

God's Loving Pursuit

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Scripture: John 10:27
Proverbs 3:5

I have a very vivid memory of my first encounter with the Living Lord. It happened in the middle of the night while I lay awake in my bed feeling very afraid. I don't even remember why I was afraid. Perhaps it was just because I was so young; I was in the dark, and I was feeling very alone. God's hand suddenly appeared in my room on the wall opposite my bed. It was a large skin-colored hand and it filled up most of my room. I knew this was God's hand; there to comfort me. He was holding me in His hand. He was present with me in this way until I calmed down and was no longer afraid, and I drifted off into a peaceful slumber. Now some people might say that this is just a child's imagination. But I knew that God was with me then. I never forgot that experience and lately I find myself remembering it more and more, God holding me in his hand. I felt God's presence a lot when I was a child.

I felt His presence when I would rise shortly before sunrise at my grandparent's cottage on the lake in the Eastern Townships of Montreal. I would sneak out of the cottage very quietly as to not wake anyone. I would sit with my feet dangling in the water at the end of our wharf, and then I would wait for the sun to come up on the other side of the lake. On the opposite shore were mountains in the shape of a large elephant's back. The sun would emerge from that elephant's back and gleam on the lake. I would squint my eyes to create millions of dancing diamonds on the clear blue water. What a delight! This was the most amazing sight to me. I could barely contain the peace and joy I felt in those moments. Now some people might say this is just a child's imagination, but I knew God was with me then. I had no doubt that God had created this amazing show of beauty and lights just for me and that this was our moment to enjoy it together before the rest of the world awoke.

When I was growing up, I attended church with my mother and two brothers every Sunday. My father went to a different church by himself. I was always very confused about the differences in these two churches and why we couldn't attend church together as a family. I asked my parents a lot of questions about this, but

as much as they tried to explain this to me, it never quite made sense. I had a lot of questions about God, The Virgin Mary, and Christ dying on the cross, the resurrection and about what all of this meant to my life. I wanted to see and understand what all this God stuff was about. After all, I had had some pretty wonderful experiences with God myself.

At church no one seemed too pleased with my curiosity and all of my questions, and I had a lot of questions. No one was too anxious to answer me and I had a hard time understanding the answers I did get. I'm sure they did the best they could but I was a child, with the mind of a child, and I became afraid of asking too many questions after being reproached, one to many times.

Now some people may have been reading the Bible but I don't remember learning about God by reading any of his Word. I was very confused about Jesus, his sacrifice for us, and my relationship with Him. I did not understand Jesus as my personal savior, even though I had been told He had been crucified for us. Most of all I didn't understand why I could not talk directly to God, since I felt that He had been talking to me for some time by then. I had a deep yearning to know God and feel His presence. I was very confused and as I grew older I started to lose my connection to God in the way I had experienced Him as a child. I didn't feel God with me then!

I left the church at eighteen when I left home. I was earnestly seeking God and the Truth, but at this point I was discouraged I didn't think I would find God at church.

I started practicing meditation and felt that I might find the presence of God in this way. I was reading books on Hinduism, Zen, Buddhism and eventually New Age philosophies. I entertained myself with horoscopes and numerology, believing these to be innocent diversions. I am a product of my culture and this sort of stuff is all around us. Just look at the back of any fashion magazine and you will usually find the monthly horoscopes. Or go to Borders or Barnes and

Noble bookstores and look at the size of the New Age book section. Not everyone practices these pursuits in order to find a relationship with God, but I sure did. I didn't know where else to look. I was desperate and I was so eager to regain that closeness I had enjoyed as a child, and then lost.

I studied for many months with the Self-Realization Fellowship, believing that I would find God when I could let go of my ego, and in meditation merge with the cosmic consciousness. At one point I was required to give my allegiance to, and to follow a guru who would guide me on my path to enlightenment. I had been quite disciplined and was practicing an hour or more of meditation almost every evening. One night just before this event was to take place I was sitting in deep meditation. Suddenly I saw a very vivid image before me of Jesus' shining face. I knew this meant something, even though at the time I was not sure exactly what. But I gave up my pursuit of Paramahansa Yogananda's self-realization path.

