

STUDY GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP USE

10 WAYS TO DELIGHT

IN THE CLOSENESS OF GOD

*always*  
*near*

ROBERT J. MORGAN

Thank you for reading and studying my book on practicing the presence of God.

We wanted to provide a study guide for individual and small group use, which will correlate with a series of five videos available for free at [www.robertjmorgan.com](http://www.robertjmorgan.com). This study guide consists of five lessons, which will cover the ten units of the book, two per session. Each of the sessions has three parts:

- Get Started – Ideas for getting the session started.
- Get Real – A guide through the reality of the material and its application.
- Get Going – Some practical ideas for participants to take with them as they leave.

I hope you enjoy *Always Near* and will tell others about it. May the Lord bless you as you grow in your walk with God.

--Robert J. Morgan

## **Session 1 (Always Near - Introduction / Part 1 / Part 2)**

**Synopsis of session:** Delighting in God’s closeness requires a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ, coupled with the daily habits of Bible study and prayer.

**Video:** Robert Morgan’s testimony and the three verses that impacted his life in the days following His surrender to the Lord—Psalm 139:16, Philippians 3:10, and Galatians 2:20

**Get Started** – The introduction describes a missionary family on the same plane as the Beatles without realizing it. Have you ever found yourself in the presence of someone famous? Have you ever bumped into a celebrity or spoken to a national political figure? How do we feel in the presence of a well-known individual? If you could meet anyone on earth, who would it be? What if we could live in God’s presence all the time? Try to imagine a life with Almighty God as your constant companion, always available, always near.

**Get Real** – The three most basic essentials to living in God’s presence are meeting Him through Christ, learning to listen to His voice in Scripture, and learning to draw near to Him in prayer:

1. First, to be close to God, we need a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. In Part 1 of his book, the author recounts his testimony of coming to know the Lord and of developing a daily walk with Him. Do you have a testimony? It will be unique to you, for every believer has his or her own story, but usually there are some key moments along the way that stand out in our memory. Jot down any key moments that have helped shape your spiritual journey.
2. Read Hebrews 10:19-22. This passage tells us we must draw near to God by entering His presence through the blood of Jesus. Why does the writer of Hebrews call this “a new and living way”? Read Romans 5:1-2. What gives us access into grace and into the presence of God?
3. On page 8 of *Always Near*, there’s a rendition of Philippians 3:10 from the *Amplified Bible*: “For my determined purpose is that I may know Him, that I may progressively

become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and understanding the words of His person more strongly and more clearly.” Have you ever thought of this as the ultimate priority and determined purpose of your life? If this was your greatest aspiration, how would your daily habits be different than they are?

4. Getting to know God is akin to getting to know another human. It requires meeting the person and then spending time with him or her, talking, conversing, listening, and growing in friendship. Read Matthew 6:6. In the older translations, Jesus told us to go into our “closet” and talk to God in secret. We get to know God at the cross, and we call that conversion. We get to know Him better in the closet, and we call that conversation. There are two elements to conversation—talking and listening. When we listen to God, we call that Bible study; and when we talk with Him we call that prayer. What personal habits of prayer and Bible study have been most helpful to you? How do you need to improve?
5. Read Isaiah 57:15. What impresses you most about this verse? Read the verses that are in bullet points on pages 20-21. Which of these most speaks to you?
6. Discuss the concept of finding your own Bible verses, described on pages 31-37. Review the four steps of *marking* verses that speak to you, *memorizing* them, *meditating* on them, and *making* them your own. Is this process practical and attainable for you? How has this helped you in the past? What is most difficult about it? Where would you begin if you wanted to start this habit today?

**Get Going** – Urge the participants to make knowing God the top priority of their lives and to let it impact each day. End by discussing the example of Brother Lawrence on pages 21-22. End with this discussion question: What one new attitude or practice can I put into place this week that will give me a greater “Brother Lawrence” experience with the Lord?

## **Session 2 (Always Near - Parts 3 and 4)**

**Synopsis of session:** The greatest habits in drawing nearer to God are improving our practices of prayer and praise (worship).

**Video:** Robert Morgan's exposition of Hebrews 10:19-25

**Get Started** – This of someone with whom you once had a close friendship, but now you have drawn apart and the friendship has faded. How did that happen? Are there parallels here to our friendship with God?

