

## HIDDEN FROM GOD

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” are Paul’s words from Romans.

Isaiah put it this way:

To whom then can you compare to God?  
There is NO equal.

“Have you not know? Have you not heard?  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?”

It is GOD who sits above the circle of the earth,.... and all the inhabitants of the earth are like grasshoppers to God.

God stretches out the heavens like a curtain....

God can crush political rulers, even the most powerful,..... as if they were made of Styrofoam.

God is over all life forms. God created all the millions and millions of stars in the universe, and even knows them all by name.

God—the God we know from the Bible, through prayer, from creation and as demonstrated by Jesus.....  
IS ALL Powerful!

Our God has been from the beginning and always will be.

God can do Anything, and God is there for us.

As Isaiah states, “God gives power to the weak. God strengthens the powerless.”

Without God,... people grow weary, even the young become exhausted.

With God’s help, strength will return.....and the marathon of life can be run without becoming weary.

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Those who wait for the Lord will renew their strength,.... and they shall mount up with wings like eagles.

With a resource available like that..... how can there being any worries or difficulties???

How’s the soaring like eagles going?

How's do all the hardships, frustrations and sorrows look from a eagle's eye view? ..... pretty small I imagine?

We affirm all that Isaiah presents about God as true,.... yet.....

We proclaim,.... even say that we believe this about God, yet....

Yet,..... we are very hesitant to declare... Openly... that we are not flying high above the perils and storms of life.

Most of us fear that our religion / the pillars of our faith would come tumbling down if we were to honestly confess that God seems distant... beyond reach..... out of touch with us.

*Sometimes honesty can not be found in the church.*

A while ago, I attended a funeral of a very dear friend.

She was a good, church going Christian. She tried very hard to live the Christian life, and I know that she really struggled during the dying process.

As cancer was taking away her life, she looked for angels to comfort her. She expected the experience to be a holy time of preparation, and was shocked, even appalled that she was not sensing the comfort and closeness of God.

Her pastor, who did the funeral, also knew this about her experience of dying, Yet..... he told another, untrue story about her dying.... in order to keep the Myth going. I guess he was afraid people would doubt, and maybe even lose their faith,..... if they heard the truth.

He created a story about how strong her faith was, and so forth....

I was very disappointed by his fabrication..... because we need to hear the truth,..... even if we don't like it,.... and even if it shatters all our pillars.

I feared that most who heard that funeral meditation were thinking to themselves, "What's the matter with me. That's not my experience.

I have doubts. I feel distant from God, and it must be all my fault.

If I only had more faith. .... If I was only Stronger."

The honest message could have given permission to people to be more open,..... to be drawn together,..... instead of feeling the isolation of shame and failure.

We need to always try to search out and expose the truth.... Because deception is Not from God.

The Bible is very good at presenting awkward events,... including when God's people lost their faith,... and no longer felt connected to God.

Verse 32 of Isaiah 40 reveals that the Hebrews felt separated from God.  
They felt abandoned.

They were defeated people—captives in Babylon.

*In those days, war was not only a political affair; it was also a test to see who's god was stronger. And, the Hebrews lost, and so they had to contend with the notion that Yahweh was defeated too,..... or at least wouldn't or couldn't do anything to help them.*

*It's a good thing we no longer associate military might with God's might,..... or do we?????*

Anyways, this passage is addressing people struggling to survive / struggling to understand why they were enduring such hardships, and thus,...feeling disconnected from God.

In all honesty,... most if not all of us have been in such state..... or are there now.  
Life's events can get really ugly,....even overwhelming,.... and to make matter worse, God doesn't seem to be responding..... or.... we don't even bother expecting God to intervene..... because we've concluded that God won't or can't.

That condition is a dark place. Aloneness / isolation... when the world is crashing in around us.... is a very dark and dreadful place.

We are also in a dark lonely place ... when God is but a fanciful notion.... or ... so distant we can't even sense the divine.

The Contemplatives call that condition / that state of being... “The Dark Night of the Soul.”

Teresa of Avila, in the 1500s, wrote about that predicament, as did many others, including Thomas Merton and Mother Teresa.

They described being in the Dark Night as feeling abandoned / forgotten by God. The early stages include frustration, even dismay and agony. Yet, the honesty of struggling with the rejection and aloneness,... usually evolved into a deep longing..... a prolonged search for God.

The Dark night of the soul can visit any of us, and the night may be long, too long,..... or it can be brief. It can also be tormenting and extremely painful,... or a dullness that breeds indifference.

Sometimes,.... darkness comes for no apparent reason.  
Sometimes..... it happens because of no fault of our own,..... and sometimes,..... we know that we are the cause.

Regardless of the reason,..... the darkness makes God hidden from us / we feel alone..... beyond God's help.

Last Sunday, I had a brief, horrific experience. I was in dark and terrible place.....beyond rescue.

It happened at the West Edmonton Mall.  
We went there last weekend.

Four times a year, a month has five Sundays, and when that happens, I get the whole weekend off. This is a nice benefit,.. because it allows family time and an opportunity to go some place. That can't happen during the 44 weekends that I work.  
So,.... thanks for providing that option for me.

However, last weekend we went to West Edmonton Mall,..... and for some bizarre reason,..... I decided to ride the "Mind Bender."

If you not familiar with that ride: it is a hybrid roller coaster with radically drops, turns, corkscrews, and loops,....all done at a high speed.

