

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

THEOLOGY PROPER

The Doctrine of God

UNIT 4: THE INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Lesson 12

The Omnipresence of God

The God from Whom There Is No Hiding

Key Texts: Psalm 139:7–12; Jeremiah 23:23–24; 1 Kings 8:27; Acts 17:27–28

Where Can I Go from Your Spirit? — The All-Present God

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Series Verse

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Romans 11:33–36, NASB 1995

Introduction

In Lesson 11 we explored the twin attributes of eternity and infinity, the truth that God transcends the temporal and spatial dimensions of the created order, inhabiting eternity as His native environment and possessing an unlimited, unsearchable greatness that no creaturely measure can contain or exhaust. We saw that as eternity is infinity with respect to time, infinity encompasses God's transcendence over every dimension of creaturely limitation. We closed with the declaration of Isaiah 57:15, the high and exalted One who inhabits eternity also dwells with the contrite and lowly of spirit, as the bridge between divine transcendence and divine immanence that sets the stage for what we take up now.

In Lesson 12 we address the most intimate and most immediately pastoral of all the incommunicable attributes covered in Unit 4: the omnipresence of God. If eternity declares that God is not bounded by time, omnipresence declares that God is not bounded by space. If infinity declares that God's being is without limit or measure, omnipresence declares that His presence is without spatial restriction. He is not here and not there; He is not in the sanctuary and absent from the hospital room; He is not in the heavens and remote from the valley. He is fully present, not partially, not representatively, not through an agent or an influence, fully, personally, completely present, everywhere, at all times, without exception and without limit.

The doctrine of omnipresence is one of the most practically significant in all of Theology Proper, and it is also one of the most frequently misunderstood. It is misunderstood by those who confuse it with pantheism, who imagine that God's presence everywhere must mean that God is identical with everything, and that the creation is therefore a mode or expression of the divine being. It is misunderstood by those who treat it as a primarily threatening truth, the surveillance God who sees every sin and from whom no wrongdoer can escape. And it is misunderstood, perhaps most commonly and most sadly, by those who have never allowed it to function as the comfort it is designed to be: the truth that the God who loved us enough to send His Son is never more than the silent prayer away from the loneliest and most desolate soul that has ever drawn breath.

I. Defining Omnipresence: Fully Present Everywhere, Contained by Nowhere

The doctrine of divine omnipresence is the affirmation that God is fully present everywhere at all times, without being contained by any place. Each element of this definition deserves careful attention, for each guards against a specific distortion of the doctrine.

"Fully present", This phrase distinguishes the Christian doctrine of omnipresence from the idea of a divine influence or an impersonal force that permeates the universe. God is not present in the way that an electromagnetic field is present, distributed through space in varying degrees of intensity, stronger at some points and weaker at others. He is fully present at every point: not a fraction of His being, not a representation of His

being, not a delegate of His being, but the whole, undivided God, with all His perfections, all His knowledge, all His power, and all His personal attention, present to every point in His creation simultaneously and without diminution.

“At all times”, God’s presence is not occasional, not seasonal, and not conditional upon the spiritual state of the one who occupies a particular location. He does not withdraw from certain places and concentrate His presence in others in such a way that some places are genuinely God-forsaken while others are genuinely God-inhabited. His presence is continuous, constant, and comprehensive, without interruption and without exception.

“Without being contained by any place”, This is the most theologically precise and most frequently misunderstood dimension of the definition. God is not present in the way that a physical object is present, occupying a specific volume of space, located at a particular set of coordinates, bounded by the space it fills. He is present to every place without being contained within any place. Solomon’s great confession at the dedication of the Temple captures this precisely: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27, NASB 1995). The highest heaven cannot contain God, not because God is larger than heaven, but because containment is a creaturely category that does not apply to the One who transcends all spatial limitation while being present to all spatial reality.

II. The Distinction Between Divine Immensity and Divine Omnipresence

The theological tradition has carefully distinguished between two related but distinct aspects of God’s spatial transcendence: His immensity and His omnipresence. This distinction is subtle but important, and grasping it prevents the confusion of omnipresence with pantheism while preserving the genuine reality of God’s presence to every point in creation.

