

BFF433 God is Near

Scott Moore: Welcome to the "Building Faith and Family" podcast with Steve Demme. I'm your host, Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve. How are you today?

Steve: I'm well. I still have my opening in my teeth, [laughs] so I might sound a little bit funny, but I'm trying to articulate even without all my teeth. Got about six more weeks before they put the permanent one in or until another one falls out. How are you doing?

Scott: I'm good. I'm almost back to normal from my cold. I may still sound a little stuffy, but I'm feeling much better.

Steve: How about Henry? Didn't he have a surgery?

Scott: He had a procedure. I don't know if you'd call it a surgery. They injected some Botox somewhere in his digestive tract to try and make things work more smoothly. They'll know in a couple of weeks whether it really worked or not.

He's not throwing up much at the moment, but they don't know if that really will be a permanent thing or not. Keep praying.

Steve: May it be so. Amen. Today, we're going to continue our series on rethinking biblically about Who God is and what He's like and more of His characteristics. So far we've covered that He's kind, He is slow to anger, He's love, and today, God is Near.

Scott: That sounds like it might be important because I think a lot of people feel that He's not, including myself sometimes.

Steve: One of the things that blessed my socks off this morning is as I was doing my homework, I found I had already done a study on God is Near back in 2017. In fact, I found a whole bunch of them I'd done back then. I like topical studies. I like to pull together scriptures from all through the Bible.

Today we're going to visit Exodus all the way into Revelation. One of the reasons, I think, that it's important to read your Bible every day is because you have a sense of the breadth of scripture and you're comfortable in it and you're familiar with it.

If you started reading anywhere in the Bible, I could probably get pretty close to where you are because I'm familiar with the language and immersed in it.

Then it's helpful to pull out nuggets and focus on one particular aspect of God and His nature. To find out that I'd already done the homework blessed me. I'm hoping to have another opportunity later today to go back and look at all the studies that I did because it was very edifying. Let's pray before we jump in.

Father, we know You are near because you're God. You're omnipresent. You're everywhere. But yet, sometimes, we struggle to sense Your nearness. And so help us today in our thinking, especially. Help us to be transformed from within so that we get the right idea of You, that we have more faith to believe in Your presence and in Your nearness.

Bless us as we read through these wonderful scriptures that we've put together, but You're the one that put them together by Your spirit. I pray that You'll quicken them to us and give us fresh faith and fresh courage. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: Acts 17, Paul was talking to unbelievers. He was trying to get them to hear the gospel. I'm breaking into his soliloquy, in the 24th verse.

"The God Who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is He served by human hands as though He needed anything since He Himself gives to all mankind life, and breath, and everything.

"And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him.

"Yet, He is not far from each one of us, for in Him, we live and move and have our being. As even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed His offspring.'"

That's the first passage that came to mind when I was seeking God about this topic. In Him, we live and move and have our being. He is not far from each one of us.

Beautiful thought.

With that thought overshadowing our study, we're going to read in Exodus 13, "Jehovah went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people."

Right from the beginning, God revealed Himself to His people with signs, wonders, and mighty deeds, and then He showed Himself to the people. They could look out their tent, and see a pillar of fire. They could see a pillar of cloud. Then they knew that God was with them. Exodus 33:14 says, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." My presence.

Of course, we've already studied in-depth a year or two ago about the tabernacle. It's an interesting word because tabernacle can be a noun and a verb.

There are words in the Old Testament and New Testament that are very closely related to tabernacle, one would be **mishkan**. If you wanted to say to tabernacle, or to dwell with, or to abide with, it's **shekan**.

In the New Testament, the noun is tent, tabernacle, dwelling, **skene**. The verb is to dwell, to tabernacle, to pitch a tent is **skenoo**. The tabernacle wasn't on the edges of their encampment. It wasn't up on a mountain overlooking the children of Israel.

It was right in the middle of all the tribes. And in the middle of the tabernacle was the Holy of Holies where God came and spoke to His priests. That's where His presence was. God told them, "I'll be with you," then He showed them that He'd be with them, and then He pitched His tent right in the middle of them.

Deuteronomy 31, "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them."

They had lots of enemies when they came out of Egypt. They went from one battle to another. The verse goes on. "For it is Jehovah, Your God, Who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you."