**Get Real** – The heart of this lesson has to do with developing a daily plan for private prayer and a weekly plan for public worship. Worship, of course, is something we do continually and often privately, but Jesus seemed to emphasize the importance of His children gathering together in His Name (Matthew 18:20). When He ascended to heaven, He left behind local churches as places for worship and teaching. Because there are many styles of worship—and this can be a sensitive topic—try to stay positive and stress the biblical truths about the importance of church attendance.

1. Look up James 4:8. What does this verse tell us to do? The verse doesn't tell us exactly how to go about the process; but now look up Deuteronomy 4:7. What key insight do we learn?
2. Pages 47-52 of *Always Near* gives us two examples of people at prayer—the prophet Jonah and the mother of President James A. Garfield. Have you ever known a true prayer warrior, someone whose prayers were powerful and effective?
3. Look up these 10 key verses about prayer. Each one gives us a suggestion about how to go about doing it. Jot down the essence of each idea beside the reference below:
  - Psalm 5:3
  - Ephesians 6:18
  - Romans 12:12

- Luke 18:1
- Philippians 4:6
- Colossians 4:2
- Colossians 4:12
- Hebrews 4:16
- Matthew 6:6
- James 5:16

4. Pages 53-56 of *Always Near* deal with times when God says “No” to our prayers. Has that ever happened to you? How did it turn out? Which of the biblical examples in this section of the book do you most identify with?
  
5. In pages 61-65 of *Always Near*, Robert Morgan describes some of the methods that have most helped him in prayer. Do any of them resonate with you? If you were teaching a brand-new Christian how to pray, what methods or suggestions would you give?
  
6. Pages 69-79 of *Always Near* describes the privilege of worshipping God, especially with other believers in local churches. Read Acts 2:46-47 about the new Christian community at Pentecost. Read Hebrews 10:19-25. Why did the author of Hebrews add the last phrase to this passage: “—and all the more as you see the Day approaching”?
  
7. Think about this question. If you’ve been going to church for weeks, months, or years is there one particular worship service or occasion that stands out in your memory?

**Get Going** – When it comes to public worship, there aren’t any perfect churches—not even the New Testament congregations. Without complaining about what you may not like about the church you attend, spend a few moments talking about its strengths and blessings. End with a prayer for your church or churches and with a plea for God to make each participant a more attentive worshipper in public and in private.

### **Session 3 (Always Near – Part 5 / Part 6)**

**Synopsis of Session:** To grow in our practice of God's presence, we need to find special times of personal spiritual refreshment and learn from people who have come to walk with God more closely than we are.

**Video:** Robert Morgan shares from the book of Philemon along with memories of people who have helped him develop a closer walk with God.

**Get Started** – Ask the group to discuss people they've known who have walked with God and whose spiritual example they would like to emulate. If they don't know anyone, ask them who in life they have most admired and why.

**Get Real** – Two of the biggest issues in life are our busyness and the lack of good role models. Both issues are connected with learning to walk closely with God.

1. Read Leviticus 23:1-2 and scan the rest of the chapter. In light of pages 83-87 of *Always Near*, why is this chapter (Leviticus 23) in the Bible? What lesson did God want to teach us by giving these festivals to the Israelites?
2. Describe your most recent break, getaway, or vacation, however long ago it was. Was it a success or failure when it came to spiritual rejuvenation? Does it seem practical to design trips or getaways that will be restful and restorative? How would you go about doing that? In your own circumstances, how can you practice some of the ideas about spiritual getaways, even if you're unable to travel?
3. Read the paragraph from *Always Near* that begins at the bottom of page 92 and continues on page 93, about daily practicing God's presence. How can you begin learning to cultivate this constant awareness?
4. Discuss pages 95-99. Do you know the experience about knowing God was near you though you could not sense or feel His presence? What do we learn from such times?

5. Pages 103-111 of *Always Near* describe being a refreshing person. Look up Philemon 1:7 and 20. Do you think others would describe you as a “refreshing” person to be around? Based on this section of study, how have you been inspired to work on this aspect of your influence and character?

**Get Going** – Read aloud Mark 6:31 with emphasis the last part of the verse—the words of Jesus. If possible, look at your calendar and plan a time to do what He says. Perhaps you can take a week, perhaps a weekend, perhaps a day, or perhaps just a morning or an hour. If you were to spend personal time in spiritual rejuvenation, where would you go? What would you do? How would you plan it? Why not start planning it now?

