

THE *Certainty* OF
God's Promises



Welcome!

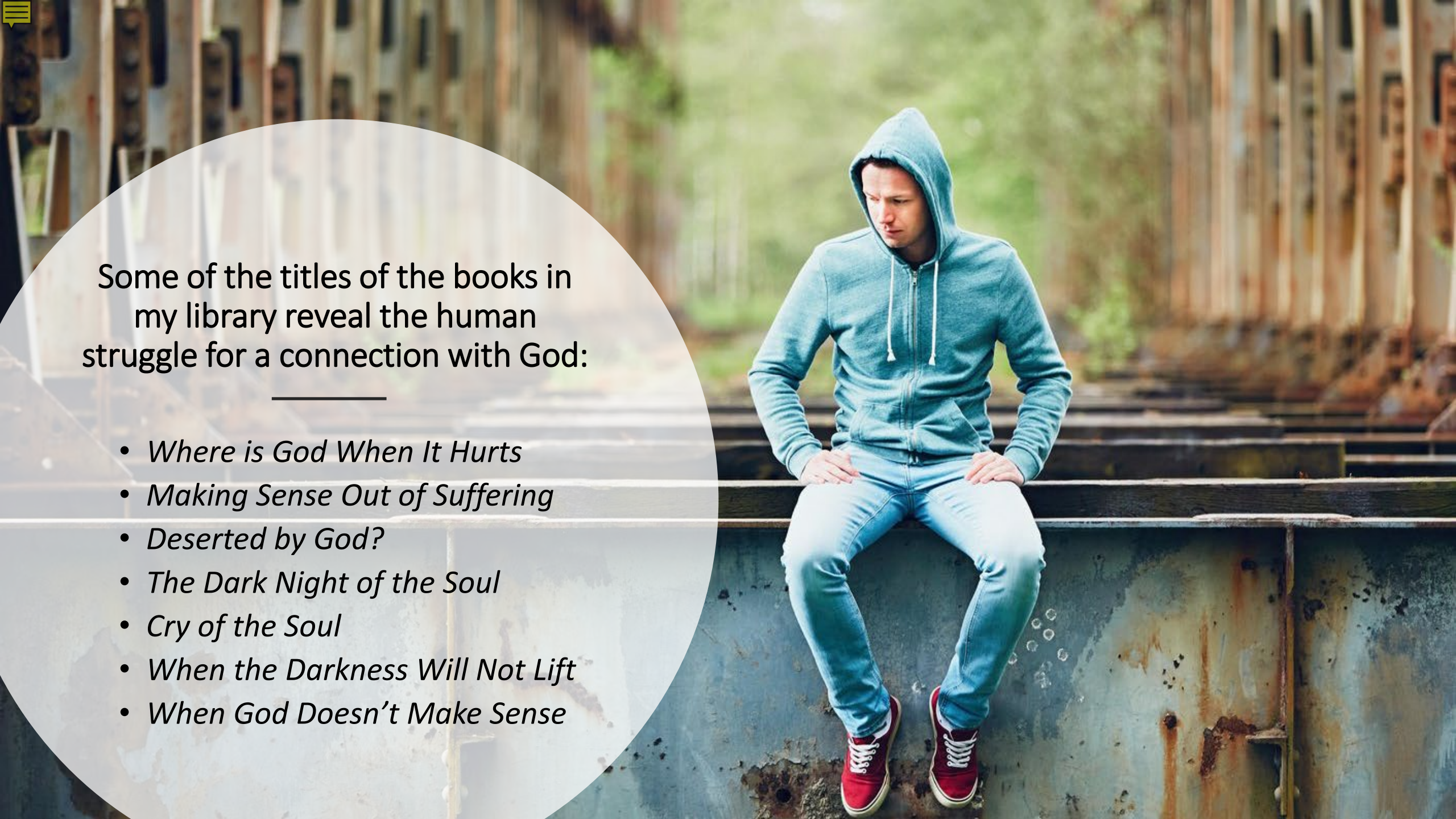
A warm welcome to each one of you this morning! I am glad you decided to join me as I present a second promise that God has made to us. It is God's word to us that we will *never* be alone in this life or in the one to come. It is His promise that He will never abandon or forsake us:

"I will be with you."