When you read the Old Testament and you get comfortable in it, you recognize that the writers of Hebrews are simply quoting what God has already said. Hebrews 13, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." It's a testament as you read scripture and you see that it's synchronized. It's one document. It's the same God. The same promises. Deuteronomy 31:8, it's a little different twist, but it's the same idea. "It is Jehovah who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

God was making His point to His children. "I am with you. I've got this." David knew this when he said in Psalm 23, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are close beside me. Your rod and Your staff protect and comfort me." He was aware of the nearness and the presence of God.

We were just talking about Henry, and there's a lot of other people laboring with the circumstances of life. I have more and more friends that are getting replacements for their hips. Or dealing with prostate issues. Some are battling cancer.

I count on passages like Psalm 34. "Jehovah is close to the brokenhearted. He rescues those whose spirits are crushed." Psalm 46 says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

I think God is especially near to the brokenhearted. He's especially close to those that need Him the most. Psalm 125, "Those who trust in Jehovah are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so Jehovah surrounds His people from this time forth and forevermore." Wow!

If I lived in Jerusalem and woke up in the morning and looked out while I'm feeling like God's not near, then I would remember this scripture. Look at all those mountains surrounding us. Every direction I look, I see a mountain, and that's God. That's the way God surrounds His people.

Psalm 139, "Where shall I go from Your spirit? Where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell on the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me," because God is with us.

Jeremiah, "Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares Jehovah. "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" Such a nice picture. "I fill heaven and earth."

In the New Testament. Jesus is coming, and here's the prophecy. "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which means God with us." Immanuel, God with us. Matthew 28, right before He ascended, He told His disciples, "I am with you always even unto the end of the world."

John 10, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, Who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." That was a huge comfort to me. When I came to Christ, I used to think that it was up to me to hold on to God.

Then when I recommitted my life to Christ and got real serious about my faith and began studying and reading, I ran across that, and I thought, "Wow, it's not about me

holding on to Him. He's holding on to me." "No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand."

John 14. There are three great promises here. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself that where I am, you may be also." With Him.

John 14: 16, "I will ask the Father and He will give you another comforter to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth."

Jesus is sitting right now at the right hand of the Father praying for us. He said that I'm going to send you the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of God to be right beside you.

There's another verse in Proverbs that I associate with the Spirit, "There's a friend that sticks closer than a brother." That's the Holy Spirit. He sticks closer to us than even our own flesh and blood.

John 14: 18, "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you." I've got two more, and then it's up to you, Scott, to wrap this up. Ephesians 2:13, "Once, you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to Him through the blood of Christ."

We know that sin is what separates us from God, but Jesus took away sin by His own blood so there's nothing to keep us away from Him. In fact, the blood, it says, makes us near to Him. We are especially near because there's nothing to separate us from our Dad.

One of my favorite passages, Revelation 3:20. I was on Facebook yesterday, and somebody put up a meme where it said, "Wouldn't you like to just sit down with God and have a meal, and talk about things, and He'd tell you what's what?"

I copied this scripture and I posted it in the comments. "Look, I stand at the door and knock. If you hear My voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."

God's heart has always been to share a meal together with us as friends. God's heart has always been to be near His people. He loves us desperately. We just need to open the door. What I was communicating to those people on Facebook, He's right there. Just open the door. Ask, and He'll come in. After this bath of scripture, what do you think?

Scott: I'll go backwards here. First of all, you were reading John 14. Did I miss the part where you said Jesus talked about the Spirit saying the world cannot accept Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, but you know Him for He lives with you and will be in you?

Steve: I didn't read that.

Scott: Going back, I was thinking as you were, at the beginning, talking about the tabernacle, you see God's presence in the garden. Then you see His presence on the mountain with Moses or on the burning bush and then on the mountain.

Then you see His presence in the pillars, cloud and fire, and then in the tabernacle. Then in the temple. I wonder what they think happened to Him after the temple was destroyed.

You see other elements of, in Psalm 51, David, "Create in me a pure heart, oh, God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me." There's other passages that talk about the Holy Spirit being with David.

Steve: Yes. He had sinned grievously. He knew he had no right to even be praying that way, but God didn't take His Spirit from him.

