

Always Pursuing
Genesis 3, Psalms 139, Psalms 23

Slide 1

God hasn't changed over time. Because of this, we can still experience Him every single day in a very real way.

In the movie *The Fugitive*, Tommy Lee Jones is committed to finding Harrison Ford and bringing him to justice, but as committed as he was God is infinitely more committed to finding you.

But there's a huge difference between God's pursuit of you and Gerard's pursuit of Kimball.

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Now, most of us know what it means to be lost or to lose something of value.

I read that the average American spends 2.5 days each year looking for lost items and "collectively costs U.S. households \$2.7 billion dollars a year in replacement costs."

The Bible clearly teaches that God seeks and pursues the lost. In God's Word, we see that the search and rescue mission began the moment we became lost.

Look at Genesis 3. God created Adam and Eve to have a personal relationship with Him.

He only gave them one rule: Don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He wanted them to depend on Him for their understanding of good and evil.

He was telling them, *“Don’t try to figure it out for yourself. I’ve seen the future; I’ve seen all the way to 2022. What a mess people are going to make when they decide for themselves what’s right and wrong.”*

Well, Adam and Eve didn’t listen, or they did listen, just not to God. They listened to the serpent, who convinced them to eat from the forbidden tree from which God told them not to eat.

When they ate, their eyes were opened, and they saw they were naked. After which, they covered themselves with fig leaves, and hid.

Genesis 3:8, *“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.”*

When it says, *“in the cool of the day,”* the implication from the text is that this was later in the same day. So almost from the moment they were lost, God started looking.

Genesis 3:9, *“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.”*

You know the rest of the story. God kept His word that Adam and Eve would surely die. They no longer would live forever in God’s presence. Then God cursed the serpent for deceiving His children.

He told the woman He would greatly multiply her pain in childbearing. He cursed the ground because of their sin. From then on, raising food from the ground would only come through sweat and hard work.

Then God banned Adam and Eve from the Garden. They couldn’t remain in the garden in their sinful condition.

Now, we always think that meant God couldn't be in the presence of sin because He's so holy. But let's look more closely at what's going on.

Genesis 3:22, "And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

Do you fully understand what God's saying here? If they ate from the tree of life in their fallen state, then the man and woman would live forever in separation from God and God couldn't bear to think of that.

So it isn't that God can't be in the presence of sin, it's just that sin separates us from God.

Remember, God took the initiative to look for Adam and Eve in their sinful condition. In verse 21, He made garments of skins and clothed them, in their sinful condition.

And thousands of years later, God Himself would be made flesh and would dwell among us IN OUR SINFUL CONDITION! The worst thing the enemies of Jesus could say about Him was that He ate with tax collectors and sinners.

Never in a million years did the religious leaders view God as a God that pursued those who were lost, or as a God who sought after those who were not seeking him.

William Barclay said, "No Pharisee had ever dreamed of a God like that. A great Jewish scholar has admitted that this is the one absolutely new thing which Jesus taught about God – that he actually searched for us.

A Jew might have agreed that those who came crawling home to God in self-abasement and prayed for pity might find it; but he would never have conceived of a God who went out to search for sinners.”

Let this sink in! The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.

Yes, our sins separate us from God, but it's that very separation that caused God to draw nearer to us, to seek us and to initiate a rescue mission.

So how does He do it?

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God's pursuit of us is consistent with His character. Many of you probably know Psalm 23.

Verse 6 says, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

The Hebrew word translated “*follow*” in this verse is “*rah-daff*.” It's a word that's used over 150 times in the Old Testament. It means “*to chase, to pursue with the intent to catch.*”

When Abraham's nephew Lot was taken captive, Abraham “*radaffed*” his captors. When the Israelites were leaving Egypt, Pharaoh “*radaffed*” them.

Usually people are “*radaffed*” by an army with swords, and weapons, and war horses.

But what “*radaffs*” us, according to Psalm 23? “*Surely fear and intimidation*” shall follow me? No. “*Surely disappointment and frustration*” will follow me? No.

“Surely goodness and mercy” will pursue me, will chase me, will intend to capture me. God’s pursuit of us is relentless, but it’s consistent with His character!

God’s heart toward us is good. When Moses asked God to *“show me your glory,”* in Exodus 33:18, God responded with *“I will cause all my goodness to pass before you.”*

Then, in Exodus 34:6, God passes by Moses, proclaiming, *“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.”*

The phrase, *“compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness”* shows up 13 times in scripture. If God was a major league baseball player, this would be His walk-up music.

God’s pursuit of us is consistent with His character. In Jeremiah 31:3, God says, *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving kindness.”*

In Hosea 11, the Bible says God led His people *“...with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them.”*

God feels this way about us because He created us. Psalm 139 is the most tender portrait of the God who pursues us.