However...

- Not everyone believes this.
- Many world religions or cults do not believe in a personal God.
- Some who do believe in God believe He is transcendent but not immanent and, therefore, unknowable.
- Some have sincerely searched for God and express that they have not been able to find Him.
- Many have asked the question, “Where was God when I _____?”
- Most everyone has wrestled with the silence of God.

A man in a blue hoodie and jeans is sitting on a rusty metal beam, looking down thoughtfully. The background is a blurred industrial setting with vertical metal structures.

Some of the titles of the books in my library reveal the human struggle for a connection with God:

- *Where is God When It Hurts*
- *Making Sense Out of Suffering*
- *Deserted by God?*
- *The Dark Night of the Soul*
- *Cry of the Soul*
- *When the Darkness Will Not Lift*
- *When God Doesn't Make Sense*

Two Outcomes

The authors of these books and hundreds more have explored the difficulty of believing in a God who seems – at times – to be absent or far away when He is so desperately needed. As you would imagine, some who enter the “dark night of the soul” come through to the other side transformed in ways they never could have imagined. For others, sadly, the silence of God drives them away into various forms of unbelief, hopeless that a transcendent, self-existent God is really there and cares about them personally. Having experienced the loss of a loved one, trauma, financial ruin, injury, disease, or some other deep pain, it would be quite normal for them to cry out in anguish, “God, where are You?”

Douglas Groothuis, PhD



Photo credit: Cameron Bertuzzi of Capturing Christianity

Douglas Groothuis, PhD

1957 –

Professor of Philosophy, Denver Seminary

“I sometimes get lost walking through dementia’s twilight. The trail may be torturous and the walking is often more like staggering. But I soldier on, marching while wounded, heaving for good air. But Becky and I need other soldiers to hold us up and to call us on. Every sufferer needs the same.”

- from *Walking Through Twilight*

A memoir about his wife’s illness and his lament

Introduction

Dr. Groothuis has spoken openly about his “getting lost” and “staggering.” You probably have your own personal vocabulary to describe your reaction to some of your life’s most difficult experiences: *abandoned, forsaken, lonely, or deserted.*

