

## **“You Will Find Me”**

### **Jeremiah 29:10-14**

Imagine for a moment a five-year-old girl we will call Mary. The two things Mary loves the most are her father and her favorite game, hide-and-seek. In fact, one of the many reasons she loves her father is that he sometimes plays hide-and-seek with her.

One evening, Mary begs her father to play her game. Hand in hand, they go out to their big backyard for a little hide-and-seek. She volunteers to be "it," turns her back, shuts her eyes, and counts all the way up to ten while her father hides. "Here I come, ready or not!" Sure enough, her father has disappeared as he was supposed to do—he has become invisible.

She hunts thoroughly: behind the doghouse, inside the doghouse; behind the tree; around the dollhouse; inside the dollhouse; around the garbage can; and even inside the garbage can. Around and around she goes. By now, the sun is setting. It's getting dark, and Father is still invisible. Maybe he has gone off and left her! She's a little frightened. Her smile fades. Tears well up. But Father, hiding behind a big bush, sees and recognizes her fear. He clears his throat—shakes a branch. Mary hears, spots him, and breaks into a big smile as she runs to him.

Perhaps some young person is troubled by doubts about the actual existence of a loving, invisible God. Or a middle-ager is facing some seemingly unsolvable problems and wonders whether the invisible Father really cares. Or a seasoned pastor feels the evening of life approaching and finds the future uncertain. The good news is as promised by our invisible Father in Jeremiah 29:13, “you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

Faith in God is essential in our present world. Jesus promised, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid' " (John 14:27).

We were designed in Eden to feel at home with God. It's in our DNA. There's a God-shaped hole in the human heart that cannot be filled by anything else. That shape can be filled by God alone, filled by our faith in Him. Faith in God, therefore, is essential in our present world.

Faith in God is our only hope for the world to come. God promises in Jeremiah 29:11, " 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' "

Those who study human behavior state that most of us spend about 12 percent of a typical day thinking about the future. Augustine said it dramatically, "We are deafened by the clanging chains of mortality." But death is not the last word— only next to last. Jesus has the last word: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die' " (John 11:25).

God *wants* to be found. Why did little Mary's father clear his throat and shake that branch? Because he loved her and wanted to make his frightened, unhappy little girl happy again. Our invisible heavenly Father wanted to make us happy, and so He sent us a very visible God, Jesus, who said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

God is findable, even in our old age. He promises: “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I

will rescue you “(Isa. 46:4). *Carry* means something special to old people. When we were young, we could hardly wait to get out of Mother's arms and carry ourselves. In old age, we revert to needing extra help again. Now its canes, crutches, walkers, wheelchairs, or someone's strong arm. God's offer to "carry" us with His strong arm is a precious promise.

The text from Jeremiah with which we began this sermon assures us that God is findable only to those who search for Him wholeheartedly—“ 'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart' “(Jer. 29:13).

Mary's father was moved by her wholehearted search: tree, doghouse, dollhouse, garbage can—over and over. Our heavenly Father is moved by our wholehearted search.

But one hour of worship once a week is hardly a wholehearted search!

A half-hearted searcher may never find the invisible God. The irony is that not only do the half-hearted not find God—but because their casual search did not find Him, they usually accuse *Him* of not being findable!

The *Message* paraphrase Bible tenders our text in Jeremiah as, "When you get *serious* about finding me and want it more than *anything else*, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed" (emphasis added). What a blessed assurance.

Remember the law of exertion, which says, "Strength requires repetition." Learn to respect that law. If you ever had an arm or leg in a cast or were bedfast for a few days, you will remember how quickly an unused muscle can weaken. If you never used your legs except for getting to church one day a week, they would quit working. To be strong, both our leg muscles and our spiritual muscles need exercise daily.

There are three places where wholehearted, daily searchers can look for their invisible Father:

1. *A book.* Devotional books are helpful, but you cannot do better than the Bible! If you have tried daily Bible reading and gotten discouraged with it, I challenge you to try this: Find your favorite Bible version, open it daily, and prayerfully read a few verses from Matthew 5-7. If you did just that daily for the rest of your life, I predict you would learn to know and love the invisible God.

2. *Prayer.* Jeremiah 29:11, 12 says: " 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.' Prayer is one way of searching for God. It has three basic parts:

**Thank.** Thank God for the *air* you breathe, your *heart* that keeps on beating, and the *food* you eat. Our food, after all, does not originate at the market. Basically, it comes from seed, soil, sun, and water—and God provides all four. Food is a very visible proof of an invisible God.

**Ask.** The Jeremiah promise is "You will ... pray ... and I will listen." First, ask for forgiveness. Only after that, remember family, friends, and your prayer list.

**Volunteer.** This is the most neglected part of prayer. Do not just say, "Use me somewhere." That's just a way to appease the conscience. Volunteer for a specific service you and God have chosen together. He will help you find something that fits who and where you are. So long as He gives you air to breathe, He will give you a place to serve. This is the antidote to selfish prayer. Our service to others is how the invisible Father's love becomes visible to the world.

3. *Nature.* A man contemplating turning atheist noticed his little girl eating in her high chair. He watched her experimenting with ways to get food into her mouth on her own. He heard her blabbering as she was learning to talk. But, of all things, mostly he studied the perfect, intricate form

of her little ears, saying to himself, "There's no way this could all happen by chance. There's got to be a God."

Astronomers predicted for months that the temporary alignment of the sun, earth, and moon would produce a "blood moon," very visible on January 31, 2018. Sure enough, our big full moon was red. For me, it was an "aha" moment. You see, humankind did not make or maintain that moon. Astronomers did not know how to make it turn red. But they did precisely predict it. The lesson to me was that God is not only mighty but also mighty dependable.

Having searched wholeheartedly, Mary receives her reward: to fall joyfully into her father's arms.

Don't-fear the future. If you have searched wholeheartedly and committed yourself to Christ you have nothing to fear. At the end of the day or at the end of life, you are safe in the arms of Jesus. The arms of your heavenly Father embrace you in eternal Love.

Take heart; you can do this. You have God's word on it. "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.' "

May the peace of God . . .

WOV #699 – Blessed Assurance