

2018 8 5 Where Are You

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The adoption agency my wife and I worked with to adopt our daughter held an annual reunion several years back at an amusement park. We had a great time except that first, it was one of the busiest days on record.

That in turn led the *second* unfortunate event. I lost my wife.

The three of us were holding hands, navigating the sea of humanity, when Karen's hand slipped out of mine. I turned around...and she was just...*gone*. No sight of her.

For everyone else, it was an ordinary day at an amusement park. But for me and our daughter, it was a *scary moment*. We tried getting to a higher vantage point: no sign of her. We traced our steps back a bit, no luck. And we *didn't both* have cell phones, just one between us that day.

What we *did* have, was a *plan*. When we got to the park that morning, we agreed that if we get separated, we head straight to the nearest lost & found station.

It was a magic moment when we saw each other again and *both* parents could stop worrying.

It is a tremendous feeling to *be* found—to realize someone *loves* you, *misses* you, and *searches* for you until they *find* you.

The Bible is fundamentally the story of how we all got lost, and the great lengths to which God has gone in order to find us.



God's search for us begins with a very simple question.

It is actually the first question found in the Bible.

It comes very early in the story of how we got lost, and of God's all-out *lost and found mission*.

Many times *we* have questions *for God*.

The Bible shows that *God* also has some questions *for us*.

In preparing for this teaching series, I searched the Bible for all the times when *God* asked questions of *people*. Then I boiled that list down to five of the *most important* questions that *God* has *for us*. We'll take one question each week through Labor Day weekend, with each question building on those that came before.

The very first question *in* the Bible is very *simple*.

From Genesis chapter 3 and verses 8-9 we read—and this is on the back of your bulletin—"*The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?"*"

"Where are you?"

In the Hebrew in which the OT was written, the question is a single word, "ayeka."

"Ayeka? Where are you?"

An all-knowing God asking, "Where are you" seems not only simple, but *unusual*.
Can anyone actually *hide* from God?

His question prompts *our own*.

Psalm 139 asks—and answers—that very question in *poetic* form...

***“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,***

(from the vantage point of an Israeli looking East at sunrise or West over the Mediterranean at sunset, this is saying, ‘Whether I travel as far as possible East or West)

***even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.***

***If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,”
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.” Psalm 139:7-12***

Today the question might be can I build a safe room where I can avoid and evade God?

Of course not!

- Where I go, he knows.
- Where I hide, he sees.
- What I do, he’s aware.
- What I say, he hears.
- What I entertain in my thoughts or do in the dark is as plain as day to God who asks the question.

The NT letter to the Hebrews adds...

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” Hebrews 4:13

God sees it *all!* Yet he asks the question: “Ayeka? Where are you?”

It’s a *simple* question.

It’s an *unusual* question.

And it’s a very *personal* question: “What have you done? Where are you?”

God asks not because he doesn’t know where they are, but because he wants them to *see, to recognize* where they’ve gotten themselves—to face up to what sin is doing to them.

It’s been pointed out that...

**Sin will take you farther than you want to go,
keep you longer than you want to stay,
and cost you more than you want to pay.**

[repeat]

So God asks the question “Where are you?” not to *drive* them out, but to *draw* them out. There’s a *kindness* in God who already *knows*, asking, “Ayeka? Where are you?” Asking not to *drive* us out, but rather to *draw* us out.

Let’s back up a bit. Genesis opens with sweeping grandeur, a fly-through of the universe. The camera quickly zooms in to the beautiful, bountiful Garden of Eden.

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Everything there is *the best*: Adam and Eve enjoy deep intimacy and openness and vulnerability with God and one another. They're free to receive and enjoy God's love, and to extend love to one another.

Everything they need, God has provided. They find their work to be fruitful and fulfilling. In this place created *by* God, they reflect being made in *the image* of God. It is *all good—very good*, God declares!

But then comes the first massive plot twist in our story.

As brief as Genesis chapter 3 tells it, it's all about *how we got lost—exemplified* in Adam and Eve. The prophet Isaiah describes our *lostness* by way of a word picture that fit the ancient Middle East:

***“We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way.” Isaiah 53:6***

The NT says the same, that *“All have turned away.”* (Romans 3:12)

We reason, “I can decide for myself what's good or evil, right or wrong. I don't need anyone to tell me how to live. I know best.”

We turn away from God.

God doesn't lose *us*. *We* ditch *him*. And we end up...*lost*. *Separated* from God who created us.

PBS featured a special a while back on the book of *Genesis*, with panelists from a wide range of religious backgrounds giving their opinions about Genesis and human history. After the rest of the panel tiptoed around the problem of *sin*, bestselling novelist Mary Gordon finally got to it. She said this:

“People just aren't right. There is something fundamentally wrong with us that we cannot fix ourselves.”

We see it in Adam and Eve. We see it across history. From this point forward, history is a series of vignettes displaying *the effects of being lost*; what happens when we *are lost, separated* from God and from each other.

