

Where Are You?

Series: What God Wants To Know
Brad Bailey – September 7, 2014

(Personal reference to returning from taking summer break)

Break... been serving as the Lead pastor for 23 years...pastoral team for 27 years...(1404 weeks)

- Planned a big surprise trip for my family... Hawaii
- House projects
- Celebrated our 23rd anniversary
- Finally last weekend we took our oldest son to college

> Big juncture... when one begins to have to engage some big questions...and realize that they will have to answer for themselves...that is hard.

Life is full of questions.

We may feel that the most dramatic questioning we might face would be from that of a professor in class...or a judge in court...or a confrontation with some human accusation.

The REALLY big questions are those which God asks.

Naturally when we think of ourselves as finite beings in the face of the infinite cosmos we tend to think of questions we want to direct towards God.

Good... but what we'll discover is that God has questions for us.

> Discover God as the **master of questions**....

> Today we are beginning a series...entitled *What God Wants to Know*...over the next 9 weeks we will engage **9 questions that God asks...9 questions that define life.... questions which sort out and sum up** much of what really matters.

.... And at the same time reveal the very heart of God.

.... Especially true of the first question we come to in God's Word.

Comes early in the Biblical narrative...the story of our roots...

The background is the creation of human life as bearers of God's image....whose very existence is bound in relationship with God.

Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

The Creation story given to us in the very first chapters of Genesis in the Old Testament... has never ceased to **speak deeply to the questions of life**. There is a **poetic quality** and brevity that I believe rightfully allows for various interpretations in terms of the details... but however we interpret the details, the Genesis record is clear.... Our very existence is defined by God. God is eternal source and sustainer of life... who created that life that would bear His image in a created world. Within such a relationship lies life...and love...a love which includes freedom.

Genesis 3:6-10

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also

gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Then 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?"

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Having **lost their innocence**, our first ancestors **become ashamed of their nakedness**. They **hide from each other** behind **fig leaves**... and they **hide from God** behind **bushes**.

God's presence comes with the **first question**... **"Where are you?"**

That question, so simple and direct, **had and continues to have enormous implications**.

It may be the **first question God asks anyone**... if we will listen.

But before engaging what God said...consider...

What God didn't say...

1. Why did you do this?

"Why" is a valuable question...but it is a secondary question. As a culture that has invested greatly in a deeper understanding of **psychology and sociology**, we are fascinated with the **question of "why."** As both a pastor and licensed therapist, I find great value in gaining insight into our behavior. But I've also come to the conclusion that **such insight in itself is not very liberating**. Understanding 'why' does not itself bring freedom.

- This is one of the great strengths that comes in the 12-step process...commonly a part of AA. The 12 step process doesn't focus on why we have a problem. It begins with the admission that one is powerless over an addiction and is in need of restoring their proper relationship to what is greater than themselves...to a Higher Power.

God also does not begin by asking....

2. What can I do to fix it?...or You need to fix it?

God doesn't begin with a **quick move** to provide a **quick-fix solution**. This isn't about a simple moral shortcoming that can be rectified...it is about being separated from life.

We like to think we can just fix our condition with a little extra good behavior.... Or a little restitution.

Or perhaps we think God can just be more forgiving...more merciful.

Mercy is His nature. The cross was already in the heart of God.

> But **mercy cannot bring reconciliation to that which isn't recognized**. Mercy will require recognizing the condition and need.

3. How dare you! That's it. I'm through with you.

That the Scriptures tell us of God's returning to these two is itself profound. That God comes to engage them is itself a miracle of grace.

It's a striking reversal of what we commonly may think about relating to God. We may think that we are the one's seeking God and he is the one hiding. But the Scriptures declare that God has made Himself known and that we turned away and worshipped the creation rather than the creator and SUPPRESSED the truth...not simply did not understand it...but suppressed it. Our inward nature turned away...that our hearts have become blind.

So perhaps the **most important** thing for us to recognize and hear... is that it's **we who moved** away from God. **God never withdrew.** His commitment to relationship never was withdrawn. His desire for relationship has never changed. Whatever Adam and Eve did, **God still comes to pursue relationship.**

SO he comes asking "Where are you?"

Because he lacks the ability to see?

The question is **not referring to coordinates** but **condition.** God isn't asking for an evaluation of our coordinates... but an evaluation of our **condition.**

It's a question that lies before us collectively..