He pursues us not to send us back to prison or bring us to justice, but to bring us into fellowship, to bring us home. Listen to the first six verses of Psalm 139:

“You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.”

God pursues us because He created us. God searches for us so that He can lead us home. Look at the last two verses of this amazing Psalm.

Psalm 139:23-24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

Don't make the mistake of believing this is some indulgent, wink-and-nod, and look the other way treatment of our sin. God's hatred of sin and His wrath against sin is absolute.

But don't miss this: God's wrath is poured out on sin. Yes, God punishes people, but don't imagine for a moment that the Lord takes pleasure in it.

Ezekiel 33:11, *“I take NO PLEASURE in the death of the wicked.”* Lamentations 3:33 says that the Lord does not afflict *“from the heart.”* So, while He does afflict and punish sin, His heart's literally not in it.

This is why the Puritan, Jonathan Edwards, called judgment *“God's strange work,”* and mercy God's *“natural work.”* In the New Testament, Paul describes it in his letter to Titus.

Titus 3:3-7, “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

Paul’s talking about the goodness and loving kindness of God. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, is literally goodness and mercy made flesh.

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God also pursues by staying. This may sound weird since how can you pursue someone and stay put? But that’s exactly what God does.

Think about it. When someone’s lost, there’re times when it makes sense to go look for them. But there’s a risk with that.

Because if both of you are moving, there’s always the chance you’re moving away from each other.

A lost person needs to know that there’s a place they can go that won’t move. If they can find their way back, they’ll be home.

I think this is what Jesus was getting at when he told the story of the Prodigal Son.

In Luke 15, Jesus actually told three stories about lost things. A sheep wandered away from the flock, and the shepherd left the 99 sheep to go searching for the one.

A woman loses one coin out of ten, and she turns her house upside down to look for the one.

But when Jesus tells the story of a father whose son takes his share of the family inheritance and goes to a far country and squanders it all, the father doesn’t go to the far country to search for his son.

Instead, he stays home, always making sure that when his son finds his way back, he has a home to which he can return, and the son does find his way back.

Luke 15:17-20, "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

What an image! A Father running to hug and welcome his lost son home.

Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon called "*Many Kisses for Returning Sinners*" and he preached that entire sermon on that small phrase, "*and kissed him.*"

He writes, "See the contrast. There is the son, scarcely daring to think of embracing his father, yet his father has scarcely seen him before he has fallen on his neck. The condescension of God towards penitent sinners is very great. He seems to stoop from His throne of glory to fall upon the neck of a repentant sinner. God on the neck of a sinner! What a wonderful picture!"

A picture of God not only running toward the wayward and lost, but embracing him. Sometimes, God pursues by staying put.

He never changes his character. He never lowers His expectations. He never modifies His Word to adapt to the changing times, and the result is that the lost person has something to come home to.

We, as a church, will never water down the truth of God's Word in order to accommodate a changing culture.

Sin is still sin and must be repented. God is still Holy. Heaven is still heavenly, and hell is still horrifying.

But when sin loses its attractiveness; when the promises of sexual freedom and following your own truth burn themselves out; the church will still be here, ready to receive repentant sinners.

Our job is to leave the porch light on and watch the horizon for the prodigal to come home.

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Conclusion

If you're here this morning and not in a relationship with Jesus, that means you're here this morning and lost.

God brought you here today as a way of pursuing you so you could hear this message of His love and surrender your life to him. Because you can't outrun the One Who's pursuing you.

There's another scene in *The Fugitive* that's interesting. When Dr. Kimble is in a stand-off against Detective Gerard, he yells, "*I didn't kill my wife.*" But Detective Gerard yells right back, "*I don't care.*"

Think about it. Guilt or innocence wasn't an issue here. Gerard's job was to bring a fugitive to justice.

WE are guilty of the crime with which we're charged. "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" We deserve punishment.

But God cares. He cared so much that He sent His Son to pay the price for our sin.

God relentlessly pursues us. He'll chase us down to whatever flophouse or outhouse or henhouse in which we find ourselves.

This is the Gospel. This is why Jesus came to earth and lived a perfect life and died for me and you.

It was the ultimate way God could show how He pursues us. It was the ultimate way God could show the lost how much they're valued; how much He loves them.

Romans 5:8, *"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Don't buy into this idea that you don't matter; that your life isn't worth anything. Thoughts like that are straight from the pit of hell.

I recently learned that suicide is up 33% over the last two decades. It's the second leading cause of death between those 10-34 years of age.

Don't listen to the enemy telling you that your life is hopeless, meaningless and that you don't have value. You do matter and have since before you were born.