

I want to linger a bit longer in Luke 15, because it provides us with foundational principles for the relationship **God** wants with us. Too often **we** define our relationship with Him; we want God on our terms: *if You will do this..., or make this happen, then I will trust You more*. We act like the fisherman's wife in Grimm's Fairy Tales<sup>1</sup>, the one who repeatedly sent her husband back to the flounder asking for a bigger and better house, and more power! Even when God answers our request, we say, *Do it just once more God, make it more believable, then I will put my trust in You!*

A childhood game, not my favourite, was hide- and- seek. The familiar cry, *"Where are you?"* echoed down the street as the seeker searched far and wide to find us in our hiding places.

The first game of hide-and- seek ever played is in the account of creation. Having disobeyed God's very specific instruction, the first couple hid when they heard God walking in the garden in the cool evening breeze. Not seeing them in the garden, God called out, **"Where are you?"** i.e. *Why are you hiding? What are you afraid of?*<sup>2</sup>

It's like a child hiding, having done something they were told not to, hoping not to be found out, questioned, confess and face the consequence of disobedience. The incident in the Garden elaborates God's character, and our response has defined our relationship with Him.

We imagine God playing a cosmic game of hide-and- seek with us. We hide from God by living our own lives, but every time anything goes wrong, that's the question we ask God, **"Where are You? Why aren't You doing something about this mess, ... this evil, ... this horrible thing ...? Where are You, Lord?"**

We cannot find God in the inhospitable universe, which is bursting with the power of His creative energy, but the evidence of God's presence is here, all around us. There are always those like atheist Bertrand Russell

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<sup>1</sup> and Aleksandr Pushkin's poem by the same name

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:10. The man's response in 3:10 divulges these questions would have been asked or implied.

who when asked what he would say, if after death he met God, to which he replied: *God, you gave us insufficient evidence.*<sup>3</sup>

In the history of the human race, many **feel** they have *insufficient evidence* and ask the same question. Job asked, "*Why do You hide Your face, and consider me the enemy?*" (13:24)

The Psalmist cries out, *Why do you stand afar off, O Lord? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble (10:1).* He "accuses" God of being *asleep* to his mournful cries: *Arouse, yourself, why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake and do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face, and forget our affliction and our oppression? (44:23-24)*

In his deepest suffering, Jesus cried out using the words of Israel's poets, *My God! O My God! Why have you forsaken me?*<sup>4</sup>, the **feeling** of being abandoned by a loving Father, the **feeling** of being left to suffer in our pain and angst.

The parable in Luke 15, brings this paradox into focus: lost, then found; hidden, then found; retrieved, then restored.

*A man had two sons...* This opening line brings together the one who went walkabout and was (actively) lost, and the one who was (passively) lost in His father's home.

Two sons: one elder, one younger. The elder is the Patriarch-in-Waiting, to look after the family after his father's death, for which he received a greater share of inheritance. The younger **felt** at a loss. *I want to taste the world I don't know. Give me what belongs to me!* The young lad had not realised, "what belongs to me" is finite; it will be spent and will end. The lad had not realised that everything in His Father's home, was always at his disposal, there for the asking: food, clothing, shelter, even a home for him and his wife to live in and have a family, all this was available to him, but he asked for *my share of Your estate, ...now, before you die!*

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<sup>3</sup> Cited in Dr. Paul K. Moser's booklet **Why Isn't God More Obvious: Finding the God who Hides and Seeks** (Norcross, GA: RZIM, 2000)

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, both quoting Psalm 22

Don't we do this with God? *All I can see and touch and feel, **belongs** to me, Lord. Please leave me alone. Let me enjoy it in peace. BUT, I will tell every one, You blessed me.*

A phrase which repeats itself in the lead sections of this parable, of the lost sheep and the lost coin is, *search ... until it is found!* This describes the character of God: He is **rest-less** and **relent-less**. We know God neither slumbers nor sleep<sup>5</sup>, nor does he rest or relent, until all who are lost to Him, return to His home, where the eternal banquet is laid, ready for all to enjoy.

*A man had two sons.* This parable is about the man; the two sons illustrate the character of the man, but being a parable, we are invited to identify with the two sons.

The narrative of both sons, invites us to consider and re-consider our relationship with the Father.

The younger son teaches us repentance, about turning around and starting the journey home. It is the memory of his Father which triggers his change of heart and mind: *I will go home to MY Father and say 'Father! I have sinned ...'*

Note, when he asked for his share of inheritance, *he said to his father, 'Give me my share of Your estate...'*

Now, for the first time, this young lad refers to *My Father*, and plans to address him as *Father*.

The mistake we make is not knowing, **My Father**. Unless we know God personally as, **My Father**, we cannot begin the journey home. When father and son meet in the warmth of the Father's embrace, the lad says, *Father! I have sinned against both heaven and you, and not worthy of being called Your Son.* The father's response? *This SON of mine was dead (to me) and has now returned to life* - Once a Child of God, **ALWAYS** a Child of God, but it does require us to recognise, we **are** a child of God.

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<sup>5</sup> Psalm 121:4

Interestingly, the lad *has returned to life* - outside of the Father's home is death, only in the Father's home is life, and the lad has *returned to life*.

The elder son makes the same mistake, of not knowing, **My Father!** He launches an angry tirade against his Father, *I have slaved for you...* This is the elder son's view of their relationship: Master - slave, obedient to His every command.

Bitterness and jealousy ooze with every word: *this son of Yours ... squandered Your money... Now, You celebrate with the fattened calf!*

Through all the raving and ranting, the Father still calls him, *My Dear (elder) Son...*<sup>6</sup>, confirming his favoured standing in the family. All that remains to be seen is, how this son will respond.

Without a happily-ever-after ending, Jesus leaves the door open to write our own ending. Are we the younger son *who was dead (outside the Father's home) and should return to life (back home), lost to his Father and restored to a father-son relationship?*

Or, are we elder son, *lost in our Father's home, because we think we are His slave in His home, not knowing our Father, and all we can enjoy in His home?*

The frightening thing is this: many are like the elder son, active in our Father's home, the Church, but never knowing or experiencing God, as Father.

Many know Him as, *Our Father in Heaven*, but He is waiting for each of us to know Him as **My Father** here and now, in our midst, in this time.

Will we accept His invitation to turn from death, and be restored to life in His home?

God is not hiding; we are! God is searching for us, and will not rest until we are restored to His family, where we belong!

**AMEN.**

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<sup>6</sup> verse 31