

2 - When God Is Near

I. Announce:

- A. Welcome those online!
- B. **Slide1 DC:** Healing happens in community. If you or someone you love is walking through **separation or divorce**, you don't have to do it alone. Our next Divorce Care group starts Feb 16 & meets every Mon at 6:30pm in the Agape Rm, 13 wks. More info/register, visit the Divorce Care pg on church website under the *Connect* tab.
- C. **Slide2 GriefShare:** We offer a GriefShare cycle twice per year, and we will be starting our Spring sessions on Sun, March 1st. It's a **video, workbook and discussion format** that features experts on grief and recovery topics as seen from a biblical perspective. More info/register, visit our webpage under the *Connect* tab, then click on *GriefShare*.
- D. **Slide3 Ramadan:** 30 days of prayer for the Rohingya, starts next Wed.
 - 1. **Ramadan:** a month of fasting (1 of the 5 pillars of Islam). **Eat after sunset & before dawn.** (no food, liquids, smoking, sexual relations). **Spiritual rewards for fasting. Sensitive to spiritual things.**
 - 2. **Negative perception** from Nepalese nationals, leading to resistance and social difficulties.
 - 3. **Ramadan is one of the most spiritually focused seasons** in the Muslim world. For 30 days, millions fast, pray, give generously, and seek closeness to God with unusual intentionality. It is a time when hearts are softened, eternity is considered, and spiritual questions rise closer to the surface. Ask that the Lord **to reveal Himself in truth, grace, and love.** God who draws near to seekers delights **to make Himself known.**
- E. **Prayer:** Canada school shooting. (8 dead, 25 injured, also the shooter took their life)

II. **Slide4 Intro: When God Is Near** (#1 When God is Distant)

- A. **Q:** Throughout the Bible, God **draws near** to His people, using various means/locations, (purpose) **to dwell with them**. Can you name some examples?
1. (Eden, Tabernacle, Temple, Incarnation, Church, New Jerusalem).
- B. **Last week** we talked about when God *feels distant*. **This week** we talk about when He *is near*. **But hear this - He has not moved!**
1. The same God who feels close today, will still be faithful when He feels quiet tomorrow.
- C. Big Idea: God's nearness is a gift - **but** it's also **a season** that requires *wisdom*.
1. **But hear this clearly:** **His nearness** is not proof that *He loves you more*. **And His distance** will never mean *He loves you less*. (pause)
- D. Feeling God's nearness is meant to **form us**, not just **comfort us**!
- E. Balance: **Don't Idolize nearness**, **nor Panic in distance**.
1. **If you are in a near season**, **don't waste it**.
 2. **If you are in a distant season**, **don't misinterpret it**.
 - a) Distance is not abandonment. It is often **apprenticeship**.
- F. **Slide5** Show Teaching Framework for Both Weeks: *READ from slide*.
1. Both seasons require **grace**. Both require **wisdom**. Both are **gifts**.

III. Slide6a 1 NAMING THE SEASON

- A. Most of us can point to seasons where God felt incredibly **close**. **Prayer** was easy. **Worship** was alive. **Scripture** felt personal.
1. **Slide6b** **But here's the question** we **don't** ask enough: **What is God doing in us when He is near?**
- B. As Andrew reminded us last week, so many people know, use, and love **Phil.4:13**, "*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*"
1. **Slide6c** **But what does the verse before it say?** **Phil. 4:12** *I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance,*

I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

2. Paul **doesn't just** say he **experienced** seasons ... he **learned** in them.
3. Paul says: "I know how to be **brought low**, and I know how to **abound**."
 - a) **He doesn't say:** "*I feel the same in both.*"
4. He says: "I have learned." The learning happens across both.
 - a) **Nearness** is not accidental. It's **instructional**.

