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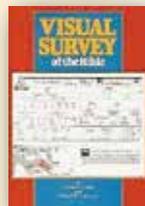
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## THE PROMISES OF GOD HIDE AND SEEK – GENESIS 3:8-9

Everyone has experienced the cycle of sin and shame. It's a dreadful place to be, a box canyon with three sides going straight up. We enter by way of sin, and wouldn't dare to look for a way out since we don't think we deserve it (and we don't). And if we hear the sound of someone passing by, we can't even call out for help. To do so would presume that the person wants to help us (adding presumption to our sins). We know no one could want to help one such as us (which is not true, but it is what we think). And so we hide in our canyon of shame.

There is only one way out of our shame, but we often can't see it. The way out is to simply say what we have done—confess it to God—so that we may receive his forgiveness which is always available. And yet we are usually too ashamed to lift up our eyes, much less our voice, to him. So what does he do to get us to speak? He seeks us out. In our moment of need, when we are hiding from him, he comes looking for us—and he speaks first. Without our even knowing it, he changes our confession to a conversation.

God did this first with Adam and Eve. In the perfect Garden of Eden, the first couple sinned. Hearing God approaching in the garden, they ran and hide themselves among the trees. Did God see them? Yes. Did he know what they had done? Of course. Was he gently willing to allow them to tell him in their own words rather than accusing them directly and deepening their shame? That's exactly what he did. By rhetorically calling out, “Where are you?” God drew Adam out from his hiding

place. Seeing the patience of God, Adam released himself from shame by confessing his sin to God.

Is your identity today “Ashamed”? It need not be. Know that God is walking in your garden seeking a conversation that leads to confession, and freedom. If you lift your eyes, you will see him. If you lift your voice, he will hear you. He seeks you for only one reason: To find you and set you free..

**GOD'S PROMISE TO YOU:** *“When you hide, I see you and will seek you out.”*

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# REFLECTIONS

Reflections on God's revealed truth  
MAY 2012

# PRACTICING God's PRESENCE

God of power and might, I thank You for the grace-filled gift of prayer. You welcome me into Your presence and bid me to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that I may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. In prayer, let me lay hold of my true possessions in Christ and exercise the authority You have granted me as a believer in Jesus Christ. I want to internalize and pray Your Word back to You, and I wish to pray at all times by practicing Your presence and acknowledging my dependence upon You in everything. Thank You that I can also be real and honest in prayer without pretence or posing, because there are times when I need to wrestle with Your will in the circumstances of my life. You patiently and lovingly hear my complaints and You succor and comfort me in times of distress.

A teaching letter to encourage believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart



### THREE CULTURAL FORCES

In his perceptive book, *The Gravedigger File*, Os Guinness discusses three processes that have gripped our culture in recent decades –secularization, privatization, and pluralization. In his words, *secularization* is the process through which, starting from the center and moving outward, successive sectors of society and culture have been freed from the decisive influence of religious ideas and institutions. *Privatization* is the process by which modernization produces a cleavage between the public and the private spheres of life and focuses the private sphere as the special arena for the expansion of individual freedom and fulfillment. And *pluralization* is the process by which the number of options in the private sphere of modern society rapidly multiplies at all levels, especially at the level of world views, faiths and ideologies.

In other words, religion is being rendered culturally insignificant, removed from the public square, and reduced in value to one of a myriad of options. Even so, these contemporary cultural forces cannot defeat the power and purposes of the living God who continues to draw people to His Son and to transform them by the power of His indwelling Spirit.

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## THE PURSUIT OF GOD—PART 39

This Reflections series is based on my 11-part CD teaching series on A. W. Tozer's spiritual classic, *The Pursuit of God*.

In our discussion of burden and rest, we talked last month about the burden of pride and the burden of pretense.

### The Burden of Artificiality

The third burden is the burden of artificiality. The burden of artificiality forces us to play a character in a carnival of self-deceit, hoping that the audience never awakens to the fact that underneath the costume and makeup is only an empty self. We strive to never flub a line, never miss a cue, and never, never slip out of character. The entire advertising industry is built upon artificiality –the art of convincing people that appearance is everything. But what the world has raised to an art form, each individual experiences as a burden – a burden that gets heavier as time goes on.