Divine immensity refers to God’s transcendence of all spatial limitation from the perspective of His own being: He is not contained by, bounded by, or located within space. Space is a feature of the created order, a mode of the extended, material world that God created. God is not within space as its largest possible occupant, nor is He identical with space as its pervasive substance. He is above space, as its Creator and Sustainer, in a mode of being that is categorically different from spatial existence. His immensity means that He cannot be located, mapped, or measured by any spatial coordinate system, because He is not the kind of Being to whom spatial location applies in the creaturely sense.

Divine omnipresence refers to God’s genuine presence to every point within the creation He transcends: though He is not contained by space, He is nonetheless genuinely present to every point in space. The God who transcends the spatial order by virtue of His immensity is also the God who is intimately present to every corner of that order by virtue of His omnipresence. These two truths are not in tension; they are the two sides of the same theological coin. Immensity explains how God can be

omnipresent without being confined: because He transcends space, He is not restricted to any particular location within it, and is therefore able to be fully present to all locations simultaneously. Omnipresence explains what immensity means in practical terms: that the God who transcends all spatial limitation is nonetheless genuinely, personally, and fully present to every creature in every place.

The distinction between immensity and omnipresence is what separates the Christian doctrine from both deism on one side and pantheism on the other. Deism affirms immensity (God is beyond the universe) but denies omnipresence (He is not genuinely present within it). Pantheism affirms a kind of presence (the divine pervades everything) but denies immensity (God is identical with the universe, not above it). Biblical theism insists on both: God is above the universe by virtue of His immensity, and He is genuinely present within it by virtue of His omnipresence. He is near without being identical; He is present without being confined.

III. Psalm 139:7–12: Where Can I Go from Your Spirit?

The most magnificent and most personally searching biblical meditation on divine omnipresence is Psalm 139, the great psalm of David on the all-knowing, all-present God. The psalm moves through the omniscience of God (vv. 1–6), the omnipresence of God (vv. 7–12), the creative power of God (vv. 13–16), and the searching holiness of God (vv. 17–24) in a single, sustained, increasingly intimate meditation. We focus in this lesson on the central section, the omnipresence passage of verses 7–12:

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night,’ even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You.”, Psalm 139:7–12, NASB 1995

The opening question, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?”, is not a desperate cry of the hunted; it is a rhetorical question, the answer to which is already known and is about to be declared: nowhere. There is no place in the created order from which the presence of God is absent. The psalmist then maps the extremities of the created cosmos as a series of hypothetical escape routes, each of which collapses before the omnipresence of the living God.

The vertical axis: the highest point of the cosmos (heaven) and the lowest point (Sheol, the realm of the dead, understood in ancient Near Eastern cosmology as the deepest place in the created order). If I ascend to the uttermost heights, You are there. If I descend to the uttermost depths, You are there also. The omnipresence of God fills the vertical axis of creation from its highest point to its deepest.

The horizontal axis: the eastern extremity (the wings of the dawn, where the sun rises) and the western extremity (the remotest part of the sea, understood as the distant western horizon). Even there, at the furthest conceivable remove from the center of covenantal life in Israel, Your hand will lead me and Your right hand will lay hold of me. The omnipresence of God fills the horizontal axis of creation from its easternmost to its

westernmost extent. There is no corner of the geographical universe from which God is absent.

The darkness axis: the darkness that seems to hide, that seems to provide a concealment even the divine gaze cannot penetrate. But even the darkness is not dark to God; the night is as bright as the day. The omnipresence of God fills what seems the most impenetrable privacy of the created order. Darkness provides no shelter from His presence, because His presence is not dependent on light for its operation.

The cumulative effect of this cosmic cartography is the recognition that there is no coordinate in the created order, no height, no depth, no distance, no darkness, from which God is absent. He is fully, personally, inescapably present everywhere. The question of verse 7 admits of only one answer: there is nowhere to go. There is no place where God is not.

