

Episode 244

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. Gwen, the Manager of Volunteer Services and one of our Associate Editors, and Nelson, our Director of Video Content, are joining me again today to continue our series on the attributes of God. And today we're going to be focusing primarily on one, but one that also has some implications that are worth discussing as well. Today we're going to be talking about God's omnipresence—means that God is present everywhere. I find this attribute particularly comforting. That's kind of been an ongoing theme in our episodes, which is how understanding things about God are meant to help us to know him better and to provide us with comfort. And knowing that God is always there, he's always with me, is a tremendous comfort, as it should be.

Shea Houdmann

Now if I were to point to the scripture, at least in my mind, that most quickly surfaces when I think of God's omnipresence, it's in Psalm 139 and verses 7 to 12. Let me read those for you. Where shall I go from your spirit? Or 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 to the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night. Even the darkness is not dark to you, the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Shea Houdmann

So in here, even in what the psalmist is talking about, there's nowhere I could go where you would not be there. And to him, this is a good thing. We occasionally get questions from people who are like, God's omnipresence actually bothers them. It's similar to omniscience. Is God always watching me? Is he like a stalker, so to speak? It's like, no, that is not what God's omnipresence means. But that's why it's so important for us to do this series like this, where we clarify what God's attributes mean and don't mean. So Gwen, in your preparation for this conversation, what particularly stood out to you about the omnipresence of God?

Gwen Sellers

Well, I agree with you that it's just such a comforting attribute. That whole idea in Psalm 139, there's nowhere I can go where God is not. And I think that's just so comforting. And to me, it also relates with his omniscience. Since God

is everywhere, of course, he knows everything. So to me, it feels like I will never be abandoned. And there's never a time that I'm alone and on my own.

Gwen Sellers

One thing that people point out about omnipresence is two distinctions, talking about God's transcendence and his eminence. And so transcendent talks about God being above creation. So he exists outside of time and space. But eminence is that he also interacts with creation and is active in it. And so I think for me, that's kind of the comforting portion of omnipresence is it's not just that God is sort of always there, like he's actually really with me and interacting with me.

Gwen Sellers

And one verse that I love about this is during the Exodus. So the writer has explained that the Israelites are under this harsh slavery, Pharaoh's killing the babies, but the Hebrew midwives, you know, won't stand it. And the people are just desperate. And so it says, And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel, and God knew. So that idea that God sees and cares about his creation and is actively involved in it, and that includes me, is, yeah, it's just really impactful. Nelson, how about for you?

Nelson Domingues

Yeah, I feel the same way. I mean, as you guys are both saying, the fact that he is present everywhere, it is, you know, again, truly comforting. And we kind of sound like a broken record here with the attributes of God and telling how comforting, but I think that's kind of the point, right? The more we get to know someone, the more comfortable we are with them. And the more we understand the attributes of God, the more comfortable and comforting it is. And I find this again, yet another one, that he's always near me. He's always there. No matter, as the psalmist says, I can go to the tops of the mountains or the bottom of the sea. He's in there, in my presence.

Nelson Domingues

And this helps, you know, for some people who maybe even struggle to getting to church because of an illness, you know, for those who are homebound, who can't get out of their house. I think sometimes people will emphasize, or they could be scared, I should say, I haven't been able to go to church because of these physical limitations. Is God still with me? And the answer is, of course, yes. I mean, he obviously wants us to gather, and it's our priority. It's one of an act of obedience, and it's such an act of encouragement being able to go to a church service and be along for church family and give and take. But for those who can't get there because of some reason, physical limitation or travel, or maybe there is no church in their area at all, they can

still commune with God. And the fact that they can do that, the reason they can do that is because he's everywhere.

Nelson Domingues

And so that's one of the things that we kind of talk about, like, oh, you know, I pray. It feels like my prayers are just hitting the ceiling. Like, well, no, you're speaking to God. Like, he's there with you no matter what's going on in your life. Psalm 46, verse 1 says, God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. And that's when I think about God's omnipresence, I think he's with me. He's continually with me, and that's comforting to me.

Nelson Domingues

But then another thought is the fact that he is everywhere. He's beyond the stars that we know about. He's beyond the galaxies we know about.

He's in between the atoms in the earth. There is no place too far. There is no place where he's not there. There's no darkness so dark that it can crowd out God. He is completely present in all of his creation, and I wouldn't have it any other way. And so for me, again, it's truly a comforting thought and a powerful one, knowing that no matter what is there, no matter what darkness someone might feel in a particular situation, God's there, and there's no darkness that can push him away from there.

Shea Houdmann

I would love to follow up with you on that. There are numerous places in Scripture where it talks about God being present, like when Jesus says, I am with you always, or when talking about church discipline, it's like where two or three are gathered together, there I am with them. So if God is present everywhere, which I completely agree, what are these verses talking about, and in what way is God maybe especially present in a certain situation or a certain place, and how does that work with God's omnipresence?

