**“I Know I AM” – Week 4 (Immanent)**

**October 7/8, 2017**

We are in our fourth week of our series called I Know I Am, and this is all about what the Bible teaches us about the Great I Am, who is God. We have talked about a number of other qualities of God such as…God is gracious and God is infinite. Today, I want to talk about a very important topic that could ultimately shift how you relate with God.

Before we jump in, I want to talk about your favorite celebrity…now, this could be your favorite actor, actress, musician, athlete, role model, maybe celebrity crush, etc. I always imagined what it would be like to meet my favorite celebrity. **(Leaders Note: Share about your favorite celebrity)**

I always wanted to meet him/her…and I imagine what I would have done had I received opportunity to meet them…but unfortunately, I didn’t. I imagine I would have probably flipped out like many of these fans who finally got to meet their favorite celebrities…let’s check it out!

**(Leaders Note: Show “Celebrity Surprise Video”)**

It makes me jealous to think of the people who got to meet their favorite person...it’s fun to watch, but it doesn’t impact my life at all. I continue to go along with my day, and all of these other people got to meet their hero! Hollywood and the celebrity life seems so foreign, but I imagine that when people get to meet their favorite celebrity, something shifts and their hero finally feels much closer than before…not forever, but at least for a bit.

I can’t help but think this is sometimes how we view God…as a well-known celebrity that only pops in to surprise the lucky few!  Some of us have heard of God doing incredible things in other people’s lives, and we are still waiting for Him to show up in our own.  We feel distant, and we can’t help but think it’s God’s fault…or…maybe we have seen God show up in our own lives, and it felt like we finally got lucky!  We finally got to meet the person we had been longing to meet, but now that moment has passed…and now it almost feels like we are just trying to get lucky again to connect with Him.

Some of you might have grown up in church, and you have been taught that God is close, but for some reason, it just feels difficult to connect with him.  You are not alone in this struggle.  For many of you, maybe you have just accepted this idea of God being distant and uninvolved. Maybe you tried the God thing, and it just didn’t work…nothing happened. Maybe you prayed and it didn’t turn out the way you wanted. Maybe you see so much hurt in your own life that you wonder if God is even there. Maybe you look at the world and see so much pain, suffering, evil, and brokenness that you think, if there is a God, He must not be very concerned about us…

I have thought all of these things as well, and I have been where you have been. I have asked the question, “If God is near, why does He seem so distant?” The world will only try to tell you that He seems distant because He is…But, God knew that we would struggle with this thought, and He knew that the world would tell us that He was far away…but God was and is living and active, and he gave us evidence of His nearness in Scripture.  So, we are going to take a look at what the Bible has to say about God’s nearness and interaction with the world.

So, let’s open up to John 14:15-17 in the New Testament to learn about how God has shown His nearness and activity in the world. To set this up, I want to give some back story.

In the beginning of time, God showed His nearness and activity in the world through Creation.  He made everything perfect, and He was with Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve sinned, and this is what created a gap in relationship with God...from that point on, the relationship with God was different. However, he showed up time and time again to rescue His people, to talk to His followers, and to lead them. Now, the Israelites, God’s people, have been looking for a Messiah, someone to deliver them for hundreds of years…and now, that Messiah, their hero, their role model, has shown up, and His name is Jesus. God showed His nearness and activity in the world through sending His son, Jesus to live a perfect life, die on the cross, and he rose three days later, restoring the relationship that was broken by Adam and Eve….and right after he rises from the dead, He is about to leave…but, He isn’t just about to show up and peace out like celebrities, He is going to give the Holy Spirit to be with the people…

So, let’s take a look at John 14:15-17: *“Jesus tells His disciples, If you love me, you will keep my commandments.  And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.  You know him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.*

Jesus is sending the Holy Spirit to Christians to be with them and be in them. God has continued to care about His people by continuing to be with us, even after leaving.  He helps us, guides us, leads us, and is available for relationship with us. But think about what the disciples were thinking? This was their favorite celebrity, their hero that finally showed up…and now he is about to leave?! And they have to trust that the Holy Spirit is still with them, working in their lives, near to them, and guiding them…even though He is unseen. And the disciples had to believe a new truth: that Just because God isn’t seen, doesn’t mean you can’t see Him work.