IV. Jeremiah 23:23–24: Do I Not Fill the Heavens and the Earth?

While Psalm 139 explores the omnipresence of God from the perspective of the creature who cannot escape it, Jeremiah 23:23–24 gives us the divine perspective, God's own declaration of His omnipresence in the context of a prophetic confrontation with false prophets who imagine they can speak visions of their own hearts and attribute them to the LORD while remaining beyond His observation. The passage reads:

“Am I a God who is near,” declares the LORD, “and not a God far off? Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?” declares the LORD. “Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?” declares the LORD., Jeremiah 23:23–24, NASB 1995

The rhetorical structure of the passage is a series of divine questions that each expect a negative answer and together constitute a comprehensive affirmation of omnipresence. The first question, “Am I a God who is near, and not a God far off?”, is a polemic against the ancient and persistent human tendency to imagine that God's presence is localized to specific sacred places and absent from ordinary life. The false prophets of Jeremiah's day operated under the implicit assumption that they could speak falsely in private, in the hiddenness of their own hearts, without God's omniscient attention reaching them. The first question dismantles this assumption: I am not merely a near God, present in the sanctuary and absent from the secret chamber of the false prophet's heart. I am not merely a far-off God, enthroned in transcendent remoteness and uninvolved in the particulars of human life and speech.

The second question, “Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?”, is the omnipresence question at its most searching and most personal. The answer is implied and absolute: no. No one can conceal himself from the omnipresent God. Not in literal physical concealment, and not in the more subtle concealment of the heart. The inner life, the private thought, the secret ambition, the concealed sin, all of these are as visible to the omnipresent God as the most public and observed act of the most scrutinized life.

The third and most comprehensive question, “Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?”, is the omnipresence declaration in its most cosmic and most comprehensive form. The Hebrew verb *mālē* (“fill”) does not suggest that God is the spatial content of the

heavens and the earth, that He is identical with the space they constitute, in the pantheistic sense. It suggests that He is fully present to every dimension of the heavens and the earth, that there is no space within the created order from which He is absent. He fills them not as water fills a vessel, occupying and contained, but as the Creator is present to His creation, fully and personally present to every point within it while remaining transcendent over and beyond it.

The pastoral and apologetic significance of this passage is enormous. It establishes that there is no private life from God, no corner of human experience that is beyond His knowledge and presence, and no speech or thought or intention that escapes His omniscient attention. This is a truth of radical accountability for the false prophet, the secret sinner, and the one who imagines that the darkness will provide cover for what the light would expose. But it is also, as we shall see in Section VI, a truth of radical comfort for the one who feels abandoned, forgotten, or lost beyond the reach of God's care.

V. Three Modes of Divine Presence: General, Gracious, and Glorious

Having established the comprehensive reality of divine omnipresence, we must now introduce a distinction that is crucial for understanding how the Bible speaks about God's presence in differentiated ways without contradicting the doctrine of omnipresence. The theological tradition has distinguished three modes or dimensions of divine presence, each genuine and each operating simultaneously, but each differently characterized in terms of its purpose, its intensity, and its relational meaning.

A. General Presence: The Sustaining Presence of the Creator

God's general presence is His presence to all of creation as its Creator and Sustainer, the presence by which He upholds all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3), in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:17), in whom we live and move and exist (Acts 17:28). This is the presence that Psalm 139:7–12 describes in its cosmic cartography: the presence that extends from heaven to Sheol, from the wings of the dawn to the remotest sea, through the darkness as through the light. It is the presence that makes omnipresence what it is, universal, continuous, comprehensive, and without exception.

God's general presence is extended to every creature in every place, regardless of that creature's relationship to Him. The wicked man experiences God's general presence no less than the saint; the unbeliever is sustained in existence by the same divine presence that sustains the believer. This is what Paul declares to the Athenians: "He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:27–28, NASB 1995). The pagan Athenians, offering sacrifices to unknown gods, are sustained in their very existence by the presence of the God they do not know. His presence is the ground of their being, the condition of their consciousness, the sustainer of their breath, whether they acknowledge it or not.

B. Gracious Presence: The Covenantal Presence of the Redeemer

God's gracious presence is His special, covenantal, saving presence with His redeemed people, the presence that is not merely sustaining but transforming, not merely universal but particular, not merely the presence of the Creator to His creatures but the presence of the Father to His children, the Shepherd to His flock, the Bridegroom to His bride. This is the presence that constitutes the deepest blessing of the covenant relationship: "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33, NASB 1995).

The gracious presence of God is what Moses pleaded for at the decisive moment of Israel's crisis in Exodus 33: "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here" (Exodus 33:15, NASB 1995). Moses did not doubt God's general omnipresence; he knew God was everywhere. What he pleaded for was the gracious presence, the personal, accompanying, covenant-fulfilling presence of the God who had bound Himself to Israel as their God. This gracious presence is what the Tabernacle and the Temple were designed to symbolize: the localized, particular, covenantal dwelling of the omnipresent God with His particular people.

