

Not Far From Each of Us

A 5-Day Devotional Bible Study

Based on Acts 17 and John 14 | A journey from searching to belonging

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The Searching Heart

Key Verse

"For in him we live and move and have our being."
Acts 17:28

Today's Devotional

When the Apostle Paul walked into Athens, he entered one of the most impressive cities the ancient world had ever produced. Everywhere he turned, there were temples, shrines, and monuments dedicated to gods of every kind. And tucked among them, he discovered one altar set apart from all the rest: an altar to the unknown god. The Athenians, in a kind of spiritual insurance policy, wanted to make sure they had not missed any divine power that might be out there.

There is something quietly familiar about that impulse. We may not build physical altars, but many of us carry within us a similar searching. We long for reassurance that our lives matter, that we are not alone, that something stronger than fear or grief or uncertainty is holding us. This longing is not weakness. It is one of the most deeply human things about us. We were made for more than we can see, and our hearts know it.

Paul does not mock the Athenians for their searching. He honors their curiosity and meets them where they are. And then, with boldness and grace, he points them toward the God they had not yet fully known. That same God is not waiting behind some undiscovered temple. He is already near, already present, already at work within the very lives we are living right now.

Reflection Questions

1. In what areas of your life do you find yourself searching for reassurance or certainty?
2. How do you relate to the Athenians' desire to cover all their spiritual bases?
3. Where have you seen God show up in places you were not expecting him?

Today's Prayer

Lord God, you know the searching places in my heart. You know the questions I carry and the fears I do not always speak aloud. Thank you that you are not a distant or unknown god. You are near. You are present. Help me today to trust that you are already at work in the very places where I feel most uncertain. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

God Comes Near

Key Verse

"What therefore you worship as unknown, **this I proclaim to you.**"
Acts 17:23b

Today's Devotional

Paul stood on the Areopagus, a hilltop in Athens surrounded by some of the greatest philosophical minds of his era. He could have been intimidated. He could have retreated into safer, more comfortable language. Instead, he looked at the altar to the unknown god and said with remarkable confidence: I know who this is. And I am here to tell you.

That is not arrogance. That is the natural overflow of someone who has personally encountered the living God. Paul had been changed by Jesus Christ, and no amount of impressive architecture or sophisticated debate could shake what he knew to be true. The God he proclaimed was not confined to any building, any shrine, or any system of thought. This God made the world and everything in it. This God does not live in temples made by human hands. And most importantly, this God is not far from any one of us.

Christianity is not the story of humanity slowly climbing upward toward some distant divine achievement. It is the story of God descending. God reaching down. God choosing to be found. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the ultimate declaration that God is not content to remain at a distance. He enters the mess, the grief, the fear, and the ordinary days of human life and says: I am here. This is the gospel that Paul proclaimed in Athens, and it is the same gospel that still rings true today.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever experienced a moment when God felt suddenly close or unmistakably present? What was happening in your life at that time?
2. What does it mean to you personally that God is not confined to a building or a specific place?
3. How might Paul's boldness in Athens inspire you to speak about your own faith more openly?

Today's Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for not remaining hidden. Thank you for the boldness of Paul, who pointed people toward you in the middle of one of the most impressive places on earth. Give me that same confidence today. Help me to know, deep in my bones, that you have already come near, that you are not waiting to be discovered, but that you are already here. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

I Will Not Leave You Orphaned

Key Verse

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you."

John 14:18

Today's Devotional

Jesus speaks these words to his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. They are frightened, confused, and grieving what is to come. Into that fear, he speaks the most tender of promises.

There is a particular kind of fear that comes when stability disappears. A sudden diagnosis. An unexpected loss. A relationship that fractures. A future that no longer looks the way you planned. In those moments, the fear is not always loud. Sometimes it is quiet and cold, a creeping sense that you have been left behind, that your prayers are not reaching anyone, that God has gone somewhere you cannot follow.

Jesus knew his disciples were heading into exactly that kind of darkness. And so, the night before the cross, he gathered them close and spoke directly into their fear. "I will not leave you orphaned." Not a vague reassurance. Not a distant comfort. A direct, personal, unconditional promise from the Son of God himself. I am not abandoning you. I am coming to you. The Spirit of truth will be with you, not just near you, but in you.