To make matters worse, our culture encourages and celebrates artificiality without qualification. You can never go too far. Nobody cares any longer if those body parts are fake or if this designer outfit is a knock-off or if that diploma is mail order. It's all about appearing to have more, even if you really don't have anything. It's about being on top, even if there really is no top. And there's nothing new here. The artificial fruit fooled Eve. The artificial intimacy duped Samson. And the artificial reputation lured Ananias and Sapphira. The only thing that's new is how trendy artificiality has become.

At its core, artificiality is aspiration with God removed. The noble quality of aspiration: a dislike for being stuck, an impatience for mediocrity, a dissatisfaction with business-as-usual, or, as Paul proclaims in Philippians 3:14, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." But when you remove God

from this praiseworthy virtue, you are left with an empty shell – all hype, no hope.

As Tozer says,

*Artificiality is one curse that will drop away the moment we kneel at Jesus' feet and surrender ourselves to his meekness. Then we will not care what people think of us so long as God is pleased. Then what we are will be everything, what we appear will take its place far down the scale of interest for us. Apart from sin we have nothing of which to be ashamed.*

### The Easy Yoke and the Light Burden

Our world is bent low from weight of these triple burdens. And there is only one way to release the load and find rest for our souls, and that is via the meekness of Christ. Return again to Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Augustine echoes this truth on the first page of his book *Confessions*, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you." He crisply states that life apart from God mandates that we must shoulder these heavy burdens all by ourselves.

Jesus invites us to drop our burdens and, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light," By being yoked to Christ we discover two things. First, that he is the one who has already removed our burden of sin, bearing it on the cross. And secondly, that he also invites us to off-load our burden of self, exchanging it for the gentle weight of humility. Meekness is our calling, rest is our reward.

As Tozer concludes,

*"The rest he offers is the rest of meekness, the blessed relief which comes when we accept*

*ourselves for what we are and cease to pretend. It will take some courage at first, but the needed grace will come as we learn that we are sharing this new and easy yoke with the strong Son of God himself. He calls it "My yoke," and he walks at one end while we walk at the other."*

Letting go of our burdens requires us to elevate the unseen above the seen, the invisible above the visible, the "not-yet" above the "right now." 1 John 3:1-3 puts it this way: "See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that, when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

Revelation 22:12-13 delivers this promise from our Lord: "Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." With all that is on the line, the loss or gain of eternal rewards, it is unwise to ignore a way of life that our heavenly Father calls blessed. As Maximus told his soldiers before battle in the movie *Gladiator*, "What we do in life echoes in eternity."

### The Personal Beatitudes

Perhaps the following list will prompt you to write out your own personal Beatitudes.

- I'm most blessed when I live each moment as though I'm in desperate need of God's grace, for in that moment I increase my ownership in the kingdom of God.
- I'm most blessed when I live each moment, making no claim on anything or anyone, for in that moment God lays claim to more of my heart.
- I'm most blessed when I live each moment in the quiet pose of a servant, for in

that moment I behave like an heir apparent.

• I'm most blessed when I live each moment with a voracious appetite for pleasing God, for in that moment my soul is content.

• I'm most blessed when I live each moment forgetting about blame and focusing on love, for in that moment I'm aware that God is doing the same for me.

• I'm most blessed when I live each moment with a holy, blame-free heart, for in that moment I get a fresh glimpse of God himself.

• I'm most blessed when I live each moment looking for ways to knock down barriers and build bridges, for in that moment my Father goes around bragging about our relationship.

• I'm most blessed when I live each moment mimicking my Lord's behavior in suffering without cause, for in that moment heaven gets a little closer and a little clearer.

• I'm most blessed when I live each moment willingly absorbing every stinging curse hurled at me, simply because I freely admit to knowing God. It gives me another opportunity to be joyful, knowing that my heavenly Father is paying attention and will someday make it all worthwhile.

### Your Prayer

Make this closing prayer by Tozer the prayer of your heart:

*"Lord, make me child-like, deliver me from the urge to compete for another place, prestige or position. I would be simple and artless as a little child. Deliver me from pose and pretense. Forgive me for thinking of myself and help me to forget myself and find my true peace in beholding thee. That Thou mayest answer this prayer, I humble myself before thee. Lay upon me thy easy yoke of self-forgetfulness that through it I may find rest. Amen."*



**"Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."**