In the New Testament, the gracious presence of God reaches its fullest expression in the indwelling Holy Spirit, who is given to every believer as the down payment of the eternal inheritance (Ephesians 1:13–14). The Spirit's indwelling is not merely a general divine sustenance but the personal, covenantal, transforming presence of the triune God dwelling within the body of the believer: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19, NASB 1995). This gracious presence is the distinguishing mark of the redeemed life.

C. Glorious Presence: The Eschatological Presence of the Consummation

God's glorious presence is the fullest and most direct manifestation of His presence, the presence that is now experienced proleptically in moments of intense divine encounter (the burning bush, the Sinai theophany, the heavenly throne room of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4–5) and that will be experienced in its completeness in the consummated new creation. This is the presence of which John speaks in Revelation 21:3: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them."

The eschatological promise of God's glorious presence is the ultimate goal of the entire redemptive narrative. The exile from the Garden was an exile from God's glorious presence; the Tabernacle and Temple were provisional and mediated anticipations of it; the incarnation was its supreme though veiled expression in history; the indwelling Spirit is its down payment in the present age; and the new creation will be its full and final realization. The name Jehovah-Shammah, "THE LORD Is There" (Ezekiel 48:35), is the eschatological name of the restored city precisely because the glorious presence of God is the ultimate definition of the blessed life: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8, NASB 1995).

These three modes of presence, general, gracious, and glorious, are not three different Gods or three different presences of the same God; they are three dimensions of the single, undivided omnipresence of the one God, differently characterized in relation to their purpose and their recipients. The believer simultaneously enjoys all three: the

general presence that sustains his existence, the gracious presence that constitutes his covenantal relationship with God, and the anticipatory foretaste of the glorious presence that will be his eternal inheritance.

VI. Theological Implications: Omnipresence, Pantheism, and the Creator-Creature Distinction

The doctrine of omnipresence must be carefully protected from the pantheistic confusion that has plagued the history of theology and philosophy and that continues to exercise influence in contemporary spirituality. The confusion runs as follows: if God is present everywhere, and if everything exists somewhere, then God is present in everything, and if God is present in everything, then perhaps God is everything, or everything is in some sense divine. This reasoning has produced the “god is in everything” spirituality of contemporary New Age religion, the “all is one” metaphysic of certain Eastern philosophies, and the formal pantheism of thinkers like Spinoza, who explicitly identified God with the totality of nature.

Biblical omnipresence is categorically different from pantheism, and the distinction turns on a single crucial point: the Creator-creature distinction. The omnipresent God is present to every part of His creation, but He is not identical with any part of it, or with the whole of it. His presence to creation is the presence of the Creator to the creature, a presence that is real, personal, and comprehensive, but that is never a presence of identity or of mixture. God and the world are never the same thing; the divine being is never confused with the being of the creature; the presence of God to a place is never the same as God’s being that place.

The classic formulation of the distinction is found in Acts 17:27–28, where Paul quotes the Greek poet Aratus, “For we are also His children” (or “offspring”), in a context that simultaneously affirms God’s universal presence (“in Him we live and move and exist”) and maintains the absolute distinction between God and the world He has made (He is the God who made the world and all things in it, v. 24, who is not served by human hands as though He needed anything, v. 25). Paul uses the poet’s language of divine presence and human derivation from God without conceding the pantheistic conclusion that the poet’s philosophical framework might have endorsed. We are in Him as our Sustainer; we are not Him.

The theological precision required here is the same precision we exercised in Lesson 11 regarding infinity and spatial extension: God is not spread out through space as its spatial content; He is present to space as its Creator and Sustainer. His presence in the world is not the presence of a substance that pervades and constitutes the world from the inside; it is the presence of the sovereign, personal, transcendent God who upholds and governs the world from beyond it while remaining genuinely present to every point within it. Omnipresence without pantheism requires both the Creator-creature distinction (God is not the world) and the doctrine of omnipresence (God is fully present to the world), and the biblical testimony insists on both with equal force.

VII. The Pastoral Significance: Comfort for the Believer, Warning for the Unbeliever

The doctrine of omnipresence carries two distinct but equally important pastoral implications, one for the believer and one for the unbeliever. They are not merely the two sides of the same coin; they are the two ways in which the same truth, that God is inescapably, comprehensively present, encounters two different postures of the human soul.