It’s a little bit like wifi…How many of you love your wifi?  Now, how many of you hate slow wifi… Me, too.  And we can see our signal strength, but we can’t really see our devices sending signals back and forth to access internet…but, even though we can’t see it, how do you know it’s working?...right, your devices work. Exactly… we know it’s working not because we can see it, but we can see the effects of it working or not.  And sometimes, it is a tricky thing to see the effects of God at work, especially if you have seen a lot of hurt in this world.  Perspective shifts how we see things, and it can help us see more or less of God.

**THP: God is near and active!**

If we look for ways that God is distant, we will find that…if we look for ways that God is near and active, we will find it. God’s presence has less to do with His proximity and more to do with our perspective. When our perspective is off, we view God differently. We don’t see Him working, or we get frustrated that He isn’t working how we want Him to. And let me tell you, pain, suffering, sickness, and brokenness…they all break God’s heart.  And it isn’t His fault that those things exist, it’s the result of sin. And evil is present not because God isn’t near, but because we chose to wander from His nearness and invited sin into this world. In the same way, the presence of evil does not diminish God’s nearness. Just because bad things happen doesn’t mean that God isn’t with us. I think many times we mistake God’s nearness for a promise of a perfect life now…But just because there is pain, doesn’t mean God isn’t with us.  God promised perfection in heaven, but on earth, He promised to be with us.

So, as our THP says, if we find what we look for, we can either find God or find that He is far. I want to show you how to shift your perspective and life to find God. First, we need to draw near to Him. We need to find ways to make space to be near God through worship, study, prayer, relationships…draw near to God.  James 4:8 says *“Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.”*

We have a responsibility to put ourselves near God. Maybe we haven’t seen God’s nearness because we aren’t drawing near. Maybe if we drew closer to God, we would see Him more closely, and we could see Him working more clearly. Every time we draw near to God, we invite God closer into relationship with us. Many times, we expect God to do all the work. He already made a way for us to be in relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Now, it’s our turn to come close and drawing nearer isn’t just trying to be a better person. It’s making space in your life to learn about God, talk to Him, and justbe with Him.

The next thing I will tell you to do is to give God an opportunity to come through for you. Maybe we haven’t seen God in our lives or near us because we haven’t asked Him to be. What if God is waiting to be asked into your life, ready to work on the very thing that is frustrating you. I know this is a scary thing to trust in God.  I am sure we have all been let down before, and we certainly don’t want to be let down by God…so sometimes, it’s easier just to not ask. I encourage you to give God an opportunity to be near.  Maybe you need to ask God to be working in your personal life, maybe you feel depressed and you need God to be hope.  Maybe you are lonely and You need God to be a friend and provide other friends.

Whatever it is, ask God to be near and active…He is always near.  He is near and more active when we ask Him to be. Here is how we’re going to close out our message today. We are going to spend some time quietly in prayer. I am going to ask you to pray for a specific area of your life and then give you 30 seconds in complete silence to pray and ask God for help with that issue. After we’re finished, we’ll go into our group discussions and talk about some areas we prayed about so we can encourage the rest of our group to draw near to God as well! Let’s pray!

**(Leaders Note: This will be a guided prayer. Give them the opening line/verbal prompt and then wait 30-45 seconds before moving on to the next one. After they’re finished with the last one, you can close the whole group in prayer).**

**-Praying for more of God’s presence in your life**

**-Praying for your family and friends to draw near to God**

**-Praying for a challenging situation (examples could be feelings of loneliness, bullying, difficult situation at home or with family member, issues with friends, etc.)**

**-Praying to grow closer to God in all areas of your life**