Nelson Domingues

Our obedience or disobedience doesn't allow or disallow God to be present. He's there no matter what it is, but he may not act in our presence for whatever particular reason. Perhaps, for instance, we are under church discipline, and we've been kicked out of church because of sin that we have refused to let go. While he is there, and I could speak to him at any moment, perhaps he's allowing himself me to feel what we might call a distance, meaning that he's not gonna be blessing my choices. He's not gonna be blessing my sinful actions. He's not gonna be blessing my future endeavors or goals if they're not aligned with his, and so when we talk about church discipline, that's exactly what it's talking about. We will feel a distinct absence of his blessing on our life.

Nelson Domingues

And conversely, when two or three are gathered and praying in my name, there I am present with them, as we're told in scripture, and he's blessing that union of believers that are together, that are in right standing with the Lord, that are praying and agreeing with one another, and when you have multiple believers agreeing with one another who love the Lord and he's present in that situation, he too will be agreeing with them, and I think that verse communicates those truths.

Gwen Sellers

I think it's interesting to consider, so if God is present everywhere, like why is it special to be in his presence? And we know that it is, and I think you see that in like Old Testament and New Testament. So the Old Testament, David wrote in Psalm 27:4, one thing I have asked of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

Gwen Sellers

And then Jesus says, Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Then of course there's that Hebrews verse about entering into God's presence in prayer, and so I just think of, yeah, it is like God is everywhere, and yet there is still something special about that bond.

Gwen Sellers

I almost, I mean this is a crude analogy, but I almost wonder if it's like, you know, living with your family. Like, yeah, like everybody's there at home, but that's different than we're sitting down to family dinner. So like there is still that deeper one-on-one connection, or like the community connection of this is the church gathered together, and we're all entering God's presence together, and somehow that's different than like, yeah, of course God is there when I'm at the grocery store. Shea, you mentioned before the podcast John 4, and I'd love to hear more thoughts on that.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, so in John 4, it's the Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well, and she starts asking them like differences between the Samaritans and the Jews, and it's like, so we Samaritans, we worship here on Mount Gerizim. You Jews worship in Jerusalem. Basically, who's right? And Jesus responds by a day is coming when you will not worship on this mountain or that mountain, or God is spirit, and those who worship must worship him in spirit and truth, or Jesus is kind of taking the attention off of only worshipping God at these certain locations, saying you can worship God anywhere and everywhere, and that's the big change.

Shea Houdmann

But like as we were talking earlier, Old Testament, it's understandable why they would think that God's presence is particularly in a place, because it was, whether you refer to the Shekinah glory in the temple or even the most holy of holies in the temple, that's where God's presence especially was, and today we kind of use that same concept for like God's theological term, manifest presence, where God's making his presence particularly known, where God is present everywhere, but you can really feel it in this particular location at this particular time. So that's like the concept in that God doesn't want us to think we can only worship him within the four walls of a church, but like as Nelson was saying, there is value to worshiping corporately and to have a special place set aside for the purposes of God, and sometimes you really can feel God's presence there that you can't feel in the same way in other places, but that's not that God's only present there, God is manifesting his presence more powerfully in one spot versus another, so that's just a big change between Old and New Covenants and Testaments, where the worship of God in the Old Testament was focused in a physical place, even though God was present everywhere.

Shea Houdmann

Now it's less so, but then that doesn't minimize the fact that there is holy ground, there is times where God is particularly manifesting himself in a location and where we feel his presence, we're especially aware of his presence, and that's often something I pray for people who are going through a hard time, it's like, not God be there or God be present, because he already is, it's like, no, help this person to be aware of your presence, and I think that's a more accurate way to pray in light of God's omnipresence.

Gwen Sellers

I think that whole like the temple imagery and just and the progression in the Bible is so cool, so you've got, I mean, like in the garden, it starts with God walked among them, and then like, yeah, and then we have the Israelite temple, and only the high priest can enter once a year where the Ark of the Covenant is and the mercy seat, which is where God symbolically dwells, right? But then when Jesus died, like the temple veil is torn, and we're invited in, and then you get to Revelation, and you don't need a temple anymore, like, and you don't even need light anymore, because God is or you don't need the sun anymore, because God is light. And so it's like this full circle, you're really in God's presence.

Gwen Sellers

And I think now, for us, like living in between, and especially having seen the Old Covenant set up and understanding the holiness of God, and we live in

this time where the Holy Spirit, like indwells believers, he's not just around or like with you next to you, like he is inside of you, like with you in the most intimate of ways. But then there's more, like there's one day where we're just with God, like Jesus prayed, I want them to be where I am so that they can see my glory. So even to me, just the idea that God wants to be with us, it's not just he happens to be everywhere because he's God and he's that big, it's like, no, he wants that intimacy and that presence with us. And I just think that's so cool.