A. For the Believer: God Is Never Far

For the person who is in Christ, the omnipresence of God is one of the most comforting and most liberating truths in all of theology. It means that the God who has loved you, redeemed you, adopted you, and given you His Spirit as the pledge of your inheritance is never at a distance from you. Not in the emergency room at 3 a.m. Not in the prison cell. Not in the foreign country. Not in the pit of depression. Not in the darkest night of the soul when every consolation seems to have withdrawn and God Himself seems absent. “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?”, and the answer, even for the despairing soul, even for the one who feels utterly abandoned, is: nowhere. God is there.

The great promise of Hebrews 13:5, “He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you’” (NASB 1995), is the personal, covenantal declaration of the omnipresent God to His redeemed people. The promise is not that God will be mostly present, or present in the sanctuary but not in the street, or present in the good seasons and absent in the bad. It is the promise of permanent, unconditional, covenant-secured presence, a presence that no circumstance can interrupt, no sin can permanently rupture (for Christ is the propitiation that maintains the gracious presence even in the believer’s failure), and no power in the universe can sever.

Isaiah 43:1–2 expresses this covenant omnipresence with a lyrical tenderness that has sustained the faith of God’s people through millennia of trial:

“But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel, ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you.’”, Isaiah 43:1–2, NASB 1995

I will be with you: not I will watch you from a distance, not I will send help to you, but I will be with you. The preposition is the promise of presence, the covenant omnipresence of the God who has called His people by name and claimed them as His own. The waters and the rivers and the fire are the biblical metaphors for the extremities of trial, the situations in which human resources are entirely overwhelmed and nothing but the presence of God stands between the soul and destruction. And in precisely those situations, the omnipresent God declares His most intimate and most specific promise: I will be there.

B. For the Unbeliever: God Is Never Absent

For the person who is not in Christ, the omnipresence of God is a doctrine of radical accountability. The same omnipresence that is comfort for the believer is warning for the unbeliever: there is nowhere to hide. The secret sin is not secret. The private rejection

of God is not private. The heart that has said “There is no God” has said it in the presence of the God it is denying. Jeremiah 23:24 presses this with unwavering directness: “Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?” declares the LORD.

This is not primarily a threat designed to terrorize; it is a truth designed to awaken. The omnipresence of God is the ground of the universal accountability that Paul traces in Romans 1:18–20, the reason no one has an excuse before God is precisely that no one has ever been outside the presence of the God they are suppressing. The *sensus divinitatis*, the innate knowledge of God that we examined in Lesson 4, is not a knowledge received from a distance, delivered by a God who is far away; it is the knowledge that comes from the presence of the omnipresent Creator who is the constant environment of every human soul.

But the pastoral purpose of this warning for the unbeliever is not condemnation but invitation. The God from whom there is no hiding is also the God who does not hide Himself from those who seek Him: “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13, NASB 1995). The same omnipresence that makes flight impossible makes finding possible. He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:27). The distance between the unbeliever and the living God is not a spatial distance, the omnipresent God is as near to the unbeliever as He is to the saint, but a relational distance, a distance of sin and suppression that the gospel is designed to close.

Key Texts (NASB 1995)

Psalm 139:7–12

“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, ‘Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, and the light around me will be night,’ even the darkness is not dark to You, and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You.”

Jeremiah 23:23–24

“‘Am I a God who is near,’ declares the LORD, ‘and not a God far off? Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?’ declares the LORD. ‘Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?’ declares the LORD.”

1 Kings 8:27

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!”

Acts 17:27–28

“...that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His children.’”