There is a world of difference between a God who watches from a distance and a God who abides within. Jesus promises the latter. The Holy Spirit is not a force that hovers somewhere overhead. The Spirit takes up residence in us, accompanying us through every season, including the hard ones. Especially the hard ones. Whatever you are walking through today, the same promise holds: you have not been orphaned. You are not alone. Christ is coming to you even now.

Reflection Questions

1. What does the word "orphaned" bring up for you? How does Jesus' use of that word speak to your deepest fears?
2. Recall a season of life when God felt absent. Looking back, where do you see evidence that he was still present?
3. How does the promise of the Holy Spirit change the way you face uncertainty?

Today's Prayer

Lord Jesus, there are moments when I feel very much alone, when the path ahead looks dark and the future feels uncertain. Thank you for this promise spoken directly into fear: I will not leave you orphaned. Remind me today that your Spirit lives within me, that I am not searching in the dark for a distant God, but that you are already here, already present, already holding me. Amen.

In Him We Live and Move

Key Verse

"For in him we live and move and have our being." Acts 17:28a

Today's Devotional

Paul's declaration to the Athenians is one of the most intimate descriptions of God in all of Scripture. We do not simply believe in God from a respectful distance. We exist within him. Every breath is drawn inside his presence. Every step is taken within the orbit of his care. This is not a metaphor for the spiritually advanced. This is the condition of every human being, whether they know it or not.

The hard seasons of life have a way of making God feel remote. Grief fogs our vision. Fear narrows our perspective. We begin to wonder if our prayers are reaching anyone at all. And yet Paul says: not far. He is not far from each one of us. That phrase carries a stubborn, almost defiant tenderness. Not distant. Not abstract. Not confined to Sunday mornings. Present in the daily, ordinary, sometimes exhausting movement of your actual life.

To live in this truth is not passive. It changes how we face the morning, how we carry our burdens, how we speak to one another. We live and move and have our being in a God who knows us fully and refuses to let us go.

Reflection Questions

1. What would change in your daily life if you truly believed God was not far from you in every moment?
2. How do you practice awareness of God's presence outside of formal worship?
3. Where do you most need to hear the words "not far" today?

Today's Prayer

Father, forgive me for the times I have lived as though you were far away, as though I had to earn my way back into your presence. You are not far. You are here, in this breath, in this day, in this life. Help me to walk today with the quiet confidence that I am held by you. In Christ's name, Amen.

The Table of the Known God

Key Verse

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments, and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to be with you forever."

John 14:15-16

Today's Devotional

The altar to the unknown god has been replaced. In its place stands a table, and at that table the known God shares a meal with his people. Week after week, through water and bread and wine, through things we can touch and taste and hold in our hands, God makes his presence tangible. Luther understood this well. God does not ask us to climb up toward some spiritual achievement. He comes down to us through ordinary things, through the stuff of everyday life, and makes them holy through his promises.

The gospel of Jesus Christ has now been proclaimed for nearly two thousand years. The grand temples and philosophies of Athens are largely in ruins. But the good news continues, carried not by impressive architecture, but by ordinary people gathered around a common table, sharing a common meal, holding onto a common hope. That is the community you belong to today.

As this devotional week closes, carry with you the simple and life-giving truth that held it all together: he is not far from each one of us. In him we live and move and have our being. The risen Christ has not abandoned his people. The Holy Spirit still abides. And nothing, absolutely nothing, will separate us from the love of God made known to us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reflection Questions

1. How has your understanding of God's nearness shifted or deepened through this week of study?
2. What ordinary moments or places in your life might God be using to make his presence known to you?
3. How will you carry the phrase "not far" with you into the week ahead?

Closing Prayer

Lord God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thank you for this week. Thank you for the boldness of Paul, for the tenderness of Jesus, and for the abiding presence of your Spirit. We come to your table as people who have searched, who have wondered, and who have sometimes been afraid. And you meet us here. You feed us here. You remind us here that we are not orphaned, not abandoned, not alone. Hitherto you have helped us, and we trust you with what lies ahead. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.