

“At Your Fingertips”

Genesis 2:15-25

Series: God Is Closer Than You Think Week 1. God's Desire is to be With You.

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More than a dozen years ago, Lisa and I were blessed to visit Rome. At the heart of Rome is Vatican City – which is both the smallest country in the world and the heart of the largest organization in the world – The Roman Catholic Church. At the heart of the Vatican is St. Peter's Basilica and in St. Peter's Basilica is the world famous Sistine Chapel. This where the Pope is secretly chosen behind locked doors. Yet thousands of tourists pass through the Sistine Chapel not to see its doors but to crane their necks and glimpse its ceiling.

The great Renaissance master, Michelangelo, spent four years on his back 68 feet above the floor painting the ceiling of the Sistine chapel. Though he is celebrated more as a sculptor than a painter, Michelangelo's masterpiece on high is the very high point of the High Renaissance. Near the center is its most famous and tantalizing scene: *The Creation of Adam* from Genesis 2. Though God the Father is depicted in the traditional way as an old man with a white beard, He doesn't sit on a throne. Instead, He soars down from heaven with buff biceps and wind in his hair thrusting a powerful extended index finger toward His creation. Adam, on the other hand, looks like a lounging surfer dude who is barely able to lift his wrist. What makes this painting so intriguing is “the space” – $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch - between their fingers. The electric moment of creation is frozen in time. We are forever waiting for it to happen.

And maybe that's on purpose. In his book *God is Closer Than You Think*, Pastor John Ortberg uses this image to point out how all of us are Adam.

God is as close as he can be. But having come that close, he allows just a little space, so that Adam can choose. He waits for Adam to make his move. Maybe Adam assumes that God, having come this far, will close the gap. Maybe he is indifferent to the possibility of touching his creator. Maybe he lacks the strength. All he would have to do is lift a finger.¹

God is waiting for you. He is close to you. God's great desire is to be with you. That timeless moment, that tiny space, in which God stretches out his finger, waiting in suspense for your response, is every moment. The Lord is longing to be with you in traffic, in a meeting, watching the kids, sitting in class, on the sports field. At every moment He is at your fingertips. This moment right now!

This is the opposite of what many believe about God. They consider Him distant, absent, unapproachable, unknowable and even uninteresting. Yet Scripture consistently testifies to God's desire to be with you everywhere all the time. Michelangelo's masterpiece is actually a monumental pair of bookends. The ceiling depicts the opening chapters of Genesis while the wall behind the altar portrays the Last Judgment of Revelation. In the same way, from Genesis to Revelation, the one overarching promise of Scripture is “I am with you.” God is with Adam and Eve in the Garden, walks with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, shepherds Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land, sends Deborah and the Judges, stands beside David in the valley of the shadow of

¹ John Ortberg, *God is Closer Than You Think* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2005) p. 13.

death, frees the exiles from captivity and rebuilds the temple and walls with Ezra and Nehemiah. God so wants to be with you He even becomes human. And to drive the point home one of the names He chooses for Himself is “Immanuel” which means “God with us.” In the end, just before Scripture brings down the curtain, it proclaims,

God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. Revelation 21:3-4

I read that passage at nearly every funeral. It’s God’s great promise He will be with us for all eternity. God wants to be with you...forever.

We all need to hear and believe it. As I mentioned on Christmas Eve, you shared with me your responses to the sentence, “I need God to be with me in:”

- My parents’ divorce
- My chaos. I need motivation, energy and healing
- Helping cure many members of our family struggling with Cancer
- Moments of stress and toxic behaviors of others
- The reconciliation of a critical family relationship
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Now more than ever you need to know God is at your fingertips.

So why does God feel so far away? It wasn’t always that way. In the beginning...

The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day Genesis 3:8

What a beautiful scene. The Lord comes home from work. He just put the finishing touches on three nebulae on the far side of Alpha Centauri. It’s been a hectic day of creating but God looks forward to His favorite time. In the evening He comes home to His children, Adam and Eve. They chat, break bread, stroll around paradise together. God loves watching Adam and Eve tend the garden. Adam comes up with creative names for the animals: Giraffe, Antelope, Hippopotamus. After a while Adam gets tired and runs out of names. “I don’t know what to call this bug. What does it do? Fly? Okay we’ll call it that!” God smiles, laughs and loves them. The Creator of billions of stars and galaxies desires to be with them... and you.

What did I want for Christmas? My greatest joy is to be with my wife, children and grandchildren. My favorite gifts are the ones they make – you know the ones with popsicle sticks, construction paper, tons of glue and a whole bottle of glitter? Those are the gifts I keep. Nothing on Amazon can match it. One gift I always treasure is the calendar my daughter creates featuring twelve months of family pictures – it carries me through the year. I love to be with every one of those smiling faces.

That's the way God feels about you. It is essential for you to reach out throughout the day to the God who is at your fingertips. Talk to Him in the cool of the evening, in heat of high noon, in the promise of sunrise, the stress of morning rush and the darkest midnight. Cultivate a constant awareness of His presence. John Ortberg relates the story of a five year old who said, "I know Jesus lives in my heart, because when I put my hand on it I can feel him walking around in there."

So if God is so close, why don't we see and sense Him? That's on us. Remember the pose Adam had – barely willing or able to lift a finger? That might be Michelangelo's way of preparing us for the next scenes on his ceiling when Adam and Eve give in to temptation, eat the forbidden fruit and disobey God. Sin and selfishness drives them to reject God, blame each other, cover up their crime and hide. One evening, when God comes home to His children, He notices it is too quiet.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" Genesis 3:8-9

That is the haunting question the Lord has asked ever since. I am with you. I am here. Where are you? We widen the gap between our fingertips and God's.

