

The Nearness of God

Pastor James Foley – Sunday, March 19, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today. I praise God for the opportunity to connect DIGITALLY with you in such a time as this. I DO look forward to the time when we can all worship together again! Until that day, we will continue to meet using this medium.

#NEVERALONE

FYI – In recent days I have taken note of a SLOGAN that has gained some popularity on social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter): **#TogetherApart**. This phrase has appeared on the pages of varying medical professionals, celebrities and political figures (e.g., Ivanka Trump).

Q. What is the meaning of #TogetherApart?

A. We are UNITED in facing this crisis together (though we remain socially ISOLATED/SEPARATED).

KEY 1 – In a lot of ways it is a good slogan, as it captures the spirit of the times in which we live. I take NO issue with it. However, as followers of Christ, I think it would be great to put forth a slogan of our OWN—a slogan that finds its BASIS in the pages of God’s Holy Word: i.e., **#NeverAlone**.

KEY 2 – In this season of social distancing (wherein we CANNOT be together), it is my pleasure to report that the Lord is NEAR to those who are His. Even if we are currently separated by space and distance, He is NOT removed. We are NEVER alone!

KEY 3 – Scripture CONTINUALLY notes that there is a PROXIMITY to the Lord...

1) God is With Us and In Us

John 14:17 [ESV – Jesus Speaking Prophetically to His Own re: HS that We Have Received]

17 . . . he [i.e., Holy Spirit] dwells with you and will be in you.

1 Corinthians 3:16

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

2) His Presence is the Environment in Which We Live

Acts 17:28

28 . . . “In him we live and move and have our being”

KEY – In every conceivable way we are #NeverAlone (Christian—take note)!

THE NATURE OF HIS NEARNESS PT. 1

KEY 1 – God is Present/Near in All PLACES (i.e., Locations)

Psalm 139:7–12 (NIV)

7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
 Where can I flee from your presence?
 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
 if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
 if I settle on the far side of the sea,
 10 even there your hand will guide me,
 your right hand will hold me fast.
 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
 and the light become night around me,"
 12 even the darkness will not be dark to you;
 the night will shine like the day,
 for darkness is as light to you.

Psalm 23 (Emphasis Mine)

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
 2 He makes me lie down in **green pastures**,
 he leads me beside **quiet waters**,
 3 he refreshes my soul.
 He guides me along the **right paths**
 for his name's sake.
 4 Even though I walk
 through the **darkest valley**,
 I will fear no evil,
 for you are with me;
 your rod and your staff,
 they comfort me.
 5 You prepare a table before me
 in the **presence of my enemies**.
 You anoint my head with oil;
 my cup overflows.
 6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me
 all the days of my life,
 and I will dwell in the **house of the Lord**
 forever.

KEY – WHEREVER you may find yourself, the Lord is NEAR to you and present!

THE NATURE OF HIS NEARNESS PT. 2

KEY 2 – God is Present/Near in All PERIODS (i.e., Seasons of Life)

Psalm 23 (Emphasis Mine)

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

2 He makes me lie down in **green pastures** [i.e., periods of blessing/abundance],
he leads me beside **quiet waters** [i.e., periods of peace and tranquility],

3 he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the **right paths** [i.e., seasons of faithful obedience]
for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk

through the **darkest valley** [i.e., seasons of crisis – self-inflicted or otherwise],
I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me

in the **presence of my enemies** [i.e., seasons of opposition].

You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,

and I will dwell in the **house of the Lord**
forever [i.e., an eternally enduring period of time].

KEY – WHATEVER you are facing or experiencing, the Lord is NEAR to you and present!

TRANSITIONS

There IS benefit to HIS nearness. God's people derive blessing from His proximity and presence.

Q. What BENEFITS become ours because the Lord is near? GREAT QUESTION!

KEY – Allow me to offer the following (3–4 points) in REPLY...

THE BENEFITS OF HIS NEARNESS PT. 1

FIRSTLY, His nearness and abiding presence affords us divine PROTECTION [i.e., rescue/preservation].

Psalm 91

- 1 Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
- 2 I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."

- 3 Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
- 4 He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
- 5 You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
- 6 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.
- 7 A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.
- 8 You will only observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.

- 9 If you say, "The Lord is my refuge,"
and you make the Most High your dwelling,
- 10 no harm will overtake you,
no disaster will come near your tent.
- 11 For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;
- 12 they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.
- 13 You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

- 14 "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
- 15 He will call on me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.
- 16 With long life I will satisfy him
and show him my salvation."

Q. Do any biblical STORIES of God's presence and protection come to mind?

Daniel 3 [Summation]

- 1)** King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon erected a golden idol and held an assembly of prominent leaders
- 2)** This golden image/idol was to be worshipped by those leaders assembled at the sound of the music
- 3)** When the music sounded everyone bowed in worship before the idol (save for three figures: S–M–A)
- 4)** The rivals/opponents of S–M–A told King Nebuchadnezzar of the disobedience of these Jewish figures
- 5)** King Nebuchadnezzar summoned S–M–A before him and demanded that they worship the golden idol

Daniel 3:16–30

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual 20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. 21 So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. 22 The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, 23 and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?” They replied, “Certainly, Your Majesty.”

25 He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” 26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!”

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, 27 and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.”