Nelson Domingues

Yeah, not only is God, as we were talking, present everywhere, right? And that's what omnipresence really kind of defines it, that he is everywhere. So what we've been saying, there's no place so far away that you can't go to escape his presence. So he is there. But then the other theological term that we hear about is his imminence, right? Like God is imminent, the attribute of God. And so what does that mean? What's the distinction between his omnipresence and his imminence? And when I look at that, I see as his activity, God not only is everywhere, but he is active in everywhere and everything as well.

Nelson Domingues

And so scripture talks about that he's holding all things together. That's what Colossians 1, verse 17 says, and he's before all things and in him, all things hold together, right? My heart is beating because the Lord is keeping it beating. Our planet is spinning the way they're supposed to because he's holding all things together. Same with the rains and waters and all things. And so God is not just, he didn't just set the world in motion and then step away. Deism would believe that, right? That there is a God and that he created all things and he made it so well that he just kind of said it that way, then walked away and we're off to run on our own. And that's not how God is. He isn't just watching us from a distance. He isn't just omnipresent and watching everything happen, but in fact, he's active within his creation. And so it's a whole nother side of his being present. Not only he's just a passive observer, but he's active in every situation.

Shea Houdmann

Interesting, just thinking about this, all the different questions that come to mind. I love the eminence of God and that he's not just present and, hey, God's there, but no, God is actually doing something that's add comfort upon comfort. Like not only is God with me at all times, but he's actually involved in what's going on. And that's such a powerful encouragement. But when I think of another question that comes up, Gwen, maybe I'll target you with this one. Some people, whether they come from a different religion or even kind of

involved in the new age movement, they'll often get God's omnipresence confused with pantheism. From God is everywhere to God is everything. How would you explain the difference and why do we say that God is omnipresent and yet we reject pantheism, that God is everything?

Gwen Sellers

I think in some ways that goes back to the transcendence piece of omnipresence, that God is over and above his creation and kind of even talks to his holiness in some ways. But if we're thinking, to me, pantheism is kind of saying the universe is God, everything is God, but no, God is a distinct person, a distinct being who in fact created the world. So he is present everywhere within his creation. And like Nelson is saying active within his creation, but he is not his creation. So to me, that's the distinction.

Nelson Domingues

Yeah. I mean, I think it's important to realize those things, right? That we don't worship things just because he made it. We don't, just because he might be in between the atoms of, you know, particular matter, doesn't mean that he is that thing. Like we worship a God who is real, who is present, who reveals himself to us in many ways, through scripture, through prayer, through his manifest presence that we just had speaking even earlier before. But the fact that he created, you know, a tree doesn't mean I go out and worship a tree or maybe even like some things like crystals and think like, oh, God is more present in this particular crystal. And now this will have special healing abilities on me or, you know, something like that.

Nelson Domingues

So these are all things we can be very cautious of when we think about God being present in things and God being present everywhere as well, that we don't limit or we don't dictate how his presence works in an object, because that object is simply an object he created. And yes, he's everywhere, but that object doesn't have any particular value in the sense of God's presence in it as distinct from others.

Nelson Domingues

I remember a story. My brother was a videographer, Berlin Wall videographer. And so he worked at a lot of different weddings and he went to within, I believe it was a Catholic church. And as he was filming the wedding that, you know, the priest at that church, you know, to say, hey, you're allowed to film anywhere you want, but you can't come up past this bar in the front, you know, and he's like, well, why not? And then he's like, well, because in that box over there, that's the presence of God right over there. And he's like, he's like, oh, so God's in that box. He's like, yeah, that's the presence of God. And I wasn't there. I don't know the exact words that were being used,

but the idea of being conveyed, of course, was that God was in that particular spot because of his presence was making that box more holy. And Tim just being working there, couldn't be near it. And so that's not what we believe, right? God manifests his presence everywhere and doesn't make any particular object more holy or not holy than others.

Shea Houdmann

That's a great point. And yeah, it's very important to not have that mindset that God is only present. So God's only present in the church building. Therefore what I do outside doesn't matter. And that's a very common mindset for people, whether it's something they actively think or just how they live. God is just as present with you in your home as he is with you in church. And that's not meant to be a creepy God spying on me concept. It's supposed to be a comfort. So that kind of circles me back to the very beginning. And I'd like to ask each of you, and then I'll conclude. Maybe we'll start with you, Gwen. What to you is most comforting about God's omnipresence?