Recently, I experienced this first-hand. Remember how I look forward to being with my grandchildren, how much I love being with my grandchildren? I got my wish on Christmas. And then my daughter said, "How about if we leave the girls with you?" "Wait! What?" Ok. I can handle this. I have a doctorate, years of counseling experience plus four decades of parenting skills. It was all useless. I learned the Lord was infinitely wise when He decided parents should not be over sixty. God must have figured it out from His struggles with Adam and Eve. I learned it from Lily and Evie. Take for example Lily. She is two years old. She loves one thing more than her parents and grandparents: the word "NO!" I have to affirm her. She has certainly found her voice...and she uses it to scream at ear-drum shattering decibels. We took the girls to Trenton by the Statehouse and Lily let out a long, loud continuous scream that is still hanging in midair over the Delaware River. It made every state worker give me that sideways glance. Those two girls could fight over dried out scraps of play do and then blame each other. Lisa and I tried to teach them how to behave by reading them a story called "The Very Bad Bunny." In the story Binky, the very bad bunny, throws a ball into the lake, draws on the walls, locks everyone out of the house and more mischief. When I was done I said, "Girls, what did you learn from that story?" Lily said, "I want to be Binky. Call me Binky." "But Binky is the very bad bunny," I said, "He misbehaved." She replied, "I want to misbehave." Now Lily is advanced for her age. She is working on a special skill that makes every parent celebrate. But there are still some times when she will go and hide while she does her dirty work. My wife and I were completely wiped out when my daughter came to pick up the girls. And how long did we watch them? A day.

Lily is not bad. She is not unusual. She is human – just like the rest of us. In fact, I discovered she bears a strong resemblance to me. At various times, we each demand our way, fight over stuff, blame each other, scream and shout, misbehave and hide. We've been doing it since the Garden of Eden. All of this behavior increases the space between us and God, between us and each other. It causes God to call out, "Where are you?"

If you want to reach out and touch the God who is reaching out to you, you will need to do more than lift a finger. This will take more than just meditation and mindfulness. You and I need to work against our selfish drives which pull us away from God and live a Spirit led life. We need to stop being Binky and start being like Jesus who taught us to - doing what Jesus did – love, grow and share. John Ortberg provides us a list of Foundation Truths of My Life with God. Review these truths once a day over the next weeks. The first three say:

- God is always present and active in my life, whether or not I see him.
- Coming to recognize and experience God's presence is *learned* behavior; I can cultivate it.
- My task is to meet God in *this* moment...and do what He wants.

Don't wait for a tragedy to make you draw near to God. I had a professor in seminary who was absolutely brilliant. James Loder studied with the greatest minds of his generation. He taught a lot about God. Yet by his own admission, he didn't really know God.

Then, on a Saturday in 1970 at 4:30 p.m. he stopped his car and camper to help two elderly ladies stranded on the New York Thruway near Kingston. While under their car fixing a flat, there was an ear splitting screech of brakes. A 64 year old man fell asleep at the wheel, rammed the Olds from behind and shoved it on top of Jim. It ground his body into the gravel and pushed it until the Olds smashed into the rear of the camper leaving room for Jim's head and shoulders.

His right thumb was torn off at the first joint, five ribs were broken, the left lung was bleeding and his skin was scraped from head to foot. When he called for help Jim's wife Arlene, a slight woman barely five feet put her hands under the bumper and prayed, "In the name of Jesus Christ, in the name of Jesus Christ." She lost consciousness for a minute but when she began to focus again she saw the car lifted off her husband. You'd think pain, shock and anger would be Jim's first reactions. But something totally different happened.

As I roused myself from under the car, a steady surge of life was rushing through me carrying with it two solid assurances. First I knew how deeply I felt love for those around me, especially my family. The second assurance was that this disaster had a purpose. Walking from the car to the embankment, I never felt more conscious of the life that poured through me, nor more aware that this life was not my own. By far, the most significant and memorable effect was not the pain, nor the anger, but the gracious nature of the life I was experiencing.²

When he arrived at the hospital, the situation was extremely critical. His skin was turning blue. Arlene called her father, a pastor in Chicago, and his church quickly gathered to pray for Jim. Again the power of God's life rushed into his severely wounded body. The Crucifixes on the wall were comforting – there was Jesus, suffering in pain yet also promising a life greater than death.

When the surgeons arrived they wore the tired, solemn faces of those about to face another grim life-against-death struggle. But Jim, feeling the joyful Presence of God, invited them to join him in a hymn of praise before the surgery. They remained quiet as he sang a few bars of "Fairest Lord Jesus." Soon the mood lightened and the laughter filled the room. Jim's blue skin turned pink

² James Loder, The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences, (Harper & Row, New York, 1981), p. 1-6.

and his lung stopped bleeding. Two days later, further treatment was cancelled and the head surgeon said, “A good surgeon knows when to get out of the way and let God do the healing.”

Some months later, Jim Loder visited his father in law’s church which prayed for him. Rising during the service to say a few words of appreciation, he was overcome with tears of gratitude. As a matter of fact, whenever Jim Loder taught or preached from then on, he was always moved by the Presence of God to tears. His lectures were like worship services. His life was not just saved, but changed forever. Jesus became a living Presence in his life. He began to live from one moment to the next in a God-bathed, God-soaked, God-intoxicated world.

In 2001, Dr. James Loder passed away very suddenly of a brain aneurysm. On his gravestone in Princeton, above his name and dates is one simple sentence. “The Lord Jesus Christ Reigns.” James Loder lost the tip of his finger but for the rest of his life, and for eternity, he was deeply in touch with God.