There is something in human nature that we have a hard time understanding and reconciling... an amazing capacity that defies mere material nature... such capacity leads to the Enlightenment and becoming enamored with our potential progress...and something which defies that very progress.

[DAVID BROOKS](#) editorial in the New York Times...September 4, 2005...reflecting on the recent decade of increasing war... 9/11... Katrina and it's aftermath... and the scandals run through every institution. He concluded:

"Americans have had to acknowledge dark realities that it is not in our nature to readily acknowledge: the thin veneer of civilization, the elemental violence in human nature, the lurking ferocity of the environment, the limitations on what we can plan and know, the cumbersome reactions of bureaucracies, the uncertain progress good makes over evil."

David Brooks, New York Times

Despite all the qualities that are remarkable about our human nature...there is something about our condition that seems "off"...something unaligned...something for which we should consider the question: "where are we?"

But it's more than a communal question...it's ultimately a personal question to us. Many of us **may be quick to think we can answer the question...**that we know where we are. But I would suggest **the question never loses it's potency...** always bears a challenge.

Do we really know where we are...where we stand?

Our common way of perceiving is to ask “where is God?” That’s certainly an essential question. But that question may be a reflection of a more fundamental question...which is “where are we?”

The grand illusion is thinking that **we are the center around which God orbits...** as many once thought of the earth as the center around which the sun must be circling us. **The truth is that God is the center...**the eternal existing force and will around which all life lives in relationship to if it lives at all.

We may try to answer the question by accepting that there is some larger force... but that it is **impersonal**. Someone once suggested to C.S. Lewis that the force we must relate to is not a God whose love we break away from...but more like an immense power such as electricity...that if we violate we will get a shock. Lewis responded:

“My dear Malcolm, what do you suppose you have gained by substituting the image of a live wire for that of angered majesty? You have shut us all up in despair; for the angry can forgive, and electricity can't.” [1]

And that center is not some impersonal force... but personal.

Not... sort of personal ...not ‘semi-personal’...but more truly personal than we know.

So the question “where are you” is a **profoundly personal question...**from the infinite person to the finite creature....from the **father to the child...**your father to you His son or daughter.

What becomes clear is that we are **not lost in some geographical way...**but hidden.

“I was afraid... so I hid.”

Brennen Manning writes...

Adam and Eve hid, and we all, in one way or another, have used them as role models. Why? Because we do not like what we see. It is uncomfortable intolerable-to confront our true selves. Simon Tugwell, in his book *The Beatitudes*, explains:

And so, like runaway slaves, we either flee our own reality or manufacture a false self which is mostly admirable, mildly prepossessing and superficially happy. We hide what we know or feel ourselves to be (which we assume to be unacceptable and unlovable) behind some kind of appearance which we hope will be more pleasing. We hide behind pretty faces which we put on for the benefit of our public. And in time We may even come to forget that we are hiding and think that our assumed pretty face is what we really look like

God calls us, as He did Adam, to come out of hiding. No amount of spiritual makeup can render us more presentable to Him. As Merton said, "The reason we never enter into the deepest reality of our relationship with God is that we so seldom acknowledge our utter nothingness before him." [2]

“I was afraid... so I hid.”

Our defenses become our distance...

1. We may hide behind our blame of others.

Some of know that you struggle with being defensive... critical and angry. You may know something of the common truth that those who struggle most in being critical and angry generally have the deepest struggle with their own acceptability. When we struggle to have grace with others...we usually struggle to have grace with ourselves. We are defending our own condition with the intensity of deflecting all blame upon others. It's hard to accept our own fault.

2. Hide behind the norm. Dismiss it as common. - “Everybody’s doing it.”

We may hide behind comparison. - “I’m not THAT bad...certainly better than most.” It’s amazing how many people try to identify their moral position in relationship to Hitler.

It’s been noted that real moral goodness arises from some standard that transcends us all...and creates a humility because we are never superior to it.

3. Hide behind hopelessness.

We can hide from God behind a false futility... declaring that we’re beyond hope.

I think we may **prefer hopelessness over nakedness**. We would rather be left alone in the dark that to be seen in the light.