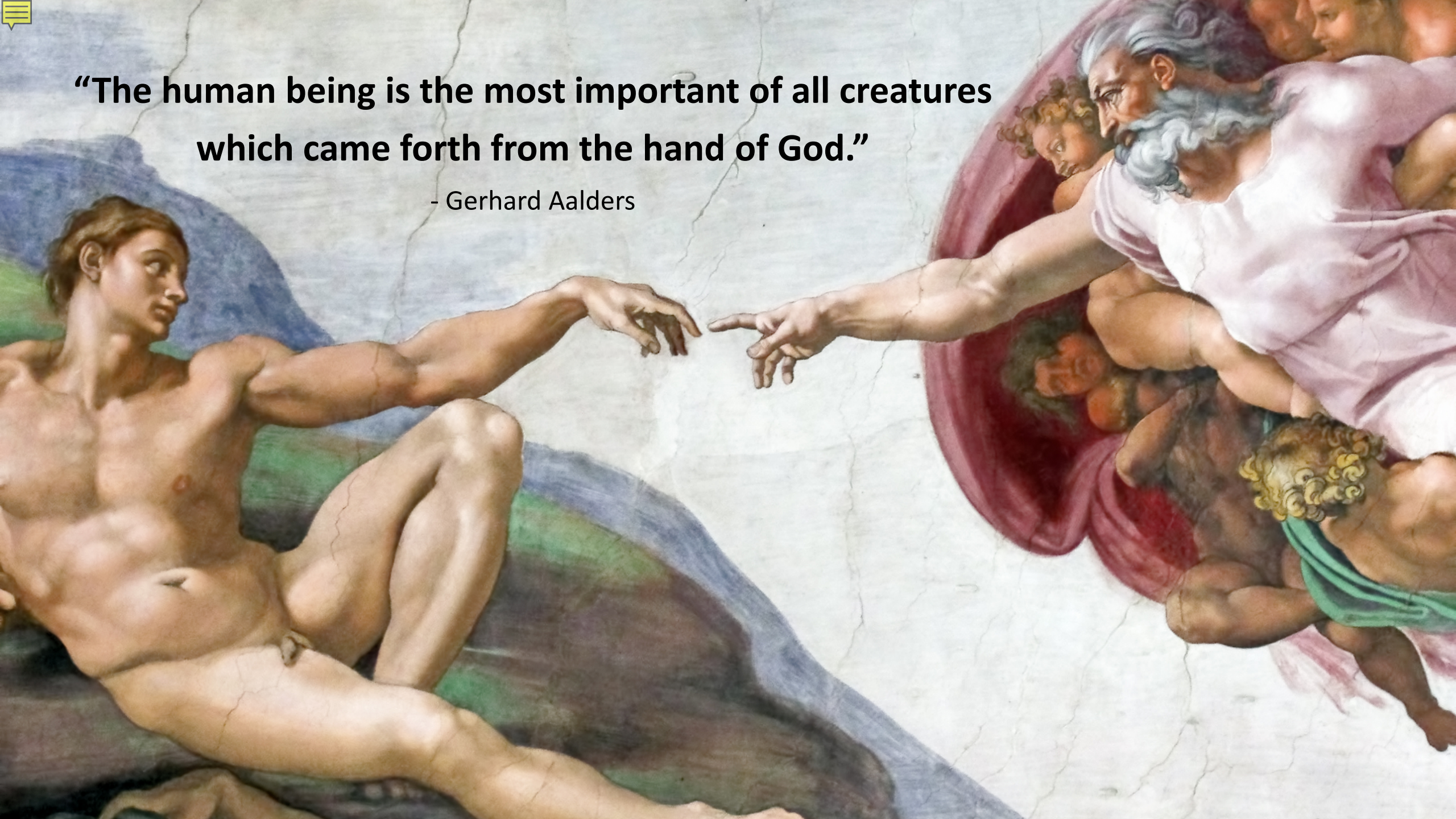
But do they reflect the reality – the “really real” of your situation?

This is what we want to explore today. Let’s begin with God’s creation of man.



**“The human being is the most important of all creatures
which came forth from the hand of God.”**

- Gerhard Aalders



God's Unconditional Love

- We should expect that Creator God delighted in His creation of Adam and Eve and invited them into a personal relationship with Him.
- The clear teaching of the Scriptures is that God made us for His own glory and set His affections upon us: “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3).
- The Apostle John claims that “our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (I Jn. 1:3). The love He has for us was clearly initiated by Him, not by us: “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (I Jn. 4:10). John returns to this idea nine verses later when he writes: “We love, because He first loved us” (I Jn. 4:19).



God's Initiation of Relationship

- This, then, is our starting point. God made us in His image and initiated a personal, loving relationship with us. He, the Creator, sought us, the created.
- Consider these truths as stated in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*: “The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.”
- What does God’s covenant have to do with His promises?