C. **Slide6d** We often ask **Why** is God **distant**? But rarely ask, **Why** is God **near** right now?

IV. **Slide7 2 THE PROMISE OF NEARNESS** (biblical theology)

A. **Build a biblical foundation** that God **wants** to be near.

1. Psalm 145:18 *The Lord is near to all who call on Him ...*
2. James 4:8 *Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.*
3. Isaiah 57:15 *God dwells with the contrite and lowly.*
4. Matthew 28:20 *I am with you always ...*

B. God's nearness is **not** based on **our performance** but on **His character**.

C. Tie back to Paul: In a Prison cell. Still in Contentment.

1. **Nearness wasn't circumstantial** - it was **relational**.

V. **Slide8 3 WHAT GOD OFTEN DOES WHEN HE IS NEAR** (core teaching)

A. **When God feels near**, He is **forming**:

1. **Identity:** You are loved. You are secure. You belong.
2. **Theology:** God is good. God is faithful. God is present.
3. **Spiritual Habits:** Prayer. Scripture. Worship. Obedience.
 - a) Near seasons are classroom seasons.

B. **Moses:** Near - Burning bush. Distant - 40 years in Midian.

C. **David:** Near - Anointed king. Distant - Running from Saul

- D. **Elijah**: Near - Fire from heaven. Distant - Cave depression
- E. **Jesus**: Near - Baptism: “This is My beloved Son”. Distant - “My God, why have You forsaken Me?”
1. Same God. Different season.
- F. So when we connect: *When God Is Near* with *When God Is Distant*, we see that these aren’t **opposite Gods** - just **different seasons** with **the same Father**.
1. Slide9 *God’s **nearness** prepares us for His **felt distance**. And His **felt distance** reveals whether we learned anything in His **nearness**.
 2. **Nearness** is **not permanent** - but it is **preparatory**.
 - a) Eg. David before the caves. Jesus before the wilderness. Paul before hardship.
 3. Picture God is storing **truth in your soul** now, that you’ll need later.

VI. Slide10 4 THE DANGER OF THE NEAR SEASON (warning w/o fear)

- A. Common pitfalls when God feels near:
1. Spiritual complacency (“I’m good right now”).
 2. Emotional dependence (when we’re chasing the feeling).
 3. Forgetting discipline (Scripture, prayer, obedience).
- B. God’s **nearness** is meant to **deepen** our roots, **not replace** them.

VII. Slide11 5 PRACTICING FAITH WHEN GOD IS NEAR (handles, not guilt)

- A. Practices for a season of nearness:
1. Write down what God is teaching you.
 2. Anchor truth in Scripture, **not just experience**.
 3. Strengthen habits, not just **emotions**.
 4. Thank Him - don’t cling to **the feeling**.
 - a) **Gratitude** keeps **nearness** from turning into **entitlement**.

b) Do we ever **thank Him** for His nearness? Or, **enjoy Him** in His nearness?

B. **Slide12 The Big Connection**

1. **Nearness Builds Trust.** **Distance Tests Trust.**
2. **Nearness** says: “Feel My love.” **Distance** says: “Trust My love.”
3. **Nearness** gives **assurance**. **Distance** produces **endurance**.
4. **Nearness** **comforts**. **Distance** **deepens**.
5. **Nearness** is often **experiential**. **Distance** is always **theological**.

VIII.7 DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- A. **Slide13** Can you think of 1 time when you felt God **especially near** in your life? - What do you think God was trying to **form in you** during that season?
- B. **Slide14** Why do you think we **struggle** to steward “**good seasons**” well?
- C. **Slide15** How can we **prepare spiritually** when God feels close?
- D. Take a moment **and Thank Him** if He is near, **or** to ask **Him** to be near.
- E. **Prayer:** Lord, **thank You** for **drawing near**. Help us not waste this season. Teach us what we **need now**, **so** we can **trust You later**.
- F. Keywords: near, distant, seasons.

Paul Tripp - “*There’s never been a time when God loves you more on your best day, nor has there ever been a time when God was less pleased with you on your worse day.*” Because He loves!