

Series: God Is Near #1620

Title: Philippians 4.4-9

Knowing God Is Near

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Welcome back. Today we begin a new conversation centered on the Lord Jesus Christ and who He is in our lives. The title of this series is *God Is Near. God Is Near*. And that's because He is. It is important to know this fact – confirmed by faith – that God is near to us, for a few reasons. These are the ones I will take time to share. I realize you may have different ones and more. But in my own life recently I have been thinking about this. Why is it essential for me to *know* God is near to me? You might ask yourself this same question. Why is it essential for *you* to know God is near to *you*?

I think this is critical because, first, we will not always *feel* that God is near to us. I can testify to you that *I* do not always *feel* that He is close to *me*. In fact, some days the Lord feels very far from me. I want to ask, "Hello? God? Are you out there?" It seems awful quiet. I am praying, but my prayers seem unanswered. I do have a hunger and thirst for you, O God, but it feels like we're playing a game of hide and go seek and you are the player who has found the perfect hiding place. I close my eyes and count to a hundred and come running, but You are nowhere to be found. In my emotions, with my feelings, I feel as if God has abandoned me. My mind speaks: "He is not near. He is far away, if He is there at all."

What about you? Do you always feel that God is at your side? Maybe, but I doubt it. In fact, you might be ready to acknowledge that right now, today, where you are He feels very distant from *you*. If so, I am glad you are listening – and I hope you will continue to do so – because we will learn this *fact*: God is near. He is always near to you and me. Closer than we think. I will prove this to you from the Bible, which is God's Word, His promise to all of us. Just because we don't feel Him does not mean God is distant. In our time together we will open ourselves up and let the facts instruct our feelings. To help with this, please bring along your Bible or read when you have time the New Testament Book of Philippians chapter 4, especially verses 4-8. That's Philippians 4.4-8 and do turn there now, if you can.

Second, it is critical for us to know God is near because we know how much distance we try to put between God and ourselves. God is near but we try and run far away from him. God is faithful to us, but we are faithless to Him. If we are honest it is not God on the run but we on the run. This is primarily due to our sin. We love and cherish what satisfies us so deeply that when we are actively engaged in that which displeases and hurts the heart of God, we escape His presence. We do not want to be bothered by the convicting voice of the Spirit of God, so we flee. Like the prodigal son we take our inheritance and escape to the far country to spend it all in sin.

Ah, so then it becomes crucial to know this biblical fact: God is near. None of us can outrun Him. None of us can escape Him. None of us can hide. We are constantly exposed to the presence of the Living and Almighty God. God is near. I think of the Psalmist writing to God in Psalm 139, beginning in verse 7. Psalm 139, verses 7-12, "**Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. ⁹ If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, ¹⁰ even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me. ¹¹ If I say, 'Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night,' ¹² even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You.**"

Why is it essential for us to know that God is near? First, this is essential because we will not always *feel* that God is near to us. Second, this is essential because we know how much distance we try to put between God and ourselves. And third, it is essential for us to know that God is near because other people may not be near. We are lonely, isolated, and deserted. Family and friends, once close to us, have been unfaithful to us. They have betrayed and abandoned us. The closer they were to us, the harder this is for us. I can relate to this. You are not alone in feeling this way. Did you hear me? You are not alone in feeling this way. It is a common human experience to be or to feel all alone in this world.

So that when we really are alone. Or when we just *feel* lonely, we must know that God is near to us. Circumstances in life may isolate us from other people. And people may intentionally (or unintentionally) forsake us. But God will never leave us or forsake us. The Lord promises this in Hebrews 13, verse 5. I am quoting *God*, "**For He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you...'**" I am certain someone tuning in right now needs to hear this. God is saying to you, listen attentively now, God says, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." Please receive that for *you*. Write it down if you would in the margin of your Bible or make a note for yourself. Hebrews 13, verse 5. "For He Himself has said, 'I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you...'"

There are definitely times in our lives when all we have is *God*. And those times, as it turns out, are great times. When we look back on those episodes or periods don't we often thank God, because that was when we knew of His presence in a profound manner? I am not talking about seeing Jesus with our physical eyes. Or feeling the touch of the Holy Spirit as if He had a hand to grasp our arm. I am not even referring to an audible sound or voice. I have never seen Jesus standing before me. I have never felt God's hand upon my shoulder. I have never heard God speak audibly. And yet, still, He is there. He is here. He is near. I *do* have God's Word in this Bible and when I read what He says and I believe what He says, then I know God is near.

And so, with these reasons in mind, let's get into the Word of God at Philippians chapter 4. I will read verses 4-8. This is Philippians 4, beginning in verse 4. "**Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."**

Obviously the phrase here that captures our attention is in verse 5, "The Lord is near." We will invest time with this, but just before we get to it I want to say something (briefly) by way of setting these words in context. What is the theme, background, and setting of the Book of Philippians? If you have ever read the four chapters that make up this short book then you probably already know the theme is the joy that we have in Jesus. Finding our joy in Jesus is what this letter is all about. And that, right there, has immediate application for all of us who need to know that God is near.

Because those who wonder if God is near usually struggle with unhappiness, fear, anxiety, constant worry, loneliness, disappointment, grief, gloom, doom, and hopelessness. This can be true of people who are Christians as well, of course, for those who are not. As we will see next time, both the author of Philippians and the people who received and read this letter originally, they all had good reasons to be without joy, and yet we learn that they were complete with *joy* because they found their joy in Jesus.

Thus begins our introduction to this: *God Is Near*. And I want to close by praying for us as we embark on this journey. Lord Jesus, thank You that we find our joy in You! Thank You that You are near. This brings us great joy. I pray for all who will hear this now and sometime in the future. Will You, by Your Spirit and through Your Word, speak to them? Will You encourage the downcast and destitute? Will You re-assure the anxious and afraid? Will You be present to the lonely and isolated? O God, speak through me. Use me as your servant to speak Your Word of Truth to these, my beloved friends. I believe You will do all this. Amen.

Join us next time because God Is Near.

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