



God Stays Near When Things Are Awful

Genesis 1:2 And the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

When threat hovers; when the unimaginable swirls around us and we have no idea what's going on; when we feel helpless, hopeless and alone – that's when it's easy to assume God has left the scene. How tender of God to reassure us – right as the bible starts – that our assumption has no validity. Genesis 1:2 announces an unexpected pairing of awfulness and God's intimate presence. God stays near when things are awful. He really does.

Three Horror-Story Words: Formless, Void, and Dark

Formless is awful. Worse than watching the slithering approach of a giant amoeba (which mercifully stays within its membranous skin). At least you can see to distinguish it from the surface over which it slimes. Formless is worse. You can't see formless; you can't predict what it will do next; and you have no idea of its size or power. Formless connotes more than a lack of shape; it connotes a lack of order. Formless implies chaos, and chaos is a fearful thing.

Void is a different sort of awfulness. Void means empty, not just physically empty but empty of meaning. Futile. A waste. God speaks of an empty universe; we speak of an empty life. They're much the same. Emptiness leaches hope from our lives; it lurks behind despair.

To heighten the horror, darkness obscures each threat. It hides our enemies from view. We have no idea which way to swing a weapon or where to run.

God Doesn't Avoid Horror Stories

In the first half of this verse, formless, empty, and dark describe a situation beyond awful. In the second half, God announces His presence and sets a whole different tone. The two halves are set next to each other – in deliberate contrast – to make God's point: *When things are awful I stay near.* God doesn't avoid trouble.

The word "moving" also tells us that God is near. That Hebrew word is better translated "hovering." Picture (as does Deuteronomy 32:11) an eagle hovering in the skies over the little ones in her nest, exquisitely aware of them, protective, ready to provide for their every need.

The Spirit is like that eagle. He actively hovers over us, watchful, alert, and aware. He doesn't back away but stays near. Rather than avoid trouble, He steps in to redeem it. He did it then; He does it still.

When darkness, chaos, and emptiness swirl around us, it's easy to assume God is nowhere to be found. Not so. God tenderly assures us – right as the bible starts – of His presence. God stays near when things are awful.

*As creation began, God hovered over a chaotic, empty, dark earth.
He hasn't changed.
In our dark times, he hovers over us and replaces darkness with Himself.*

God's Nearness

Picture the creation scene. Where was the darkness? Over the surface of the deep (the waters). Where was the Spirit? In the same place: over the surface of the waters. "Over the surface of" literally means "in the face of" (like someone getting "in your face"). These are up close and personal words, and they have huge implications. Visualize what's happening: the Spirit moves into the place that darkness occupies. God replaces darkness with Himself. Let that sink in.

God's nearness may come as a surprise because we expect Him to be more like us. Drawing near to discomfort, much less horror, is not our first thought. Thankfully God does not mimic us. Not only does He not avoid horror, He (as the rest of Genesis 1 shows) actively steps in to redeem it. Relish this fact: then – and now – God stays near when things are awful.

Many of us think God is far away when ugly circumstances enter our lives. Sometimes we think He leaves when we do ugly things. But God doesn't disappear. He stays near, carefully watching out for our welfare. That's what He did at the beginning of time and that's what He does still. He never changes. Always – always – God stays near when things are awful.

What Do You Think?

- Recall a chaotic, empty, or dark time in your life. Did God seem near or distant? During trying times, have you ever felt that God has abandoned you?
- Does God currently seem involved in your life or somewhat distant from it?
- When we doubt God's presence we generally try to replace Him. What might your attempts to compensate for His apparent absence look like?
- How would it change your life if your trust in His presence grew?
- Have you ever asked God to train you to sense His presence?

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