#### **Session 4 (*Always Near* – Part 7 / Part 8)**

**Synopsis of session:** In developing a closer walk with God, it's helpful to have some quiet or meaningful places for spiritual recharging, and it's also vital to know how to draw near to God during difficult times in life.

**Video:** Robert Morgan's exposition of Psalm 73

**Get Started** – Ask the participants to share a time in their lives when trouble, trials, temptation, and distress drove them closer to God and taught them lessons from Scripture they would never have learned otherwise. Explain that today's lesson about developing a closer walk with God encompasses two matters—find sacred places in our lives and learning to trust God during trying times.

1. Read Exodus 3:1-6. Why was this “holy ground”? Can you think of some reasons God told Moses to take off his shoes? Now look at Exodus 33:7-11. Can you think of any locations that represent “holy ground” to you? Perhaps there is some spots in your past that are hallowed in your memory, or maybe you have a favorite location today where you frequently meet with the Lord. Why is it important to have places like this?
2. In terms of drawing near to God during challenging seasons in life, what do these verses tell us about hardship?
  - Isaiah 43:2
  - James 1:2-5
  - Romans 5:1-5
  - 1 Peter 1:3-7
3. Two verses are so similar it's as though the Lord wanted to remind us of the same truth in both Old and New Testaments. Read both these verses, then discuss how easy or difficult it is to put them into practice. How do we actually do this? You might refer to Bessie's story in pages 138-141 in *Always Near*. Have you had a similar experience?
  - Psalm 55:17

- 1 Peter 5:7

4. Here's an optional suggestion. In Robert Morgan's book, *100 Bible Verses That Made America* (available February 2020), he shares this story from the life of Abraham Lincoln. Notice its similarity to the story of Bessie.

Brigadier General James Flower Rusling, a dedicated Christian and a Methodist, wrote a fascinating book, *Men and Things I Saw in Civil War Days*, in which he related his encounter with Abraham Lincoln immediately following the Battle of Gettysburg:

The next time I saw Mr. Lincoln was on Sunday, July 5, 1863—the Sunday after the battles of Gettysburg and Vicksburg—and it happened on this wise: Gettysburg was fought on July 1, 2, and 3, 1863... General Daniel E. Sickles of N.Y., commanding the Third Corps, had lost his right leg; and on the Sunday following (July 5) arrived in Washington, D.C., with his leg amputated above the knee. He was taken to a private dwelling on F Street, nearly opposite the Ebbitt House; and here I found him in a front room on the first floor, resting on a hospital stretcher, when I called to see him about 3 p.m. I was then a Lieutenant Colonel on his staff, and naturally anxious to see my chief.

We had not been talking long when his orderly announced his excellency the President; and immediately after Mr. Lincoln walked into the room, accompanied by his son, Tad, then a lad of perhaps ten or twelve years.... Having learned of General Sickles's arrival in Washington, (Lincoln) rode in on horseback to call on him, with a squad of cavalry as escort. They shook hands cordially, but pathetically; and it was easy to see that they both held each other in high esteem....

Greetings over, Mr. Lincoln dropped into a chair, and crossing his prodigious arms and legs, soon fell into questioning Sickles as to all the phases of the combat at Gettysburg. He asked first, of course, as to General Sickles' own ghastly wound; when and how it happened, and how he was getting on, and encouraged him; then passed next to our great casualties there, and how the wounded were being cared for; and finally came to the magnitude and significance of the victory there....

Sickles, recumbent on his stretcher, with a cigar between his fingers, puffing it leisurely, answered Mr. Lincoln in detail.... Occasionally he would wince with pain and call sharply to his orderly to wet his fevered stump with water. But he never dropped his cigar nor lost the thread of his narrative nor missed the point of their discussion....

When Mr. Lincoln's inquiries seemed ended, General Sickles, after a puff or two of his cigar in silence, resumed the conversation substantially as follows: "Well, Mr. President, I beg pardon, but what did you think about Gettysburg? What was your opinion of things while we were campaigning and fighting up there?"

"Oh," replied Mr. Lincoln, "I didn't think much about it. I was not much concerned about you!"

