

**July 22, 2007**  
**The Omnipresence of God**  
**Never Alone: Wherever I am... God is!**  
**Guest Speaker: Laird Crump**

**God is bigger than our box.** The goal of our teaching this summer is to get God out of the box we tend to put him in

The reality is, comprehending God is no easy task. But sometimes out of the mouths of babes comes some pretty great responses. Here is how one child responded when asked to describe God.

“One of God’s main jobs is making people. He makes them to replace the ones that die, so there will be enough people to take care of things on earth. He doesn’t make grown-ups, just babies. I think because they are smaller and easier to make. That way He doesn’t have to take up His valuable time teaching them to talk and walk. He can just leave that to mothers and fathers.

God doesn’t have time to listen to the radio or TV because of this.

God sees everything and hears everything and is everywhere which keeps Him pretty busy. So you shouldn’t go wasting His time by going over your Mom and Dad’s head asking for something they said you couldn’t have.

Jesus is God’s Son. His Dad (God) appreciated everything that He had done and all His hard work on earth so He told Him He didn’t have to go out on the road anymore. He could stay in heaven. So He did. You can pray anytime you want and they are sure to help you because they got it worked out so one of them is on duty all the time. You should always go to church on Sunday because it makes God happy, and if there’s anybody you want to make happy, it’s God.”

Well, our job today is to try and wrap our minds around who God is and what he is like.

Sometimes child-like perceptions of God are helpful.

These days most people are familiar with The Chronicles of Narnia, written by C.S. Lewis. The Chronicles of Narnia were brilliant children’s stories that are actually allegories of Christian themes and thought. As most of you know, Aslan the lion is representative of God.

In the second book in the series the children magically return to the land of Narnia after being back in England. However when the children look around at the land of Narnia they observe that so much has changed. As the children wander around they get lost and after a series of terrible events Lucy finally finds Aslan the Great Lion. Listen to the story.

Photo 1...

*A circle of grass, smooth as lawn met her eyes, with dark trees dancing all around it. And then, oh joy! For He was there: the huge Lion, shining white in the moonlight, with his huge black shadow underneath him.*

*She rushed to him. She felt her heart would burst if she lost a moment. And the next thing she knew she was kissing him and putting her arms as far around his neck as she could and burying her face in the beautiful rich silkiness of his mane.*

But then Lucy notices something different about Aslan; she is shocked to see how much he had grown from the previous summer. Although only one year had passed on England’s calendar, a thousand years had passed in Narnia time. The story continues...

Photo 2...

*The great beast rolled over on his side so Lucy fell, half lying and half sitting between his front paws. He bent forward and just touched her nose with his tongue. His warm breath came all around her. She gazed up into the large wise face. "Welcome child", he said.*

*"Aslan", said Lucy, "you're bigger".*

*"That is because you are older, little one", answered he.*

*"Not because you are?" asked Lucy.*

*Aslan said, "I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger".*

All of us share Lucy's experience. After studying who God is and what he is like we get the impression that God is bigger. But that is not because He has changed, but rather because we are beginning to understand more and more about him as we take him out of the box we have put him in.

Well if God seems to be increasing in size to you, today's subject matter might completely blow your mind. Today we want to consider a quality of God that theologians use the prefix "omni" to describe... the omnipresence of God (Never Alone – where ever I am... God is). This is the term that expresses the idea that God is all-present, or everywhere at the same time.

Just think, at this very moment, God is here. At this very moment God is also in Moosejaw, and in England and also around Pluto, regardless of whether you call it a planet or a big rock!

Let me give you a quick survey of what the Bible teaches about the everywhere-ness of God.

- **The Bible teaches that God is a spiritual being who is everywhere at the same time.**

I remember when I was a youth pastor I was teaching this concept to a bunch of teenagers. There was one kid who looked "lost in space", so I asked him what he was thinking about. He looked right through me and said, "Big Toe". I said what do you mean by that? He said, "listening to you describe God I am trying to wrap my mind around how big God is. He is so big to me all I can see is the tip of his Big Toe". If we are not careful we may think that way about God's omnipresence, thinking that if he is everywhere at the same time then he must be huge. When the Bible talks of God being everywhere at the same time it does not mean that a part of him is in Vancouver and another part in PEI. Actually a more accurate term to describe this picture of God in the Bible is the word "ubiquitous". This word means "equal where ness". The idea behind this is that wherever God is present he is fully present. God is always and everywhere at hand.

God cannot be contained in any one place. Some people think that he is in churches. Well the truth is that he is just as much out on the golf course as he is in a church building. Some of you husbands have been telling your wives that for years!

King Solomon of the Bible understood this. After building the temple in Israel as a spectacular place of worship, Solomon wrote these words in ...

