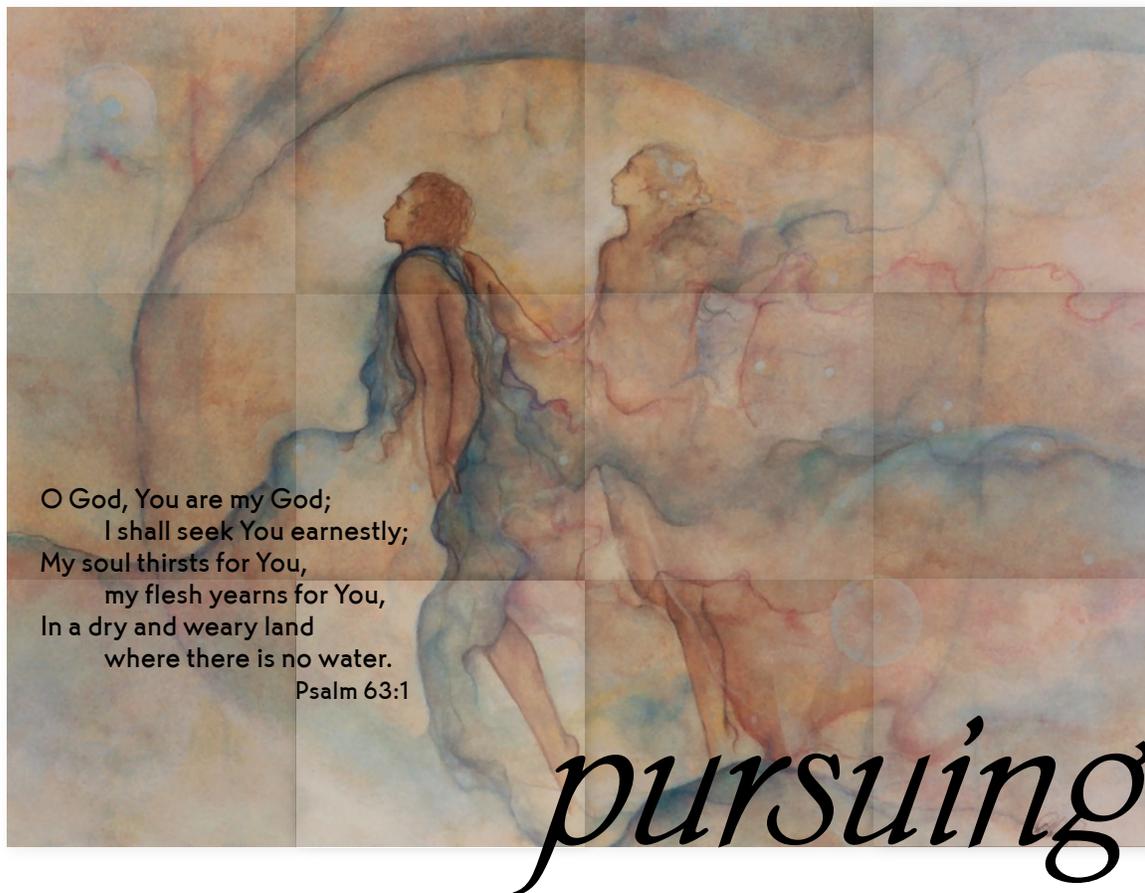


Many hope to find Christ, but their longing is in vain, for they are not pursuing Him.



PICKING BUSH BEANS IS EASY. The simplest method is to straddle the row, with the bean plant between your legs. Bend over at the waist; with one hand pull all of the plant to one side, to move the large, shading leaves out of the way. And there they are: all the beans plainly revealed, hanging there, within easy reach, waiting to be plucked.

Then there are pole beans. For the agriculturally disadvantaged, pole beans grow vertically, in a vine, rather than horizontally, in a bush. They require some sort of vertical support: a fence, wires, cage or, curiously, a pole. We've found pole bean plants to be more hearty, more plentiful with their fruit, and to bear fruit longer in the year. But their picking is quite different from their bush brethren.

Picking pole beans is a little like hacking your way into the Amazonian jungle—like wading knee-deep into the forest primeval.

Before you stands a wall of seemingly impenetrable, dark green foliage, a massive tangle of vines and leaves, stalks and stems. With nary a bean in sight. Large, daddy-long leg spiders patrol the twisted terrain. You gently move aside one or two leaves, but still: no beans. You must go in. You must brave the dark recesses of the hideous, vegetable jungle.

You gather your courage and your pith helmet and go in. Beneath the sheltering cover of leaves lies a dark and humid world of vines and stalks of tortuous convolutions. Their combined strength could support a grown man. Everything is colored in green monotonous; everything looks the same. Where are the beans?

You push deeper, moving aside the heavy vines—vines weighed down by their own explosive growth. Spiders drop down onto your hands, skitter silently up your arms. Mysterious brown bugs move sluggishly out of your way.