As I look back on these experiences now, I know that I enjoyed the peaceful feeling I could attain during my time meditating, but I was not really in God's presence or getting to know Him, or His will for my life. I did not have Christ as my savior, I was not speaking to God and therefore He was not speaking to me.

My experience meditating was not anchored in God's word or in His Truth. Now, when I think about Jesus appearing to me at this point in time, I realize His pursuit of me, He was breaking through, fighting for me, searching for me, and trying to bring me back into the safety of His hand. I was a lost sheep, stumbling blindly in the dark, soon to be devoured by the wolves and He was searching for me to rescue me from my own folly and delusions.

In spite of God's grace in pursuing me in this way it was easier for me to believe that all that existed was an impersonal cosmic consciousness that I would need to merge with, to find God. I found it very hard to believe in a personal God who had created me, who knew me intimately and who loved me dearly. Ironically, in my search for God I had read dozens and dozens of books, but had overlooked the most important one. I had read everything from the "Tao Te Ching" to Rhonda Byrne's "The Secret" but I had never even opened the Bible. I was lost and confused and getting more and more frightened as the years went by. I had pursued all of these exotic paths and was still coming up empty-handed.

When I think about this time in my life, I think

of a close friend of mine who had attended UCLA in the 70's. He was a little older than me. This was when people were experimenting, a la Timothy Leary, with LSD as a way of expanding their consciousness. My friend Art was involved in just such an experiment. One clear, star-studded night, their class went out to a beautiful spot in Malibu overlooking the Pacific Ocean. He had taken a dose and was having a pretty good trip. Feeling high and expansive and being in awe of his surroundings. He was in his own world, marveling at the infinite night sky. He told me that he thought, as he merged his mind with the stars up above, that he was uncovering the beginning of time and the actual origins of the universe. He was so enthralled, wandering about, immersed in his own delusions, not looking down at his feet or watching his steps. No one was holding his hand guiding him. He headed towards a huge rocky cliff overlooking the ocean and just at the very last possible moment, before he stepped into the dark abyss, falling to the jagged shore far below, someone grabbed him and pulled him back.

The Good Shepherd gently guides His sheep even when we are intent upon going astray, even when we are oblivious to His presence and His saving hand. Even when we think we are on the brink of Heaven, having saved ourselves in our own delusions.

Like my friend Art was on that starry night, over the years of my own wandering, I was following my own delusions, following all kinds of exotic, dangerous paths. I was unaware of God as my Heavenly Father who truly loved me, or of Christ who would hold my hand and keep me safe. I too could have easily stepped into that dark abyss, falling toward my own destruction, but God in his Sovereignty and loving grace continued to pursue me to pull me back to the safety of His loving hands.

I was misguided for many years searching for God in all the wrong places. The master con artist can lead even the most loving and innocent people astray. It is not so difficult to be deceived. For the enemy's native tongue is lies and deception. Satan does not play fair, he will use whatever he can to distract you from the real Truth, from God's Truth. The enemy will use other ideologies, worldly philosophies, counterfeit knowledge, pop culture, exotic eastern paths and the occult. He will use the weakness of our flesh and minds. He will use our desire to create and control our own destinies. He will use any and all forms of idolatry and mostly he will use whatever wounds you have been left with from your human experience.

I didn't have a human father who was really ever interested in me, or who ever spent any time getting

to know me, so the concept of an impersonal God, perfectly and perversely reinforced my wounds.

God had become impersonal to me. I had lost the Loving Presence I had experienced as a little girl. I didn't feel God with me then.

In my confusion and desperation, I had been trying to create my own religion; an unrevealed Christ as guru, God as my own mind and intellect, the dangerous New Age "Secret" philosophy of myself as God, who can create my own reality. I could visualize what I wanted and the cosmic consciousness should magically attract it to me. Wow, visions of Satan's sin. I could be like God the creator!