Scott: I've just never thought of trying to trace God's presence through the Bible and notice where you see Him. Clearly, He was active even outside of the temple or outside of the tabernacle. You see His presence even with David and others. I wonder what they felt like when the temple was gone and God was silent for 400 years. Or are there stories we just don't know?

Steve: If I was in the temple at the feast of Passover in Jerusalem on the day that Jesus was crucified, and saw what happened when they were in the temple, and the veil was torn asunder. Jesus had opened the way to the Father, and it happened at the exact same time that Jesus died. The Holy Spirit has to be the one that opens our eyes. To me, that is one of the greatest illustrations, if you want, teaching points.

That veil, I've been told, is pretty thick stuff. That was serious cloth. To have it just ripped asunder. Their first thought may have been, "Wow, I have to get out of here. The veil..." Then the second thing they're going to find out is it's dark. There's lightning. Earthquake. Then walking around town, they see people that have been dead.

I don't know how you couldn't be saved in those days. I think that by the time Peter got his voice 50 days later, they were ready to hear the gospel because God had certainly done a lot of pre-evangelism, if you will. He had laid the foundation for them to see Jesus.

Or we could be like Elisha, who told helped his servant, "Hey, open his eyes," and then he sees all these angels, multitudes of them, covering all the hills all around him. There were people that had supernatural insight into these things, but they needed it because they were standing alone against an entire nation.

Scott: Jesus had not really given the Jews much room to remain ambivalent about Him. When the curtain was torn, I imagine for at least some of those folks, must have been like, "I finally get it." He'd already reframed Passover, although I'm not sure how many of them knew about that at that point.

Certainly, the closest disciples did. He had already healed people on the Sabbath and done all kinds of stuff to reframe everything they knew about God.

When the temple was torn, you'd imagine if there was anybody in the temple or close enough to see that, certainly, when they heard about what had happened, that's destroying their entire understanding of how their relationship with God is supposed to work.

Steve: As we have pointed out in Exodus, He wanted the whole nation to be priests. He wanted all of them up the mountain. This is the way God is. He wants to be near to all His people. I don't even think He really wanted to have priests. He just wanted all of His people to be priests. They kept holding up their hands saying, "No, no, no. You're getting too close to us."

There's a part of us that we have to fight that because God is always calling to His people. "I'm knocking. Open the door. I want to be nearer than you ever imagined." When we do, it's awesome.

Scott: Then when Jesus says, "The Holy Spirit will be in you. He's with you now, but He will be in you."

Steve: Which takes our relationship to another level.

Scott: Yes.

Steve: Amen. When we're sitting there looking at Him face to face surrounding the throne, when we see Him, it says, "When He returns, we're going to see Him as He is." We're not going to need faith. We're just going to need eyeballs. When we see Him, we're going to be like Him, and we're going to be with Him forever.

Steve: I remember years ago learning to meditate on scripture. I was encouraged to take one verse and chew on it over and over and over." I chose John 14:1-3. "I have prepared a place for you. I will come again and take you to Myself so where I am you may be also."

He was telling them, "Look, I have to leave for a little bit, but I'm just going to prepare a place for you. I'm going to come back, and then I'm going to take you with Me so that you will always be with me."

In a sense, we are all orphans. I've got a friend that just got back from Bulgaria and they adopted a little orphan from Bulgaria. What does it mean to her to have a family and to have a mom and a dad that will never leave her nor forsake her?

That's how we are. We're orphans, and God knows that we have this orphan spirit, so to speak. He has to keep encouraging us. "No, I will never leave you. No, I'm going to be there for you, especially when you need Me the most."

I think we've talked enough. Let's pray. Father, in Jesus' name, hear these wonderful passages. But whatever it is in us that's keeping the door shut, I pray that You'll help us to open the door and invite You in in a deeper way so that we can commune with You, that we can experience Your presence.

Thank You for this encouragement. Thank You for this assurance. Thank You for these faith-building words. But now take it beyond our minds, which have been now transformed, and make it a part of our lives, a reality. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scott: Amen. That's our show for this week, folks. Thanks for joining us for the Building Faith and Family podcast with Steve Demme. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at spdemme@gmail.com. If you have a question for me, you can reach me at scott@unsocializedmedia.com. Thanks for joining us. Have a great week. "Those who know Your name put their trust in You, for You, O Jehovah, have not forsaken those who seek You." (Psalm 9:10)