"You were not?" rejoiced Sickles, as if amazed. "Why, we heard that you Washington folks were a good deal excited, and you certainly had good cause to be. For it was nip and tuck with us a good deal of the time!"

"Yes, I know that. And I suppose some of us were a little rattled. Indeed, some of the cabinet talked of Washington's being captured and ordered a gunboat or two here, and even went so far as to send some government

archives abroad, and wanted me to go too, but I refused.... No, General Sickles, I had no fears of Gettysburg!”

“Why not, Mr. President? How was that? Pretty much everybody down here, we heard, was more or less panicky.”

“Yes, I expect, and a good many more than will own up now. But actually General Sickles, I had no fears of Gettysburg, and if you really want to know I will tell you why. Of course, I don’t want you and Colonel Rusling here to say anything about this—at least not now. People might laugh if it got out, you know. But the fact is, in the very pinch of the campaign there, I went to my room one day and got down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for victory at Gettysburg. I told Him that this was His country, and the war was His war, but that we really couldn’t stand another Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville. And then and there I made a solemn vow with my Maker, that if He would stand by you boys at Gettysburg, I would stand by Him. And thus after wrestling with the Almighty in prayer, I don’t know how it was, and it is not for me to explain, but somehow or other, a sweet comfort crept into my soul, that God Almighty had taken the whole business there into His own hands, and we were bound to win at Gettysburg. And He *did* stand by you boys at Gettysburg, and now I will stand by Him. No, General Sickles, I had no fears of Gettysburg, and that is the *way!*”<sup>i</sup>

5. Read Psalm 23:4. Notice how the pronoun for God changes from “He” in verses 1-3 to “You” in verses 4-7. Why is that?

**Get Going** – We’ve looked up several great Bible verses in this session. Which one would you choose as a memory verse to learn and apply to your life? Which of the verses spoke most directly to you?

## **Session 5 (Always Near – Part 9 / Part 10)**

**Synopsis of session:** Drawing near to God involves developing an awareness of unseen realities around us, including the unseen city of Heaven, and pressing forward in daily increments by doing the next thing God brings into our hands.

**Video:** Robert Morgan discusses the biblical descriptions of the throne of God in heaven.

**Get Started** – Look at the air around you and try to think of all the unseen things in the room, including the air itself, pollution particles, radio waves, etc. What about angels? Demons? God? How would our lives be different if we could physically see the spiritual realities of the unseen world?

1. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. In what ways are we wasting away? In what ways are we being renewed day by day? What do we need to do if we're going to experience daily renewal? Look up 2 Corinthians 3:18 and try paraphrasing it in your own words.
2. Go to Colossians 3:1-4. How do we set our minds on things above?
3. Discuss the value of "doing the next thing." Consider Elisabeth Elliot's advice on page 162 of *Always Near*. Can you think of a way to make that practical to an experience you're currently going through?
4. Our ultimate experience is delighting in God's closeness is still ahead of us. Let's end our study by scanning the last two chapters of the Bible—Revelation 21 and 22—and, for the sake of discussion, taking them as literal.
  - Revelation 21:1 – What two things will be made new at the dawning of eternity?
  - Revelation 21:2 – What else is called "New"?
  - Revelation 21:3 – Where will God be throughout eternity?
  - Revelation 21:4 – What new order of things will affect us?
  - Revelation 21:10 – What was the author's (the apostle John) first impression of the Celestial City?

- Revelation 21:15-17 – How big is the City?
- Revelation 21:19-20 – What construction materials did God use for its foundation?
- Revelation 21:21 – What is the composition of its gates?
- Revelation 21:23 – What illumines the city?
- Revelation 22:1 – What is at the very center of the city?
- Revelation 22:3 – What will we be doing in heaven?
- Revelation 22:4 – Who will we see?

**Get Going** – End with a few verses from the faith chapter of the Bible. This is a roll call of the heroes of the Old Testament who walked with God. What sustained them on their pilgrimage through life? See Hebrews 11:8-10 and 13-16. Are you sure you know Christ as Savior and are growing in your walk with God and your progress toward His city? How wonderful to anticipate the joy of spending eternity Always Near to Him!

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<sup>i</sup> James Fowler Rusling, *Men and Things I Saw in the Civil War Days* (New York: Eaton & Mains Press 1899), 12-17.