Gwen Sellers

Well, just one thing back on what you were saying of God being present, yeah, like in church and in your life. One thing to me that's encouraging is thinking about this in terms of evangelism. Sometimes we think, oh, like these unreached people groups or nations that really just like Christianity is so unheard of or unknown there. But that idea of, well, God is still there and God is still working and he's still pursuing. So I guess that's comforting to me, encouraging to me on the big picture.

Gwen Sellers

But in terms of personally, it really is the idea of God with us. Like Jesus took on flesh and dwelt among us. So he, like God really gets what human life is about, but that he really is with me in it. He's not just watching me. He's not just next to me. Like he's actually present everywhere I go and that he actually longs for me to be present with him. Like he wants me to come to him in prayer. He wants me to read his word. So that idea that this God is, you know, we have a God so big, he is present everywhere. And yet he wants me to be with him in a special way. And he's with me in a special way is, yeah, what's most comforting to me.

Nelson Domingues

I agree with you completely. I mentioned earlier, same thing, that concept of him being with me at all times is truly comforting. But something else I think is so comforting is the idea of his imminence, meaning that he is active around. And so I think, you know, if God can have the wherewithal to manage this universe and to manage everything that he's managing, you know, the sun and the moon and stars and all these different things, all this, you know, the

inner workings of everything. I mean, we are discovering new things every day, all the time, you know, within creation. And we're blown away by some of these things and some things we have yet to even understand within science and the study of God's creation. And I think it's amazing. And so it's so comforting for me to think if God is active and upholding all of that, all these things that we haven't even discovered or don't even yet understand, then surely he understands my situation. He knows the complexity of the dynamics in my current struggle or whatever it might be. Surely he is more than capable of guiding me through, you know, what in my mind might be a million landmines to get from point A to point B. And God, if I would just rely on him, would guide me perfectly through unscathed if that's his will for me to get there. And I can fully trust that he can and will do it if that's the destination that he wants for me. And so, yeah, the fact that he is with me and that he is active in my situations and has the ability to change and do anything that he desires to be done is so comforting to me.

Shea Houdmann

Well said, both of you. I know it's not a biblical saying, but like the feeling far from God, guess who moved? That saying is one I've always appreciated. And that no matter what I've done, how bad I've sinned, I know God is right there. And I can confess, repent, and get back to right relationship with God instantly. I don't have to climb the highest mountain. I don't have to scale the tallest wall. I don't have to do any of these amazing things to get back to right with God. He's right there all the time. And that's powerful.

Shea Houdmann

And then there have been a few times in my life where I particularly felt God's presence. And one of them was when I think he miraculously saved me from a car accident. And other times where in a church service where I can just tell the people are truly worshiping God. And like, I'm not a really touchy-feely type of guy. I'm feeling something and I'm not stirring it. I'm not expecting it. It's those sorts of things that tangible reminders of God's presence that doesn't happen a lot. But when it does, it's really powerful and encouraging and comforting to me.

Shea Houdmann

So God's omnipresence, to me, it's not theological. God is always right there with me. And therefore, I know he can empower me. I know he can guide me. I know he can give me the wisdom to sermon. I know he can do all of these things. I know his other attributes are right there for me because of God's presence. And to me, a repeated theme we've discussed is how all of God's attributes work together. They're in harmony with one another. They cooperate with each other. So God's omnipotence, his all-powerfulness is

even more tangible because God's power is always right there with you because of his omnipresence. That's just so encouraging and comforting to me as well.

Nelson Domingues

I think we can encourage our viewers and listeners that no matter how far someone might feel, you know, I think we've also have not only felt the presence of God particularly sometimes, but we also felt some distance from God. Maybe when we were refusing to follow his will or we were lost in sin. And I'm sure some of our viewers and listeners can relate to feeling that way, and maybe some of you are right now. And God's omnipresence and the fact that he's active in all situations should remind you that you have not gone too far. You have not done things where you can't turn back. You have not gone beyond repentance or God's forgiveness. You have an opportunity to turn to God because he is right there with you no matter where you are or how desperate your situation seems or what sin you might be caught up in. God calls us to repentance, to turn from our sin, to turn from him. And he will forgive and his presence will be fully manifest to you in that moment. And so I just want to encourage anyone who might be facing a dark time right now that there can be light, and all it requires is you turning to our light, right? Jesus Christ himself, the light of the world, and he can surely be with you in any situation you find yourself in.

Shea Houdmann

Amen, Nelson. Well said. So I hope our conversation today has been encouraging to you as we've discussed God's omnipresence. God is with us. God is with you. I think that's ultimately what we need to remember with the fact that God is everywhere present at all times. So Gwen, Nelson, thank you for joining me today. I look forward to our next conversation on what does it mean that God is love. This has been the Got Questions podcast on what does it mean that God is omnipresent? Got questions? The Bible has answers, and we'll help you find them.