And if we *personally* consider the question, “Where are you?,” we see it in ourselves—that this is *our* story, too.

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Genesis 3 & verse 7, Adam and Eve having sinned feel *ashamed*; so they yank some big fig leaves from nearby vines, and make *coverings* for themselves." They begin hiding from each other, and try to hide from God. This is what guilt does. It provokes *hiding*.

Samuel Clemens, known by his pen name Mark Twain, once noted that,

“Man is the only animal that blushes, and the only animal that needs to.” (repeat)

- We blush over things we've done in the past.
- We blush at *not* doing that which we *should*.
- We're *ashamed*. So we try to *hide* from God and one another.

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We're afraid to show and tell who we are because if others see "the real me," I might not be *good enough*—too flawed, dirty, or inadequate. So instead we grab the nearest *fig leaves* and *hide* behind them.

As someone wise has said...

Fig leaves represent anything we do to cover our nakedness and shame.

I have fig leaves.

You have fig leaves.

We have fig leaves called *status, awards, degrees, intellectualism, clothing style, status.*

Blaming others is a huge fig leaf.

If you can blame your spouse, your church, or political leaders for your problems, you don't have to face *your own* nakedness.

That's exactly what Adam and Eve tried: they *passed the buck.*

Even *religion* can become nothing more than a big fig leaf.

Fig leaves are *anything we use to hide* behind to try to prove we're *not* defective, broken, or sinful.

They come in different shapes and sizes, but they all have *one thing in common*: they're *self-made, self-covering* attempts to *cover* our guilt and evade accountability.

Adam and Eve's cover-up portrays the fear of intimacy and vulnerability that has plagued human history ever since.

And they hid not only from each other, but clearly also try to hide *from God*. We have a primal fear of being rightly judged by God for our sins. We find ourselves caught between wanting to be close to God, yet fearing judgment for our sins. So out come the fig leaves. We start sewing...

But I want you to notice something powerful in Genesis 3:8. While Adam and Eve are *hiding from God*, God is *looking for them!* *We hide, but God searches.* He takes the initiative in bringing us back. He calls out.

Where are you?

And on the one hand, God calling out to hiding fugitives is like a summons. The question exposes our hiding.

But God did *not* ask the question for *his own* benefit. *Adam* needed the question to shake him to *full alert*, to really *see* what he had *done*, what he had *lost*.

We know this question, too. You hear it in the couple who have *gone into hiding* from each other such that when they *are* together, they're not *together*. On the phone. Earbuds in. Separate rooms. Special days slip by with little attention or effort. Until eventually one of them asks, "Where are you? Where are *we*? How did we get here? I miss you. I miss *us*."

We know this question. Think of the teen who sneaks in way past bedtime, a frightened and upset parent waiting in the darkened living room. "Where have you been? Where *are* you? What's happening to you?"

We *know* this question.

But have you every thought about God this way?

That he *misses* you?

That he *wants you back*?

The rest of the Bible is the unfolding of God's search & rescue mission for a lost humanity—all that God has done so we can be *found*.

Throughout the Bible, God keeps saying, "Ayeka? Where are you? Return to me. Come back."

God always takes the initiative. Genesis 3:21 gives us the first hint how we would ultimately be *brought back*. In place of the fig leaves Adam and Eve hid behind, we hear this:

"The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them."
Genesis 3:21

God himself clothed them. He *covered* their guilt and shame. And how he did it provides the first hint at what the rest of the Bible progressively reveals.

The death of animals to *cover* Adam and Eve's shame reveals that God will make a way to *judge* our sin *and yet forgive us*. How will God accomplish that, judge our sin yet forgive the sinner? Through a *sinless substitute*—for Adam and Eve it was the animals that died to provide their covering. For us it is the death of Jesus on the cross.

Jesus came to be full and final Substitute. Our Rescuer. Clothing us, covering us from guilt and shame.

- Where we sinned, he obeyed.
- Where we find ourselves lost, he says, "I am the *Way*. *Follow me*."
- Where we have *rejected* God's commands and end up *in the dark*, Jesus says, "I am the *Truth*. *Listen* to me."
- Where our sins *separate* us from God leading to *death and hell*, Jesus says, "I am the *Life*. *Believe* in me."

All through the Bible, God keeps giving clues, mapping out how he's going to bring us back home to him. Then *after* Jesus had died and risen, Paul explains...

"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

God doesn't wait for us to turn to him;
He took the initiative and did everything necessary to *bring* us back home. When Jesus died on the cross, he paid the debt for our waywardness. He opened the way back to God for *anyone* who believes him. For you. For me. He invites you to *come home* to God.

Come, Jesus says. Quit hiding. No more fig leaves.
Let me clothe you.
Let me cover your shame and guilt.

[Invitation & prayer]
Communion & Offering

Reckless Love

Communion prayer: Steve Gelwicks

Ever Be

Blessing: Matt