**1Kings 8:27 "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens even the highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this temple I have built".**

Solomon knew that God was fully present in that place of worship but that he was also fully present everywhere else on earth at the same time.

When was the last time you played hide and seek? Maybe some of you were really good hiders and no one could find you. But when it comes to playing hide and seek with God there is really no contest. Wherever you would hide he would be there.

God himself speaks to this issue as recorded in ...

**Jeremiah 23:24 “Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him, declares the Lord? Do I not fill heaven and earth declares the Lord?”**

The Bible teaches that God is a spirit and therefore defies the boundaries of time and space. He is everywhere and therefore always knows where we are.

A familiar Psalm for many Christians is Psalm 139. This passage from the Bible speaks very clearly about God’s omnipresence. David says in Psalm 139:7-12

**“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens you are there. If I make my bed in the depths you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. 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 day, for darkness is as light to you”. (Psalm 139:7-12)**

God is a spiritual being who is everywhere at the same time. But also...

- **The Bible teaches that God is everywhere but unaffected by impurity.**

Although we often use the phrase, there is no such thing as a “God forsaken place”, other than of course Hell.

Some people think that God stays out of certain places because he may get contaminated by evil. But that is not what the Bible teaches. God is here with us this morning in the church building. But God was just as much here a few years ago when this was a strip club. He of course did not approve of what was going on, but you can bet that if any of those employees or patrons asked God for help, God would be there to answer. It’s also important to realize he loved them while they were in the club as much as he loves us while we sit here in a church service.

His omnipresence is like the rays of the sun. The sun’s rays can fall on a cathedral or a pile of manure. But neither can alter the rays of the sun. Now one reflects the rays in a beautiful way and the other causes a big stink, but the rays of the sun are not affected by what is shines on. And so it is with God’s omnipresence.

Jesus, who was God in the flesh hung around with some of the vilest people in the vilest of circumstances. But those contexts did not contaminate him at all. In him was no sin. And likewise with God.

- **The Bible teaches that God is everywhere but is relationally connected only with those who invite him into their lives, through Jesus Christ.**

Some people think that God is *in* everything. This is called pantheism.

Now don’t confuse God’s omnipresence with Pantheism or animism. Pantheism is the idea that God is in everything therefore God is everything. Animism is the belief that all natural objects and the universe itself have souls. Animism is a common belief among aboriginal peoples. Kind of “the circle of life” idea.

This idea is popular today as it was thousands of years ago, especially with our current emphasis on the environment. And it is kind of a nice thought that God is a rock or a tree. But it doesn’t really make sense does it?

God is not a rock or a tree. God created the rock and the tree and his power sustains or keeps all the molecules together, but he is not in the object. The only thing God resides in is the human soul, and only upon personal invitation.

The Bible says in John 1...

“He (Jesus) came into the very world he created, but the world didn’t recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.” (John 1:10-13)

And of course, when we invite him into our lives it does not mean that we become God. No, the goal of the Christian life is not union, but rather communion. And each one of us can commune with God because he is near to everyone. Right now at this very moment, God is all around you. And at any moment you can connect with him. God is everywhere, but in order to be relationally connected we need to invite him into our lives.

This thought leads me to ask a question though.

### **If God is everywhere, then why do I have a hard time perceiving him?**

If God is there, then why do I have such a difficult time sensing his presence and tapping into his empowerment? If God is everywhere, why does it sometimes feel like he is a million kilometres away? If God is everywhere, why can’t some people seem to be able to connect with him?

Maybe this is the idea Bette Midler is trying to get across in her song "From a distance". The implication is that God is there but he is far away. I don’t know whether this song was written out of misunderstanding or frustration. I do know that it is not what the Bible teaches about God. But it does express our frustration with trying to connect with God in an up close and personal way.

Wouldn’t it be great to have a divine GPS or “onstar” so where ever we are we could know how to get in touch with God?

I wish I had a good answer to this angst we feel over comprehending God’s presence, but I am not sure I have. God, in his wisdom, sets the terms of our relationship with him. The Bible character Job gives us a good example of this. The book begins with Job being very aware of God’s presence in his life. Then all Hell breaks loose in his life and God seems very distant and quiet to Job. Job is longing to connect with this omnipresent God but to no avail. But Job endures and eventually God reveals himself to Job again. It is almost like a game of cosmic hide and seek. At times it seems cruel to us, but it is all part of the freedom God gives to each of us.

Think of the game hide and seek again for a moment. In a game of hide and seek the fun comes from being found doesn’t it? It is no fun when you hide so well that the person can’t find you. That is frustrating to both parties. That is why as parents, when we played this game with our kids we would give clues as to where we were hiding. If we were behind the drapes we would let one of our feet stick out so it could be seen. Why do we do this? Because the fun comes from finding and being found.

