

# "When God Seems Distant"

Dealing with Spiritual Depression

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Text: Acts 17:22-31

( words bolded for emphasis and easier textual reference )

22 Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. <sup>23</sup>For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, <sup>25</sup>nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. <sup>26</sup>From one ancestor\* he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, <sup>27</sup>so that they would **search for God**\* and perhaps **grope for** him and find him—though **indeed he is not far from each one of us**. <sup>28</sup>For "**In him we live and move and have our being**"; as even some of your own poets have said, □ "For we too are his offspring." □<sup>29</sup>Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. <sup>30</sup>While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup>because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.'

## Sermon:

To know God is to have an active, dynamic relationship with him. The knowledge of God is not a matter of philosophic speculation as practiced by the Greeks. It is more than recognizing a deity's existence as thought by the Athenians. According to St Paul -- to know God is to be engaged in a very personal and profound relationship.

So, how is your relationship with the Lord these days? Is it active, dynamic, personal, profound ?

As Christians affirm God, the Son is the living Lord! He is risen, indeed! We affirm God, the Father, as maker of heaven and earth is intimately involved in all of creation. We affirm God, the Holy Spirit is before, with, in and among us. In our First Lesson St Paul testifies that *“indeed he (God) is not far from each one of us.”* When you and I feel close to the Lord... when we feel God is near – life is, indeed, wonderful. In your spiritual life if you are currently feeling near to God... please, raise your hand. I pray that each time you enter this sanctuary to worship, that during the service - - sometime, somehow, in some way -- you feel God’s divine touch. I pray that you experience the Holy. I pray that you sense his very presence. You and I were created by God. You and I were created for God. St. Paul says: *“In him we live and move and have our being”*

YET, in a Christian’s life also there are those times: when God seems very distant; when we wonder “where God went”; when we feel estranged from the Lord. These times are not so wonderful, are they? It is not that we don’t believe during these times. We believe in God. That is not the issue. It is not that we don’t feel graced and blessed by God. It is that we don’t feel the nearness of the Lord. We don’t feel close to God. We don’t sense the Lord’s presence -- as we once did. In these times of our spiritual journey, we “search” and “grope” hoping to find God.

How do you regain once again the feeling of intimacy between God and ourselves?

First of all, realize that you may be suffering from Spiritually Depression. You’re not the only one that has ever felt that way. You’re in pretty good company. Elijah felt depressed. Jeremiah felt depressed. Jonah felt depressed. David felt depressed. There are no super-Christians who are spiritually immune to losing touch with God. There is only a Super God who wants to guide you to help you make it through.

When emotionally depressed four things are regularly recommended:

- Get plenty of rest
- Eat right
- Exercise regularly
- Surround yourself with people you know and trust.

When spiritually depressed what God asks us to do is the following.

FIRST -- “be still!”

Recalled the story of Elijah recorded in I Kings 19:11-12. He is spiritually depressed though he should be on a spiritual high. He just has defeated 400 priests of the pagan deities Baal and Asherah. But Queen Jezebel is after him. In fear he goes into hiding.

11 He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

I find it fascinating that God showed Elijah an array of powerful things: a wind that was so strong it broke rocks; an earthquake that shook the ground; a fire that lit the skies. But God was not in any of that! Instead, God reveals himself to Elijah in the "*sheer silence*" that followed all of the racket.

Often times to get out our spiritual malaise we want an encounter with God that is special...that is out of the ordinary. We want God to show himself to us, like he did for Moses in the burning bush. So we beat the spiritual bushes -- looking for God.

Remember, God is not the one who is lost. It is us.

"Be still and know that I am the Lord your God." Regaining a sense of God's presence starts with first practicing stillness. It is not about having a spectacular vision. It is not about witnessing a super sign. It's not about feeling tingling down to your fingertips, and seeing flashes of light. It is about stillness.

SECONDLY-- Satisfy your anxious mind and empty heart on God's promises as found in the Bible.

For instance, see what Jesus promises his disciples in today's text, "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. I will not leave you orphans." (See John 14:15-21) Revisit. Recite. Repeat ...to yourself aloud -- the promises of God

Then THRIDLY -- do this exercise:

Base your faith not on your emotions, but upon God's promises.

Think of it this way. The Lord's presence in the Holy Eucharist does not depend upon what we think nor what we feel at the communion rail. The Lord is present "in, with and under" the bread and wine whether we acknowledge it or not. He is present...period. His presence is based on his promises. And, the Lord is faithful to his promises and his people. Our problem is when we are spiritually in a funk, we listen to our feelings and emotions rather than listening to our Lord and his promises.

FOURTHLY, surround yourself people who know the Lord and you trust.

Jimmy Reed was blues singer back in my heyday. If one listened very carefully to his recording there could be heard, ever so faintly a woman's voice in the background. There came a time, when he simply could not remember the words of his own songs. He needed help with the lyrics, and the woman's voice was none other than that of his wife, coaching him through the recording by whispering the upcoming stanzas into his ear .

I believe GOD is present and can be encountered in his Word, in his Sacraments and in his people. When we can't remember his words...when we can't feel his presence... we need others whispering in our ears the lyrics of God's faithfulness.

FIRST -- "be still!"

SECONDLY-- satiate your anxious mind and empty heart on God's promises as found in the Bible.

THRIDLY -- do this exercise. Base your faith not on your emotions, but upon God's promises.

FOURTHLY -- surround yourself people who know the Lord and you trust.

Amen.