Mostly I felt alone in my search and as you can see I was very, very confused and I relied without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, on my own devices and understanding. I wanted to create and control my own life. My ideas, my understanding, new age thinking and horoscopes had become my idols. It was what I believed in, and therefore what I put my faith in. I was blind, foolish and ignorant of the truth, and I was lost in my own fantasies and illusions.

Ultimately, by the grace of the true living God, I was shown this to be the enemy's devices to deceive me and bring me to my own destruction. I made all these mistakes somewhat innocently, but they almost destroyed me. As much as God loves us He cannot keep us safe or pour His blessings on us if we have separated ourselves from Him in this way. But God is creative and He can use His people, His Word, the power of His Holy Spirit to continue to pursue us and bring us back to Him. And by His miracle I was rescued.

After this turbulent time of darkness and separation from the True God, the Holy Spirit began to work in my life in a powerful way I had never experienced before. He convicted me of my sins of idolatry and brought me to a place of faithfulness to my Lord. He opened my eyes and began speaking to me when I sought Him earnestly and wholeheartedly. He poured His healing love into my childhood wounds and revealed himself as my faithful and loving Father. He continues to illuminate my mind through His Word and dispels my confusion and darkness. He speaks to me in a small still voice that I know is His. He reveals to me God's Sovereign Kingdom, of which I now belong. As I give myself to Him, He continues to bless me in the most unexpected and amazing ways.

The Lord is so anxious for His children to return to Him and is so joyful to welcome us back, for there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Now I

Know God is with me.

The power of the Holy Spirit is with me now. I now have a deep and abiding experience of God's love for me. As I seek only Him above all else and speak to Him, He answers me. He answers me in the most amazing and powerful ways. He speaks to me in dreams and visions. He holds my hand and guides me and I hold his hand very, very tightly now. He lights my path. He shows me the Truth. He fills me powerfully with His Spirit and His love. I know I am safe now and I am not alone.

I enjoy an ongoing experience and understanding of what abiding in Christ is really about. It is not a thought of being in Him. It is an actual experience of feeling myself in His presence completely, and feeling His glorious and powerful Spirit in me, as I once had as a little girl, so long ago.

I love remembering myself as a child and what it felt like to be dependent, innocent and open, and God was right there with me then. He has been there in the middle of the night in my loneliness and fear, holding me in His Sovereign hand. He has been there in the quiet sunrise overlooking the dancing diamonds on crystal waters. He was there watching my foolishness, patiently calling my name waiting for me to return to Him. He has always been there pursuing me. Waiting for me to stop chasing after others and to turn around and return to His loving arms. Now, I know, God is with me. He will always be there with me.

I know the Lord has given us His Word, His Son and His Holy Spirit as a way of holding our hand, planting our feet in the Truth, and guiding us so that we may survive in this world and not fall into the dark abyss. He is Sovereign and powerful and He has come to do battle to save us from the darkness.

Now that I have turned to the Lord Jesus as my Savior, and He has graciously given me His Holy Spirit, if I turn to anything else above Him I am turning away from Him and putting myself in grave danger. It would not be He who has abandoned me, but I Him. It would not be He who is unfaithful, but I who am unfaithful. The enemy is looking for lost sheep, he prowls like a hungry lion, enticing us, waiting to devour us.

Turn to the Lord who will reveal and provide all that you seek.

Turn to the Holy Spirit who will enlighten you and show you the Truth.

Seek to know your true identity in Christ as a child

of the Living God.

Trust the Lord as your loving Father who knows and affirms you.

Trust in Him to teach and reproach you when you need it.

Trust in the Lord to speak to you when you seek Him patiently and quietly.

Meditate to seek His beautiful presence and be anchored in His Word.

Most of all trust in His amazing, unbelievable, relentless Love for you.

Trust in the Lord with all your Heart. And lean not on your own understanding: In all you ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight.

For He has been pursuing you and is holding you in His Loving Hands.

John 10:27

My sheep listen to my voice: I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish: no one can snatch them out of my hand. My father, who has given them to me is greater than all, no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

Proverbs 3:5

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And lean not on your own understanding:
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