When I sat down in the seat, my anxiety began to rise when I looked at the course of the track around, above and behind me.  
Next came the seat belt, and then a bar tilted up against my chest.

I was feeling trapped. My heart rate picked up, but there was one more restraint. A device, like a large head rest, lowered to contain my shoulders and head.  
I was completely captive,..... and then it began to move.

It was too late,..... I would have to endure the whole thing.

The creep up to the highest point was fine, the anticipation was not.

Then, there was the drop,.... followed instantly by a hard turn, as it went faster and faster.  
My reflex inhale wasn't even finished before I was upside down in the first loop.

At that point, I realized that my fearful anticipation had been grossly inadequate, and it was also then, that I decided that closing my eyes was the most prudent thing to do.

Darkness makes one feel rather alone. Moreover, I knew there was no point in asking God for help,..... because I was stuck / trapped in this mind rattling, stomach twisting adventure,..... to the end.

And,.... it did end,..... and I survived,..... and I then prayed,... "O God, don't let me loose my cookies in front of everybody."

The entire ride lasted less than a minute, even though it felt like an eternity in the midst of it.

Even so, an amusement park ride.... can not really compare to the Dark night of the Soul..... or .... being trapped in a deplorable situation that does go on and on.....

Such experiences,.... when God is far away,... even hidden,... prompts one to wonder about the nature of God:... the power of God.... the ability of God to intervene.

During times of such despair and torment we wonder:

Why is this happening?

Why isn't God coming to the rescue?

Why is God so.... removed..... so far away?

Where is God?..... and ..... what is next?

In the darkness of separation we may ask:

What is going on?

Is God limited / confined?...

..... or are we the ones who have confined God?

Regardless of the reasons, even if there are reasons, .... our longing and need is to find release / to have our hardships end or if that can't happen ..... to rise above the ordeal..... to discover eagle wings and fly away.

We sing songs about such deliverance.

We tell great stories of rescue....., and we've read about the things God has done, in the past.

The Mark passage presents examples of the many things God did through Jesus—people were healed and rescued by Jesus.

Which leaves us with the burning question: “What about me?”

It is noteworthy.... that God chose to work through a human body.. ..a limited body of flesh and blood.... that needed to get away at times in order to rest.

Even Jesus, grew weary,..... and could not run endlessly.

??So maybe, Isaiah was embellishing a little.???

Still, remember the healings that Jesus did, and how people sensed God's presence through Jesus.

And, when Jesus went away to rest, his compassions felt his absence/ they searched and hunted for him,.....until Jesus was found.

They didn't like being disconnected from Jesus.... because they experienced God through Jesus. They felt separated from God when Jesus was absent.

They kept searching until they found Jesus, and that is message the Isaiah text is striving to present.

In other words, “God is worth searching for / Being connected with God is worth it.

Yet,..... how does that Happen?

When in darkness / when alone / when life is falling apart..... how do we connect with God?????

Isaiah provides the answer; however, the English translation doesn't help, in fact,..... it feels rather dismissive.

From verse 31 states, "...but those who Wait for the Lord" ... will find divine strength / will connect with God.

WAIT?

This wait is not patiently waiting with mythological faith, nor is it biding time as if waiting for the helicopter to arrive.

In Hebrew the word wait means winding / twisting a rope.

Making a rope takes a while, ....and requires diligence with a sense of purpose.

And,..... what is the purpose of a rope?

A rope binds things together, and a rope connects, and is used to pull things.

This makes sense.

When separated from God / when disconnected..... we need a rope.

We need to make a rope to connect with God.

And, I believe that rope is made from strands of Christ—the life and message of Jesus.

Reaching out to those in need. Empowering the weak / doing acts of kindness. Living peace and justice, and being loving and gracious... is the way of Christ..... and Christ is our connection to God, and when we strive to follow Christ,.... we are twisting / making a rope.

We can't see clearly in the dark. We can't see God when all is dark, and it is common to only dwell upon the perils that are afflicting us,... when we are in such a desperate situation / state of being.

However, it would be degrading if I were to suggest to those in such despair must quit being self absorbed and instead be as Jesus/ focus on Jesus.

It would be insulting to say the only way to connect to God and find release is to make a rope by being a good Christian / by serving others.

That is declaring that the burden solely rests with the victim / the weak.

Moreover, that trite remedy is counter to the Scripture and the way of Christ.

\*The burden is NOT on the weak and powerless to find their own path to strength.

God comes to those in despair. God comes to those in need,... just as Jesus did.

Jesus empowered / lifted up the suffering, the weak and the lonely.

And, that is what we do..... as a church!

\*We make ropes. We do Christ. Together... we make robes that connect to God.

And, when someone is struggling / when someone is overwhelmed and feeling abandoned by God.....

WE use our robes to pull God into view.

We bring hope..... with our ropes made of being as Christ..... we pull God into the picture..... so that those who are drowning can be rescued / so that they can see God.

AND,..... we can NOT do that unless we are honest.

Unless we honestly confess that we have had times when God is out of sight / far away, we have no reason or motivation to help each other.

Unless we honestly and openly admit that we too have been overwhelmed, without a sense of hope... when God is hidden,.... we will not understand, nor will we go to the effort to wait and make a rope for our neighbour.

We pull God into view... That is what we do,..... because sometimes God is hidden.

We need each other.....

And, something divine happens when we discover that truth.... something divine like the flight of eagles.