God's Covenant With His People



- God confirmed the bond between Abraham and Himself when He told Abraham that He would “be your God” (Gen. 17:7). This is what is known as the **Immanuel principle: *God with us.***
- “Abraham is assured that this relationship, initiated and maintained by the sovereign and almighty God, was to be with his descendants as well. Yahweh confirmed that the **covenant** was a present, functioning, and reliable relationship.” ***This is the central concept – the heart of the covenant.***
- “God had repeatedly stressed in his covenant making, renewing, confirming, and explications with his people, that he was God to his people, that **he was present** and would **never leave or forsake them.**”

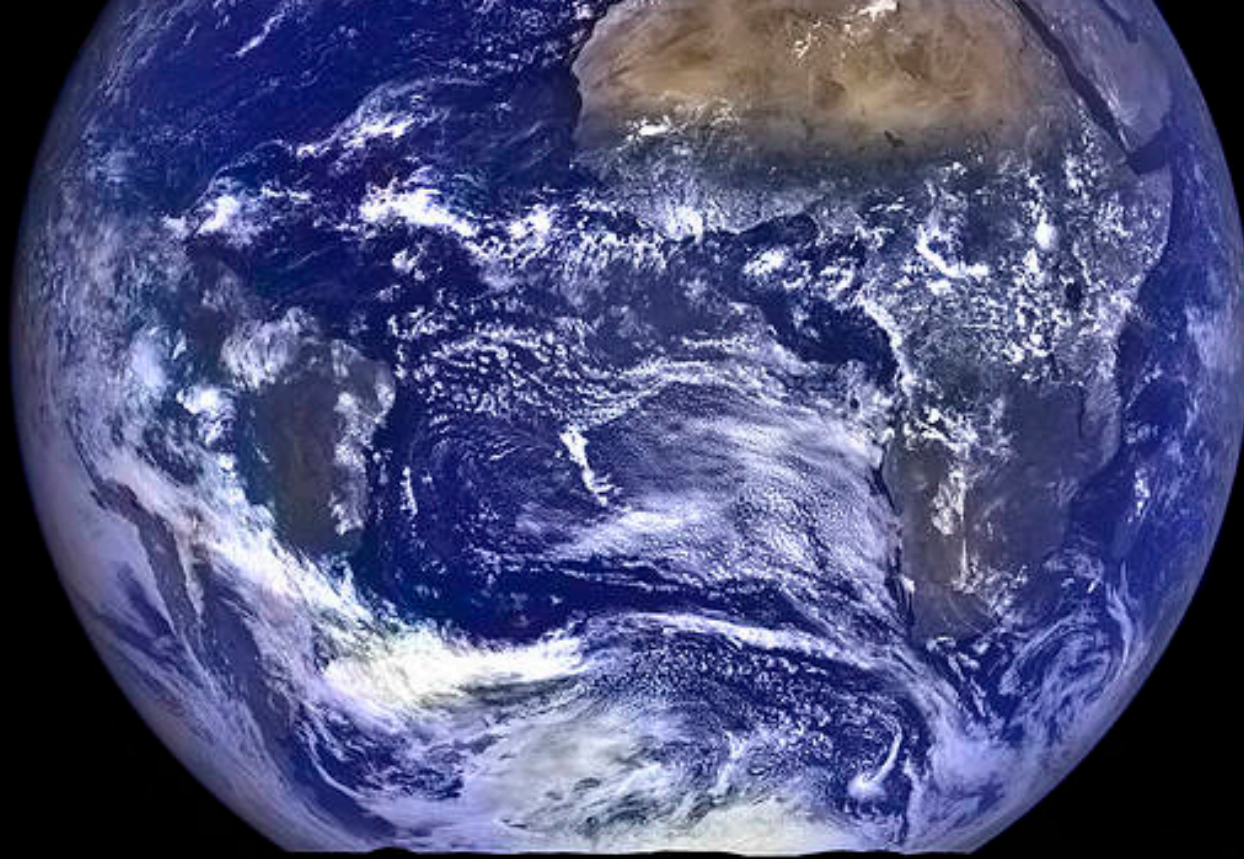
God's Omniscience: Never Unnoticed

- It is conclusive from Scripture that God remains deeply involved with His covenant people and that we were made to know and love Him.
- The prophet Micah wrote: “You will show your faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old” (7:20).
- “O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord” (Ps. 139:1-4).
- There are no limits of God's knowledge of you; you never go unnoticed. God's eye is always on you as an individual.



