

GOD IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

16 AUGUST 2026

SUMMARY

This Message continues a series on the presence of God, challenging the common but mistaken notion that the Christian life is about straining to reach a distant God. Drawing primarily from John 14:15-23, Bruce Downes argues that God has already crossed the distance and, through baptism and sanctifying grace, the Holy Trinity dwells within every believer. The Message calls Christians to stop searching outward for a God who has already made his home within them, and instead to cultivate a continuous, conscious awareness of that indwelling presence throughout every moment of daily life. Using the community prayer phrase "God is here and I am with him," Bruce Downes provides a practical framework for living as missionaries of his presence, closing the gap between occasional awareness of God and a sustained, underlying consciousness of his nearness.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1. God has already crossed the distance.** The Christian life is not the story of human beings desperately trying to reach a God who is far away. Through grace, God has already drawn near and taken up residence within us.
- 2. The indwelling of the Trinity is the foundation of the spiritual life.** Through baptism, the Holy Trinity comes to dwell within us. This is not merely a theological idea but a living reality that should shape how we pray, how we work, and how we see ourselves.
- 3. Our problem is often not God's absence but our inattention.** Like a person who looks up from their phone to find a friend who was always sitting right there, we often discover that God was never gone. What changed was our awareness.
- 4. We are a dwelling place of God.** St. Elizabeth of the Trinity built her entire spiritual life around this truth. She understood that her soul was a place where God resided, and she oriented her daily life toward remaining attentive to that presence.
- 5. Practicing the presence changes everything.** Returning throughout the day to the simple awareness that God is here and I am with Him is not a technique or positive thinking. It is a deliberate act of faith rooted in the reality of the indwelling Spirit.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

- John 14:15-23, in which Jesus promises the Holy Spirit as advocate, assures the disciples he will not leave them orphaned, and declares that the Father and Son will come and make their home with those who love him
- 1 Corinthians, in which Paul describes believers as the temple of God in whom God's Spirit dwells

STORIES:

- Bruce Downes describes setting hourly phone alarms with the phrase "God is here and I am with him" as a personal practice to counter the ease of forgetting God's presence throughout a busy day
- A story is shared about parents telling their children a truth, only for the children to receive the same truth with wonder when a stranger says it, illustrating how familiarity can blind us to deep realities we have already been taught
- Bruce Downes recalls family meetings held in a circle with his children when they were young, using this as an image for Jesus gathering his disciples to reorient their thinking before his passion and death
- An analogy is drawn of sitting with a loved one at a cafe and becoming absorbed in a phone for twenty minutes, only to look up and find the person was present the entire time, illustrating that God's presence never changes but our attention does
- The life and writings of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity are referenced, noting that she died at twenty-six and, without extensive formal theological study, developed a profound and practical spirituality centered on the indwelling presence of the Trinity
- Teresa of Avila and her book *The Interior Castle* are referenced to illustrate the image of the soul as a castle with God dwelling at its center, calling believers to move inward rather than search outward

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SMALL GROUP GUIDE

This guide is designed to help your small group dive deeper into the message.

OPENING PRAYER

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and open hearts to God's transforming work. Pray the IMPACTERS Community Prayer .

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening

1. Before this Message, how did you tend to picture your relationship with God? Did you see yourself as someone reaching toward a God who was far away, or as someone already in His presence? Where did that picture come from?
2. Bruce Downes mentions that people who have been in church for decades sometimes say they have never heard this teaching before. Why do you think something so central to Christian faith can remain unfamiliar even to long-time believers?

Going Deeper

3. In John 14:23, Jesus promises that He and the Father will come and make their home with those who love Him. What does the word "home" suggest to you about the nature of God's presence within us? How is a home different from a visit?
4. Bruce Downes draws a distinction between trying to reach God through prayer versus awakening to a God who has already drawn near. How might this shift in understanding change the way you approach prayer on a practical, day-to-day level?
5. St. Teresa of Avila described the soul as a beautiful interior castle where God dwells at the center. Bruce Downes suggests that many of us live externally, always looking outward for God, when He is already within. In what areas of your life do you find yourself looking outward for God when you could be turning inward?
6. Bruce Downes says, "Perhaps the problem that we have is not God's absence, but our inattention." Do you agree? What are the biggest distractions in your daily life that pull your attention away from the presence of God?
7. St. Elizabeth of the Trinity died at 26 without extensive theological training, yet she had a profound grasp of the indwelling presence of God. What does her example suggest about how this awareness is developed? Is it primarily a matter of study, or something else?
8. Bruce Downes connects living in the presence of God with the mission of the church, saying that talent alone will not accomplish what God has called the

community to do. How do you see the personal practice of God's presence connecting to outward mission and service?

Personal Reflection

9. Bruce Downes describes setting an hourly alarm on his phone with the phrase "God is here and I am with Him." Have you ever tried a practice like this? What happened, or what do you imagine would happen if you did?
10. Think about a situation in your life right now that feels heavy, uncertain, or overwhelming. How does it change the way you approach that situation when you remind yourself that God is not absent from it but already present within it?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- 1. The Hourly Practice** Set a quiet reminder on your phone once an hour with the phrase: "God is here and I am with Him." When it appears, pause for just a moment, take a breath, and let that truth settle. Do this for one week and bring your observations back to the group.
- 2. Morning Awareness** Before your feet touch the floor each morning, before any prayer or Bible reading, pause and acknowledge that God is already present. You are not inviting Him in. He is already there. Begin from that starting point rather than working toward it.
- 3. Reframe a Routine** Choose one ordinary, repetitive task this week, such as preparing a meal, commuting, folding laundry, or waiting in line. Use that moment intentionally to say, "God is here and I am with Him." Notice whether that simple act changes the quality of the moment.
- 4. Interior Reflection** Spend ten minutes this week in quiet. Not with a prayer list or a scripture reading, but simply sitting with the awareness that God dwells within you. If your mind wanders, gently return to that awareness. Afterward, write down what you noticed.
- 5. Share the Phrase** Without making it a performance, find one natural moment this week to mention to someone close to you, a friend, a family member, or a colleague, that you have been thinking about the idea that God is always present. See where the conversation goes.

CLOSING PRAYER

Use the community prayer to close your group time together:

God is here and I am with Him.

Lord Jesus, give me and every member of our church community a hunger today to see all people encounter you as their personal Lord and Saviour. Almighty God, three persons in one, send your Holy Spirit upon me, upon us, upon the church, upon the earth. Lord God, I am desperate for your presence. Increase our influence and show us your favour and mercy. Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.