Author Phillip Yancey suggests that God is like a person who clears his throat while hiding and so gives himself away. Sometimes God is the pursuer, other times he is the one waiting to be found. He has been called by some, “the hound of heaven”. Not a nice term, but the implication is that he aggressively pursues us sometimes. Some of you can attest to that. But other times it

seems he is playing hard to get. It is not that God is being mean by not fully revealing himself. The reason for his hidden-ness lies in this thing called faith.

Again Yancey writes, “We do know that in his relationships with people God places a premium on faith, which can only be exercised in circumstances that allow for doubt – circumstances such as God’s hidden-ness”. Phillip Yancey, *Reaching for the invisible God*

I suppose if God wanted to he could reveal himself to everyone in the world. But more than likely the direct presence of God would overwhelm us and destroy our freedom. We would have sight and therefore have no need of faith.

The great Theologian Jonathon Edwards wrote: “Were God to disclose but a little of that which is seen by saints and angels in heaven, our frail natures would sink under it... Such a bubble is too weak to bear a weight so vast. Alas, no wonder therefore it is said, No man can see God and live”.

As humans we cannot control God’s revelation of himself to us, but what we can do is to put ourselves in his way. Kind of like going to a parade early to get a street side seat, so that when the main attraction passes by, we have a good view of it.

In a tongue in cheek kind of way C. S Lewis talks about how we can promote God’s sense of omni-absence in our lives rather than his omni-presence. He writes, “Avoid silence, avoid solitude, avoid any train of thought that that leads off the beaten track. Concentrate on money, sex, status, health and (above all) on your own grievances. Keep the radio on. Live in a crowd. Use plenty of sedation. If you must read books, select them very carefully. But you’d be safer to stick to the papers. You’ll find the advertisements helpful; especially those with sexy or snobbish appeal”.

Conversely, if we put ourselves in God’s way through spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, silence, solitude, etc. we will become far more sensitive to God’s presence.

But one key way to perceive God’s presence is through the windows of the soul.

### **Windows of the soul**

If God is everywhere at the same time, and if he veils himself a little so as to preserve the faith component of our walk with him, yet at the same time gives us clues as to where he is, then we would be wise to be on the constant lookout for him... to see his foot sticking out from behind the curtains... to hear him clear his throat so we look in his direction. And we can do this by being sensitive to the windows of the soul.

This is the title of one of my favourite books by Ken Gire. In this book Gire argues that God is continually revealing himself to us in various ways. He has in this way provided windows for our soul, through which we can look out and through which God can shine his light in.

As spiritual humans we live between two worlds. We constantly feel the tension between our two parts, the spiritual and the physical. Ken Gire says, **“Like a tree we are torn between two worlds, a part of us is rooted in the soil, another part reaching for the sky”**. Because our roots can grasp soil more securely than our leaves can grasp the sky, the soil seems more real to us. The physical realm is something we can see and touch but the spiritual realm, although equally as real is not as apparent; heaven seems to elude our grasp. Yet, like the leaves of a tree, although it can’t hold the sky it can absorb the suns life-giving rays. In fact, without the sunlight from the sky, the whole tree would wither up and die. It is similar with our souls. We can’t hold God’s presence but we can absorb his revelation of himself to us.

As most of us know, only 7% of communication is accomplished through words. 93% is accomplished through, tone, body language etc. So when someone is trying to reveal themselves to you, only 7% of that revelation will come through words. Think about that in terms of how God reveals himself to us. Some of you are longing to actually hear the voice of God. That may happen for some people, but 93% of the time God will probably be communicating to us through other means.

Gire talks about those other means in what he calls windows of the soul, such as:

- **The window of the Bible**

This is an obvious one. But God reveals so much about himself to us through the Bible. The Bible says of itself...

“The word of God is living and active and sharper than a double edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12) When we read the Bible we are not just reading a text book. We are reading what God has revealed about himself to us and we can therefore “see” God more clearly.

- **The window of nature**

This too is an obvious one. God is an incredible artist. When you look at nature, what does it tell you about the artist?

Psalm 19 “The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky proclaims the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge”. God’s presence can be detected through nature.

When you look at a painting of Matt Chapman you get a glimpse of what Matt is like. The art is not the artist but the art reflects the artist. We see a beautiful landscape and we catch a glimpse of God. When we look at nature we need to be looking with the eyes of faith to comprehend the presence of God.

As well as the window of the Bible and nature, Gire also talks about...