And there! There they are. The beans!

Clustered together like grapes—like elongated, green grapes—the beans have shown themselves amidst the vines and leaves. Finally they can be grasped, by the handful, and removed from their dark and foreboding place of generation.

The reward?

Ah, one has not lived until one has feasted on green beans and bacon, simmered atop the stove for most of a steamy August afternoon, then served piping hot alongside ears of sweet corn and barbecued cow parts. Before such a feast there is never any doubt that the reward is well worth the pursuit.

waiting to be found

One finds only what one pursues. Oh, it's true that we can find something by stumbling upon it accidentally. But the quality of the thing found is often determined by the quality of the search.

Many hope to find Christ, but their longing is in vain, for they are not *pursuing* Him. Again, it is true that many come to Christ initially by "accident." The event is orchestrated by the Spirit, but to the newborn it is as if they have stumbled blindly into a new and wonderful thing.

When we replace the word "find" with the word "know," however, the point becomes clear. We cannot really *know* Christ and God the Father unless we pursue Them. We may stumble happily into one or more snapshots of Their truth, but to truly become knowledgeable to the point of acquiring His nature for ourselves, we must pursue Christ.

Like the pursuit of those delicious green beans, the pursuit of God is not chasing after something that is actively trying to get away. The beans are just hanging around, waiting to be found. Just so, God patiently waits for us to learn of Him, to really *know* Him—and to be like Him.

And too, just like the beans, the reward from knowing Jesus Christ, far exceeds the rigors of the search.

knowing where to look

So where do we find Him? Where do we go to conduct this pursuit of the living Christ? Where do we begin a pursuit of eternal God? A.W. Tozer wisely points out that we needn't go far, for our God is all about us:

A spiritual kingdom lies all about us, enclosing us, embracing us, altogether within reach of our inner selves, waiting for us to recognize it. God Himself is here waiting our response to His presence. This eternal world will come alive to us the moment we begin to reckon upon its reality.

We begin pursuing Jesus by first acknowledging His presence and His intimate pursuit of us.

O Lord, You have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
You understand my thought from afar.
You scrutinize my path and my lying down,
And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.
Even before there is a word on my tongue,
Behold, O Lord, You know it all.
You have enclosed me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.

Psalm 139:1-5

Most people would rather keep God at arm's length. This is easy to accomplish, because even though our God is intimately acquainted with us, He is nevertheless a courteous God. He does not push His way into our lives, twisting our arm up between our shoulder blades, forcing us to spend time with Him whether we like it or not.

While it is true that He is with us and all around us, it is up to us to acknowledge that presence—to hear His voice in the wind that sifts through the leaves of the cottonwood tree; it is up to us to see His face in the fresh beauty of a spring morning, and the glowing warmth of a

summer eventide; and it is up to us to feel His hand in the soft caress of a loved one, or the comforting touch of a friend.

Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!

Psalm 46:10 NKJV

So we look first for Him where we are. We pursue Him in the stillness of solitude, in the peaceful dwelling He has made in our own lives.

Some reserve their pursuit for Sunday morning, in the corporate worship service, expecting to find God waiting for them there. He may be. But how successful are marriages in which contact between husband and wife is limited to only one hour per week? How well do we know the friend that we have seen for only sixty minutes every seven days?

How much better to court Him, to seek Him out and spend happy hours with Him throughout the week, whether standing within stained-glass walls or before the kitchen sink.

the pursuit

The temporal view of pursuit is with an agenda, an "action plan," PDA and cell phone. The quarry is success and the pursuit is executed with a ruthless passion.

But the pursuit of God is not such a sweaty exercise.

Years ago, when we still lived in San Diego, there was a favorite place of mine. It was a high outlook of huge, boulder-shaped rocks that offered a panoramic view of the desert floor far below. It was a high and windy place, scorched by the sun and blessed with an exquisite quietude. There one could sit quietly for hours, gazing out over the expanse, contemplating things more ultimately important than calendars and phone calls and freeways filled with cars. There one could pursue God.

Where is your rock? Where is the place you go to pursue eternal things? You say such benign activities are a waste of time? You say you haven't time in your busy schedule to come away and be quiet?

Jesus Christ had all of three years to change the world. In less time than it takes people to attend college, Jesus had to begin His ministry, find and teach His disciples, and change the world forever. Yet, under time constraints that would make an executive crazed with anxiety, He took time to go "sit on His rock."

And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves.

Mark 6:31-32

Jesus understood the importance of quiet times with the Father. Where have we picked up the arrogance that says our activities take precedence over something that was so important to the Lord?

Go, find your rock. Pursue the Lord on His terms. Fresh green beans offer a hearty, healthy repast; their pursuit is well worth the time and energy expended. A deeper, more Spirit-filled knowledge of the personalities of Christ and our Father offers not a simple meal—but a veritable feast that will fill you for eternity. 