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Omnipresence	The divine attribute affirming that God is fully present everywhere at all times, without being contained by any place. God is not distributed through space in varying degrees but fully present, with all His perfections, knowledge, and personal attention, to every point in creation simultaneously. Declared in Psalm 139:7–12, Jeremiah 23:23–24, and Acts 17:27–28.
Divine Immensity	God’s transcendence of all spatial limitation from the perspective of His own being: He is not contained by, bounded by, or located within space. Immensity is the “negative” side of God’s spatial attributes, what He is not (contained, located, bounded). Distinguished from omnipresence, which is the “positive” side: His genuine, full presence to every point in the created order He transcends.
General Presence	God’s presence to all of creation as its Creator and Sustainer, by which He upholds all things (Hebrews 1:3), holds all things together (Colossians 1:17), and is the environment of every creature’s existence (“in Him we live and move and exist,” Acts 17:28). Extended universally to every creature regardless of its relationship to God. The ground of God’s general omnipresence.
Gracious Presence	God’s special, covenantal, saving presence with His redeemed people, the presence that is not merely sustaining but transforming, personal, and constitutive of the covenant relationship. Symbolized in the Old Testament by the Tabernacle and Temple; realized in the New Testament through the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19); the distinguishing mark of the redeemed life.
Glorious Presence	The fullest and most direct manifestation of God’s presence, experienced proleptically in great theophanic encounters (Exodus 24, Isaiah 6, Revelation 4–5) and to be experienced in its completeness in the consummated new creation (Revelation 21:3). The ultimate goal of redemptive history: the full, unmediated, face-to-face presence of the triune God with His people forever. The meaning of Jehovah-Shammah (Ezekiel 48:35).
Theophany	From the Greek theos (God) and phainein (to appear). A visible or perceptible manifestation of God’s glorious presence in history.

	Includes the burning bush (Exodus 3), the pillar of cloud and fire (Exodus 13), the Sinai theophany (Exodus 19–20), Isaiah’s throne-room vision (Isaiah 6), and the transfiguration of Christ (Matthew 17:1–8). Each theophany is a proleptic and partial disclosure of the glorious presence that will be the permanent experience of the redeemed.
Mālē’ (מלא)	Hebrew verb meaning “to fill,” used in Jeremiah 23:24: “Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?” Does not suggest that God is the spatial content of the heavens and earth (pantheism) but that He is fully present to every dimension of the created order, without any part of creation being outside His presence. A declaration of comprehensive omnipresence.
Pantheism	The philosophical and religious view that God is identical with the universe, that the divine is the totality of all that exists. Confuses omnipresence (God is present to everything) with identity (God is everything). Refuted by the Creator-creature distinction: God is present to creation as its Creator and Sustainer, not as its substance or its content. The omnipresent God is near without being identical.
Panentheism	The view that the world is contained within God (as a part is contained in a whole) while God also transcends the world. Distinguished from pantheism (which identifies God with the world entirely) but still compromising the Creator-creature distinction by making the world a component of the divine being. Rejected by biblical theism, which insists that God is genuinely present to the world without the world being in any sense a part of God.
Sensus Divinitatis	The innate knowledge of God implanted in every human being (Romans 1:19; Calvin). In the context of omnipresence: the sensus divinitatis is not a knowledge received from a God who is at a distance but the knowledge that comes from the immediate, inescapable proximity of the omnipresent God to every human soul. The omnipresence of God is the experiential ground of the universality of the sensus divinitatis.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that God is fully present, not partially, not representatively, not through an agent or influence, to every point in the created order, simultaneously and without diminution, at all times. We must believe that this omnipresence is not pantheism: God is present to everything without being identical with anything. We must believe in the three modes of divine presence and understand how they differ: the general presence that sustains every creature’s existence, the gracious presence that constitutes the believer’s covenantal relationship with God, and the glorious presence that awaits the redeemed in the new creation. And we must believe that the omnipresence of God is

one of the most powerful pastoral truths available to the church, a truth that, when truly apprehended, transforms the experience of solitude, suffering, abandonment, and fear by anchoring them in the inescapable nearness of the God who has promised never to leave or forsake His people.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

The omnipresence of God should produce in the believer a permanent sense of being accompanied, not watched in the surveillance sense, but accompanied in the shepherd sense. Every room you enter, God is there. Every moment you experience, God is present. Every prayer you whisper in the dark, God hears from within the same darkness, which is no darkness to Him. The appropriate response to the omnipresence of God is not the anxiety of the one who cannot escape a watching eye, but the comfort of the one who can never be lost, who, no matter where life carries them, is always already in the presence of the One who loves them and has promised never to abandon them. Let us desire to live in the conscious awareness of this presence, practicing what Brother Lawrence called “the practice of the presence of God,” the habitual awareness of the God who is always near.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