God's Omnipresence: Never Alone

- “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (Ps. 139:7-10).
- “When we think that we fly from God, in running out of one place into another, we do but run from one hand to the other; for there is no place where God is not” (Charles Spurgeon).



- You cannot escape from God's presence, for He is everywhere.
- Wherever you flee, the face of God beholds you.
- Wherever you are upon this earth, no matter how far from your home, God is there.



God's Names and His Character

- In Scripture, the word *name* “is always more than just a conventional sign. It expresses character and history. Hence a change in either respect frequently gives rise to a change of name. This applies to the names of God likewise. It explains why certain divine names belong to certain stages of revelation” (Vos).
- There is a three-fold significance of the term *name*: (1) it may express **one divine characteristic**. What some call an attribute, the O.T. calls a name of God; (2) the name of God can stand abstractly and comprehensively for **all that God has revealed** concerning Himself; and (3) the name of God comes to stand realistically for **God Himself.**”

Isaiah Reveals God's Name as *Immanuel*

- “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name **Immanuel**” (Is. 7:14).
- “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name **Immanuel**” (Mt. 1:23).
- “The name *Immanuel*, although it might be used to signify God's providential presence merely, has a latitude and pregnancy of meaning which can scarcely be fortuitous (accidental), and which, combined with all the rest, makes the conclusion almost unavoidable, that it was here intended to express a **personal** as well as a **providential** presence” (Joseph Alexander).

Transcendence & Immanence

“As *transcendence* refers to God’s rule as the Sovereign Lord, so *immanence* refers to his **presence** in the world he has made....He not only rules over us, but is ‘**with**’ us. The deepest sense in which God is present is in Jesus, God incarnate. Jesus is *Immanuel*, the name given to him in Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23. To say that God is present or with us is not merely to describe his location but to describe his saving purpose. He comes among us, not just to be among us, but to deliver us from sin and its consequences.”



