't feel near. That's okay. Write about that too. What does that experience feel like? What metaphors might you use to talk about it? *Note: Like above, AS you do this, don't just do it abstractly. Take some time and, even if God doesn't feel present, direct your words TO Him.*



### **Day 3 – Scripture Survey**

As we look at God’s nearness this week, we want to see what the whole story of Scripture has to say about this particular topic. Where else in Scripture can we go to read about God being near?

Take a few moments to slowly read through the passages below. As you read, take some time to ask yourself these three questions:

- What does this passage teach me about God’s nearness to me?
- What questions do I have about this?
- God, what are you inviting me into as I read and look through these verses?

**Genesis 28:10-17** (pay special attention to Jacob’s new understanding of God’s presence)

**Psalm 34:18**

**Philippians 4:4-6**

**James 4:7-8**



#### Day 4 – Story Work

The nearness of God is something that we perceive. God’s presence oftentimes will seem obvious to us or else God will feel distant. Take some time to read some passages of Scripture below and continue to reflect on your own life as you think about the passages and God’s nearness to you.

To begin today, read **James 4** as well as **Psalms 145**. Then, use the questions below to interact with the theme of God’s nearness.

1. Reflect on how you felt and perceived God’s nearness to you throughout your life. What are 1-3 times in your life when God’s presence was very tangible to you? Now, instead of just recounting those events or seasons in your life, in what ways did you position yourself to experience God’s presence?
2. Next, reflect on how you felt and perceived God being distant from you throughout your life. What are 1-3 times in your life when God’s presence felt very far off to you? Now, like above, instead of just recounting those events or seasons in your life, in what ways might you yourself have pulled away in those times?
3. Thinking about the times in which you drew near to God and experienced the nearness of His presence, how can you replicate those conditions for the future (think about habits, attitude, community, etc.)?



## Day 5 – Response

Now that you have spent this week thinking about how God is near to us all the time, and you have identified what it looks like in your life to draw near to God, the challenge is to put this into practice. Find a quiet space. Silence any technology around you. Spend some time reviewing your devotions this week. Jot down your thoughts to the following reflection questions:

Re-read Take **Psalm 145:8** and **James 4:8**.

As you look over this week, what words, phrases, Scriptures, etc. have stood out to you? What was the most significant thing? Why?

As you look over this week, where did you sense God’s nearness in the ordinary, everyday stuff of life? How was focusing your attention like that for you?

Has your perspective changed on times in which God did not feel near? Are there barriers in place preventing you from drawing close to God? If so, what is the source of these barriers? How can you consistently position yourself to draw near to God?

What is God inviting you to DO as a response to this week’s reflections?



Consider some of these suggestions as possible action steps as you step into living this week's truths:

- Write out a prayer of thanksgiving or journal ways in which God has been near to you—whether you felt it or not.
- Share with your life group or trusted friends things you will do and ways they can help you to consistently draw near to God and look for ways that He is near.
- On your calendar, block out a half-day or a whole day to spend time in God's Word, in prayer, in silence and solitude to just be alone with God.