30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

NOTE – What God has DONE in generations past He can DO TODAY. What God has PROMISED in generations past He can FULFILL TODAY. **Q.** To what degree are you placing your trust in the One who is near to PROTECT you and your family in this time of crisis. I believe that we shall find Him faithful!

THE BENEFITS OF HIS NEARNESS PT. 2

SECONDLY, His nearness and abiding presence affords us divine PROVISION [i.e., supplying of needs].

Psalm 23:1 (Emphasis Mine)

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

Q. What need do you have that the Good Shepherd has not, cannot and will not perfectly SUPPLY?

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING RE: WORRY/PROVISION

Luke 12:22–32

22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. 24 Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! 25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life[b]? 26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

27 “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 28 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! 29 And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. 30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

32 “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

NOTE – Most of us are familiar with the following promise (**Heb. 13:5b**): “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” However, most of us are NOT familiar that the context of this verse has to do with trusting the Lord to supply our needs (i.e., finding freedom from the anxieties of this life).

Hebrews 13:5

5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

“Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you.”

Q. Do any biblical STORIES of God’s presence and protection come to mind?

- 1) God’s Provision for the Hebrews in the Wilderness
- 2) God’s Provision for the Thousands that Followed J. Christ
- 3) God’s Provision for His Church through the Charity of Believers

HOW ABOUT THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT...

1 Kings 17:8–16 [Elijah In Times of Drought/Famine]

8 . . . the word of the Lord came to him: “Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food.” 10 So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, “Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?” 11 As she was going to get it, he called, “And bring me, please, a piece of bread.”

12 “As surely as the Lord your God lives,” she replied, “I don’t have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die.”

13 Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small loaf of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. 14 For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land.’”

15 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. 16 For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

NOTE – What God has DONE in generations past He can DO TODAY. What God has PROMISED in generations past He can FULFILL TODAY. **Q.** To what degree are you placing your trust in the One who is near to PROVIDE for you and your family in this time of crisis. I believe that we shall find Him faithful!

THE BENEFITS OF HIS NEARNESS PT. 3

THIRDLY, His nearness and abiding presence affords us divine PEACE [i.e., calm and comfort].

Psalm 23 (Emphasis Mine)

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
 2 He makes me lie down in **green pastures**,
 he leads me beside **quiet waters**,
 3 he **refreshes** my soul.
 He guides me along the right paths
 for his name’s sake.
 4 Even though I walk
 through the **darkest valley**,
I will fear no evil,
 for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
 they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me
 in the **presence of my enemies**.
 You anoint my head with oil;
 my cup overflows.
 6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me
 all the days of my life,
 and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Q. Do you need the peace of God (i.e., sense of tranquility and repose)? Consider...

Isaiah 26:3

3 You will keep in perfect peace
those whose minds are steadfast,
because they trust in you.

Philippians 4:6–7

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Q. Do you need the peace of God (i.e., comfort and rest for a weary/troubled soul)? Consider...

2 Corinthians 1:3–4a

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles . . .

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNT...

Acts 16:23–31 [Imprisoned in Philippi for Preaching the Gospel, etc.]

23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" [Leading to the SALVATION of this jailor and his household]!

Q. Do you want to know what I find MARVELOUS about this text?

- 1) It is NOT just that the jailor and his family were saved...
- 2) It is NOT that prison doors were opened and the ground shook...

KEY – It IS the degree to which Paul and Silas demonstrated the perfect PEACE of God!

Q. HOW? How did they NOT fall to pieces under such a circumstance?

A. Because they had peace WITH God and realized He was WITH them!

NOTE – What God has DONE in generations past He can DO TODAY. What God has PROMISED in generations past He can FULFILL TODAY. **Q.** To what degree are you placing your trust in the One who is near to give PEACE for you and your family in this time of crisis. I believe that we shall find Him faithful!

THE BENEFITS OF HIS NEARNESS PT. 4

LASTLY (briefly), His nearness and abiding presence affords us missional POWER.

Matthew 28:16–20 (Emphasis Mine)

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. **And surely I am with you always**, to the very end of the age.”

NOTE – I can execute His divine mandate (GC) because I am NOT alone in the task. He is WITH me...

1) His Nearness Affords Me Power to **Preach** His Word

2) His Nearness Affords Me Power to **Show** His ‘Love’

3) His Nearness Affords Me Power to **Do** His Works

4) His Nearness Affords Me Power to **‘Persevere’**

KEY 1 – In this time of crisis, I want you to KNOW the provision, protection and peace afforded us through His abiding presence. The God who is with and in us will supply these and more! But I ALSO want you to know His MISSIONAL POWER, as we all seek to advance His cause.

KEY 2 – This is a great time for the Church of Christ and the work thereof. It is my PRAYER that you are taking the opportunity of a lifetime during the lifetime of the opportunity. God has given us a wide-open door! As you step through, REMEMBER...

KEY 3 – God is UNIQUELY present in the lives of those who PRIORITIZE the advancement of His kingdom.

CONCLUSIONS

I CLOSE with this...

NOTE 1 – Yes, we are SEPARATED for a time. We are **#Together Apart**. But we are **#NeverAlone**.

NOTE 2 – His is WITH us and IN us in all places and at in all periods. His “nearness” AFFORDS us...

NOTE 3 – The BLESSINGS of protection, provision, peace and missional power. Receive them!

Numbers 6:24–26

24 The Lord bless you

and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you

and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you

and give you peace.