Dr. John M. Frame

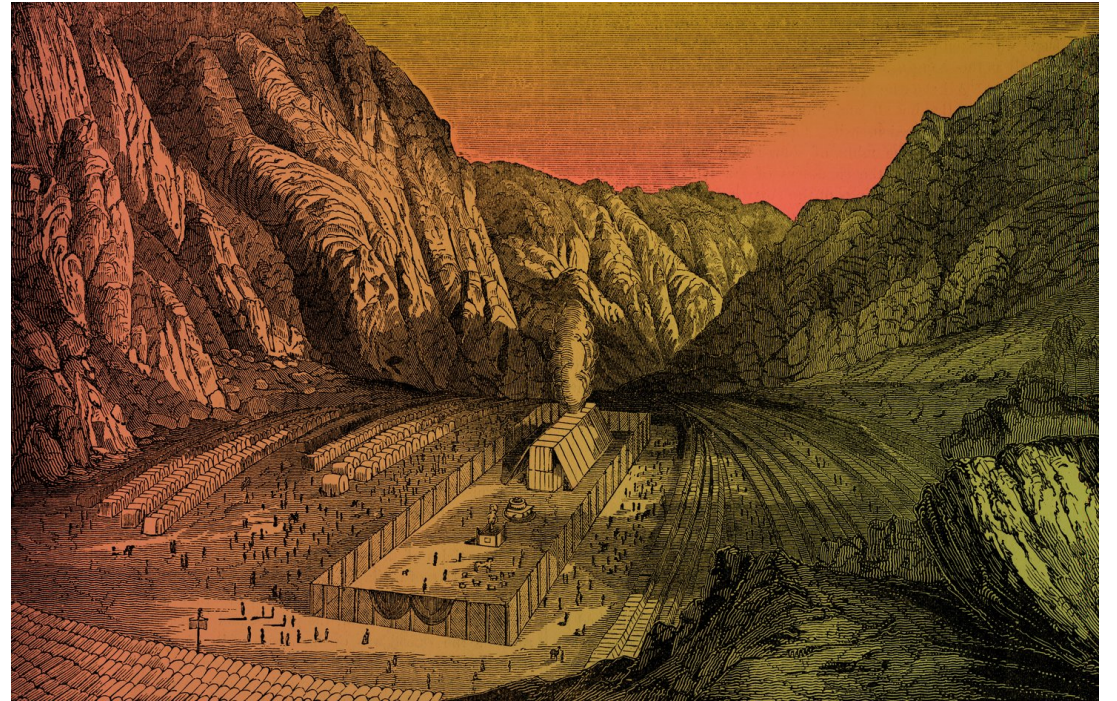
1939 -

American Christian Philosopher and Theologian

The Immanent God

“Yahweh God, infinite in being, whom the heavens ‘even the highest heavens cannot contain’ (1 Kgs. 8:27), transcendent in every respect, will nevertheless be the immanent God. He is truly a covenant-keeping Lord who fulfills his promises of being the ever-present One. He establishes his place of rest and peace (the tabernacle) among his people.”

- Gerhard van Groningen



The Old Testament Tabernacle

God's Personal Presence

- “Fear not, Abram, **I am your shield**; your reward shall be very great” (Gen. 15:1).
- God appeared to Isaac and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and **I will be with you** and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father” (Gen. 26:2-3).
- “Behold, **I am with you** (Jacob) and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (Gen. 28:15).

God's Personal Presence

- “Then the Lord said to Jacob, ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and **I will be with you**’” (Gen. 31:3).
- When Moses questioned his ability to go before Pharaoh, God said to him, “**But I will be with you**” (Ex. 3:12).
- Moses assured the Israelites: “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is **the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you**” (Dt. 31:6; cf. vs. 8).
- The Lord spoke to Joshua: “No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so **I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you**” (Josh. 1:4-5).

God's Personal Presence

- The Lord came to Nathan and told him what to say to David: “Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. And **I have been with you wherever you went** and have cut off all your enemies from before you’” (II Sam. 7:8-9).
- “Then David said to Solomon his son, ‘Be strong and courageous and do it. Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed, for **the Lord God, even my God, is with you. He will not leave you or forsake you**, until all the work for the service of the house of the Lord is finished” (I Chron. 28:20).

God's Personal Presence

- Jesus reassured His disciples: “And behold, **I am with you always**, to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:20).
- “...Gabriel was sent from God...to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph...And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, O favored one, **the Lord is with you!**’” (Lk. 1:26-28).
- “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, **to be with you forever**, even the Spirit of truth...” (Jn. 14:15-16).
- “May the God of peace **be with you all**” (Rom. 15:33).



“And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; **but God was with him** and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household” (Acts 7:9-10).



Never Forsaken

- “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘**I will never leave you nor forsake you**’” (Heb. 13:5). I will never, ever, ever, ever, ever leave you or forsake you.
- **Five negatives appear in this verse.** How do Greek scholars interpret this concentration of negatives? Simon Kistemaker writes, “The Greek cannot express the idea any more forcefully.” A.T. Robertson: “There is no denying the power of this accumulation of negatives.” Calvin: The author of Hebrews reminds us of “the promises of God by which he bears witness that He will always be present to us.”
- Compare the English hymn, *How Firm a Foundation*: “I’ll never, no never, no, never forsake.”



Personal Feelings: Where Was God?

- You weren't there for me when I needed you the most.
- You abandoned me.
- You neglected me.
- I am all alone, forsaken.
- You are silent and distant from me.

None of these statements is true. "True believers will have the gracious presence of God with them in life, at death, and forever."

- Matthew Henry



John M. Frame

“We should not press the way of remotion (removing everything which is known *not* to be God) to say that we can know only what God is not, not what he is. Negative statements by themselves are useless: for example, one can know a thousand things that a Siberian husky is not, without having any useful knowledge of what he is.”

And so, let us bow before the only living and true God acknowledging His great promise to us:

“I am with you!”



Siberian Husky