1. **Practice the presence of God.** The omnipresence of God is an objective truth; the practice of God’s presence is the subjective appropriation of that truth in the moment-by-moment awareness of daily life. Develop the habit of consciously acknowledging God’s presence in the ordinary moments of the day, in the morning when you rise, in the routine tasks of work and home, in the conversations of ordinary life. He is there. Acknowledge it. Speak to Him. Listen for Him. Live as one who knows that the omnipresent God is the constant environment of every moment.
2. **Use the omnipresence of God to combat spiritual loneliness.** Loneliness is one of the most painful features of the fallen human experience, and it has no respect for the believer’s theological credentials. The Christian can be lonely. But the Christian can never be alone, in the deepest sense, because the omnipresent God is with them. When loneliness presses hardest, return to Psalm 139: Where can I go from Your Spirit? The answer is: nowhere. And in that nowhere, there is a Someone who knows you, accompanies you, and has promised to be with you to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).
3. **Live in the accountability that omnipresence requires.** Jeremiah 23:24 is not comfortable for the person with secret sins: “Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?” There is no private life from God. The omnipresence that comforts the believer is the same omnipresence that holds the sinner accountable. Let this truth be a regular spiritual discipline: before engaging in anything you would not do if other believers were watching, remember that the omnipresent God is already watching, already present, already there. The awareness of His presence is one of the most powerful deterrents to secret sin and one of the most powerful incentives to integrity in the unseen moments of life.

4. **Comfort the grieving and the abandoned with the omnipresence of God.**

The person who sits in the hospital room at 3 a.m., or in the desolation of a broken marriage, or in the loneliness of aging and loss, is not outside the presence of God. Isaiah 43:1–2 was written for precisely this person: I will be with you when you pass through the waters; I will be with you when you walk through the fire. The pastoral application of omnipresence is not a platitude; it is the declaration of a specific divine promise grounded in an objective theological reality. Use it. Speak it. Let the people of God know that the God who is everywhere is also the God who has promised to be specifically, covenantally, and personally with them.

5. **Witness to unbelievers from the premise of divine omnipresence.** Paul's Areopagus speech (Acts 17:22–31) is a masterclass in using the doctrine of omnipresence as a bridge to gospel proclamation. He begins with what the Athenians already know: the God in whom they live and move and exist, the One who is not far from each of them. He then moves from that near presence to the specific content of the gospel, the resurrection and the coming judgment. Use the omnipresence of God as your apologetic starting point with the spiritually sensitive unbeliever: the God you are seeking, the One you sense is near, the One your conscience testifies to, has made Himself known. His name is Jesus Christ.

D. For Every Season of Life

For the new believer: You have been sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13–14), who is God's gracious presence dwelling within you. The God who is omnipresent in the general sense has made your body a specific dwelling place of His Spirit in the gracious sense. You are never without the presence of God, not in the moments when you feel it vividly, and not in the moments when you feel nothing at all. His presence does not depend on your feelings. It depends on His promise. "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5, NASB 1995).

For the one who has experienced profound desolation: There are seasons of the Christian life, the dark night of the soul, as the mystics called it, when the felt sense of God's presence utterly withdraws, when prayer seems to reach no higher than the ceiling, when the God who was once so vivid and so near has become invisible and silent. In those seasons, Psalm 139 is not primarily a comfort about feelings; it is a declaration about reality. God is there. His presence is not conditional on your awareness of it. Even in the darkest darkness, the darkness is not dark to Him. He is there.

For the one who fears: The omnipresence of God is the specific answer to the fear of abandonment, the fear that in the worst moments, you will face them alone. Isaiah 43:1–2 was written for the worst moment: when you pass through the waters, when you walk through the fire. The preposition "with" is the promise: I will be with you. Not watching from a distance, not sending a representative, not providing a resource. With you. Present. Near. The omnipresent God, who inhabits eternity, has made His home in the moment of your greatest fear. Let that be your anchor.

For the pastor and teacher: The doctrine of omnipresence is the theological ground of the most frequently needed pastoral comfort: the assurance of God's presence in suffering and desolation. Every pastoral situation in which someone feels abandoned, forgotten, or beyond the reach of God's care is an occasion to teach and apply this doctrine. Know it well. Preach it with both theological precision and pastoral warmth. Let the people of God know that the God who fills the heavens and the earth has also promised to fill the valley of their shadow of death with His presence, and that even there, His hand will lead them, and His right hand will lay hold of them.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Have you ever been in a situation, a hospital room, a moment of profound grief, a night of acute fear or loneliness, where you were tempted to feel that God was absent or far away? What Scripture, truth, or experience helped to anchor you in those moments? Share briefly with the group.