- **The window of the arts**

God often reveals himself to us through the arts. I remember when I saw Les Miserable. To me that was worth ten sermons and God spoke about himself to me through that theatrical production. Music of course does the same and that is why the church has prioritized worship through music so much over the centuries. God’s presence can be seen through various art forms, if we keep our spiritual eyes open.

- **The window of tears**

Gire asks: What makes you cry? And he asks this because he believes that God communicates something to us through our tears and because when we are in tears he is especially close. The great philosopher and writer Frederick Buechner agrees. He writes...

“Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay the closest of attention. They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not God is speaking to you through them the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where, if your soul is to be saved, you should go next”. (Frederick Buechner)

Of course there are many other windows through which God reveals himself. God is everywhere around us, and he is wanting to be found by us, but it is up to us to look for him.

Are there not times when you see a scene of nature and something inside you is moved? There are times when we watch our children play in innocence and we see something of the divine in

them. There are times when we watch a movie or hear a song and for some unexplained reason we start to cry. We experience pain that is unexplainable and something deep within us groans for understanding. Someone says something to us about God in passing and it hits us right between the eyes and we can't believe the timing. We read the Bible and all of a sudden the lights go on and we sense that we are in the presence of God!

We have the longing in our soul and God is calling us to himself through all aspects of life. When we take the time to listen we feel that the hunger pangs of our soul are finally being satisfied.

Again as Gire says, **“We must always be looking and listening if we are to see the windows and hear what is being spoken through them. But we must learn to look with more than just our eyes and listen with more than just our ears, for the sounds are sometimes faint and the sights are far away. We must be aware at all times and in all places, because windows are everywhere and at any time we may find one. Or one may find us. Though we hardly know it... unless we are searching for Him who for so long has been searching for us”.** Ken Gire

Now there is so much more that could be said but let's stop here for some quick application of these thoughts about God.

### **The two great implications of God's every-where-ness**

Now immediately my guess is that you can perceive the two great implications of the omnipresence of God. Here is the first one.

- If God is everywhere, then I need to be careful with my behaviour.

Sometimes we think we can get away with doing certain things because we think no one is looking.

I remember when in college, once driving in my car and seeing my psychology professor in the car just ahead of me. He was a very controlled and dignified man. I started to waive to him but he didn't see me. I was in his blind spot. Then, thinking he was all alone and that no one was watching, up came his finger and he proceeded to vigorously pick his nose!

There was no way he would have ever done this if he was standing in front of one of his students, but he thought he was all alone and could get away with it.

Now I must admit that at that moment I had a huge urge to honk the horn, get his attention, and point to him and laugh. I must admit that I also thought that I could use this as blackmail to get an A in his course. But mercifully, I slowed down, let him drive away and preserved the man's dignity!

The point is this. We sometimes do things we shouldn't because we think that no one is looking and that no one would find out. But the reality is that we are never alone. God is always where we are, watching everything we do. God's omnipresence motivates us toward good behaviour.

But here is the second obvious implication...

- **If God is indeed everywhere then that means I am never alone.**

If I am in a situation that causes me to fear, I need to realize that God is there with me, I am not alone.

If I am in a crisis at work – God is right there with me.

If I am experiencing health problems, God is there with me. I am not alone.

When I am at my wit's end with family issues and problems, I need to remember that God is there with me right in that difficult situation.

When I have some big decisions to make, God is right by my side, I am never alone.

Even while in the throes of dying and death, God is with us. That is why we all love Psalm 23.

Verse four says

**“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” Psalm 23:4**

An awareness of God's every-where-ness can bring us exceptional comfort. As Paul says in the book of Philippians, this awareness brings us a peace that passes understanding, knowing that we are never alone.

So, whatever circumstance you find yourself in today, please remember what the Bible teaches about God... Keep your eyes open, watch for how God is revealing his presence to you, and know that the omnipresent God is always near.

### **Benediction/Blessing**

Like many preschoolers, Rachel had a problem waking up in the middle of the night, scared and crying. The only thing that would sooth her fears was crawling into bed with her mom and dad. But Mom had to go out of town for a few days on business...

That's when Dad came up with a new solution. He said, “Rachel, I have an idea. While Mom is away, suppose I sleep in your room on the top bunk bed.”

She thought it was a great idea and that night, Rachel went to sleep on time.

A couple of hours later, when her dad crawled into the top bunk, she was sound asleep and she slept like that all night.

The next morning, Dad congratulated her on a full night's sleep. Rachel said “It's because you were in the room with me”.

“But how did you know I was there?” the Dad asked, “You were asleep when I came in & you never woke up the whole night”.

Rachel answered: “Because you said you would be there”.

Whatever circumstance you are experiencing in your life, it is my hope for you that you understand and rest in the truth that God is an ever present God. Where ever you are God is there.