4. Hide behind unanswered questions to God.

Our honest questions are fine...God can understand that we will be naturally be filled with questions. But they can represent how clearly we do not know our position...where we are.

The simple truth is that some questions really can be as much a way to divert and avoid God...and ultimately our true position. In the midst of whatever questions we may raise, we do well to ask a deeper question: Is the real posture of our heart one which WANTS God in all of his reign and all of the surrender implied?

5. Hide behind a preoccupation with our performance or possessions.

Our performance and possessions can provide a false reference point to who we are...and a shallow affirmation to our true nature. It is so much easier to accept some form of earthly success...that we substitute success for ultimate significance...and try to stay focused on whatever performance will affirm us...whatever possessions will offer some consolation.

My dreams...heroic and idealistic.

Consider where your mind wanders. Let's say you're sitting church and find yourself a little bored... Where does your mind go to relieve the boredom? What do you find yourself thinking about? What is it that you can't wait to get to or begin to do?

> **That may well be your hiding place.** (I'm not talking about a need to go to the bathroom!)

“God can deal with our guilt, but our self-justification keeps Him at arms length... and the arm is ours.” (Bruce Larson)

We can respond to God as we discover...

1. Our false coverings never will provide real comfort.

Adam and Eve... were covered but not comfortable.

- Each of us clothe and cover ourselves with certain defenses to facing the reality of our shame... if it's anger to self-criticism it will preclude us from relationships.
- Some of us may cover ourselves with outward appearance or intellectual intimidation that demands we be respected and right...but it only hides our truest condition.
- Some of us may use sexual exploitations in thought or action...or social success
- Even religious roles (Which is why I have found taking a break from my roll always healthy.)

Most of us are expending some significant energy sowing our coverings... because we've come to sense we can't live without them. Our false coverings have become so much a part of us that we can't imagine life uncovered... frighten us.

But what happens when we do is that we find the false coverings had actually been malformed and restrictive... never really freeing us at all. We've been clinging tightly to straight jackets.

2. The consequences we fear of facing our true condition is ultimately unavoidable.

The picture of Adam and Eve hiding in bushes from God is a picture that can strike us a bit foolish and futile. > We're going to face God. The only question is how long we want to live in the shame of our hiding.... How long do we want to wait before coming out and reconciling our inner tensions.

3. God is waiting to meet us in all our nakedness...with new clothing we can truly live in.

God is a saving God, however, and the fact that He clothed... Adam and Eve testifies to that. An animal was sacrificed to provide garments of skin, and later all Israel's animal sacrifices would be part of God's provision to remedy the curse—a life for a life. The sinner shall die! (Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 6:23) Yet he will live if he places his faith in **the LORD**, who has provided a Substitute. The skin with which God clothed Adam and Eve perpetually reminded them of God's provision. Similarly in the fullness of time God accepted the sacrifice of Christ, and on the basis of that atonement He clothes believers in righteousness. [3]

1 Corinthians 1:30 (NLT)

God has united you with Christ Jesus. ...Christ made us right with God; he made us

pure and holy, and he freed us from sin.

Galatians 3:27 (NLT)

And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on the character of Christ, like putting on new clothes.

All the tragedy of separation that is raised in the Garden —death, toil, sweat, thorns, the tree, the struggle, and the seed—all were later traced to Christ. He is the other Adam, who became the curse, who sweat great drops of blood in bitter agony, who wore a crown of thorns, who was hanged on a tree until He was dead, and who was placed in the dust of death.

Response / Ministry: Today a question stands before each of us... as we hear God ask: "Where are you?"

Many of us know we have in various ways... been hiding in bushes... working on fig leaves.

> How will we answer God?

We can try to be very quiet and hope he doesn't notice us...but that just reflects how distant from reality we are.

We can hear the call...to recognize that he has come for us...if we will come out.

There may be some bushes we have been hiding behind that we need to step out from.

We may have sown some fig leaves never really cover and restore our existence. God is offering us to be clothed in Christ.

Resources: The quote from David Brooks was drawn from Alistair Begg

Notes:

1. From C.S. Lewis, "Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer", chapter 18, paragraphs 6-7, page 96+

2. From Brennen Manning "Abba's Child",

3. Also Romans 3:21-26 (NLT)

²¹ But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. ²² We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. ²³ For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. ²⁴ Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. ²⁵ For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, ²⁶ for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.