Observation Questions (What Does the Text Say?)

2. Read Psalm 139:7–12 carefully. Identify the three axes along which the psalmist explores divine omnipresence (vertical: heaven to Sheol; horizontal: wings of the dawn to the remotest sea; the darkness axis). What does the psalmist declare about God's presence at the extreme of each axis? What is the effect of this cosmic cartography on the rhetorical question of verse 7?

3. Read Jeremiah 23:23–24. What is the context of this passage, who is God addressing and about what issue? Identify the three rhetorical questions God asks. What does each question affirm about His presence? What is the pastoral and apologetic significance of the declaration "Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?" in this specific context of false prophecy?

4. Read 1 Kings 8:22–30. What is the occasion of Solomon's prayer? What does verse 27 declare about the relationship between God and the Temple he has just built? What is theologically significant about the fact that Solomon, having just dedicated a house for God, immediately acknowledges that God cannot be contained by it?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

5. Explain the distinction between divine immensity and divine omnipresence. How do these two aspects of God's spatial character relate to each other? How does this distinction guard against both deism (on the one side) and pantheism (on the other)?

6. Describe the three modes of divine presence: general, gracious, and glorious. What is the distinctive character of each? How does the gracious presence differ from the general presence, and how does the glorious presence differ from both? How does a believer simultaneously experience all three?

7. Why does the doctrine of omnipresence not lead to pantheism? What is the precise theological difference between saying “God is present to everything” and saying “God is everything”? How does Acts 17:27–28 affirm divine omnipresence while maintaining the Creator-creature distinction?

8. The lesson argues that the omnipresence of God is comfort for the believer and warning for the unbeliever, but that both emerge from the same truth. How do you hold both the comfort and the warning together without collapsing one into the other? How does the gospel function as the bridge that transforms the warning into an invitation?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

9. What would it look like, practically, to cultivate “the practice of the presence of God” in your daily life? What habits of mind and heart might help you move from the intellectual affirmation of divine omnipresence to the moment-by-moment awareness of the God who is always near?

10. Jeremiah 23:24 declares that no one can hide from God. In what area of your life are you most tempted to live as though God is not present, where your private thoughts, private speech, or private behavior do not match your public confession? How does the doctrine of omnipresence call you to greater integrity in the unseen moments of your life?

11. Isaiah 43:1–2 promises God’s presence specifically in the waters and the fire, the extremities of trial. What is the “water” or “fire” of your present circumstances? How does the specific promise of God’s accompanying presence (“I will be with you”) address that specific situation in a way that a more general theological affirmation of omnipresence might not?

12. Paul’s Areopagus speech begins with divine omnipresence as his point of contact with the Athenian audience (“He is not far from each one of us”) and moves toward the gospel proclamation. How might you use the doctrine of omnipresence, the truth that God is near to every person, including those who do not yet know Him, as a bridge to gospel conversation with a spiritually searching person in your own life?

Prayer Focus

Open your prayer with the searching questions of Psalm 139:7: Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? Sit with the weight of those questions, not as desperate cries but as rhetorical declarations of a profound theological reality. Let the answer settle upon you: nowhere. There is nowhere you can go from His Spirit, no place you can be where He is not. He is in the room. He is in this moment. He is closer to you than the air you breathe, and more present to you than your own thoughts.

Then bring before the omnipresent God the specific places, relationships, and circumstances in your life where you are most tempted to feel that He is absent or distant. Name them specifically. Bring the hospital room where a loved one suffers. Bring the silence where you have prayed and heard nothing. Bring the desolation of grief or loneliness. Bring the private sin that has flourished in the darkness. And hear the declaration of Jeremiah 23:24: Do I not fill the heavens and the earth? Even there. Even in that room, that silence, that grief, that darkness. He fills it. He is there.

Pray through Isaiah 43:1–2 as a personal covenant declaration. Hear God say your name: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. Pray for those in your group who are currently in the waters or the fire. Pray that the omnipresent God would not merely be near to them in the abstract theological sense, but that they would know, with the felt, experiential, heart-deep certainty of covenant faith, that He is with them. Close with the promise of Hebrews 13:5: I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you. Let that be the resting place of your prayer: the all-present God who has promised permanent, unconditional, covenant-secured presence to all who are His.

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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