

...and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, "For we also are His children."

Acts 17:26-28



We Can Behold Him

God's word, filled with marvelous stories of Him seeking after and finding men and women of His creation, makes it clear that He desires close communion with His people. God wants to have a personal relationship with His children. To that end, He wants us to look for Him, as well.

Over the early days of one summer, Linda and I watched a young fawn grow out of his spots. At some point during most evenings the youngster would arrive with his mother in tow. They came for the salt lick, to drink from the pond, to munch fallen acorns, and to browse upon Linda's flowers and shrubs—but mostly they came because they knew that here they were safe.

The young fawn was a handful for his mother, always gamboling off, getting into trouble, and generally sticking his nose where it didn't belong. He hadn't the experience and maturity of his mother, so wasn't as cautious as he should be; he had not yet learned to be afraid. The young one was a

little too eager to come snooping close to the house, not yet understanding that most people will not be his friend.

...if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.

The doe was a good mother. She always kept at least one eye on her youngster and one eye out for danger. More experienced than her son, she heard potential danger in the snapping of twigs, in the flash of light-colored fabric through the windows of the house, in any sound she could not quickly identify.

The fawn's mother was a good protector. One evening Linda was out weeding her vegetable garden while I was in the house fixing dinner. Out the window I spied the doe and her fawn; they approached, rounded the corner of the pond, and headed through the woods toward the garden. There was no way for me to alert Linda to their presence without also alerting them, so I just waited

to see what would happen.

The mother led the way toward the garden; soon I lost sight of her in the trees, but I could still see the fawn bringing up the rear. Suddenly the little one froze and his mother let loose with a loud snort—a clear sign that she had discovered my wife, and was expressing her displeasure over Linda's presence. After a few more indignant snorts from his mom, the fawn turned and ran back the way they had come, while his mother guarded his retreat.

When the doe made it back over the barbed-wire fence ahead of her fawn, the little one faltered, not sure his legs would get him over the barrier. Hearing his frightened bleating, she returned to the fence, grunting encouragement, trying to convince him he could make it on his own. When the fawn decided he didn't even want to try, his mother leaped back over the fence and patiently led him to a place where he could get through without jumping over.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows."

Matthew 10:29-31

We see what we will. Some may look upon that doe and fawn and see little more than pretty wildlife, a momentary amusement. Others may see a prime target through the sights of their shotgun. But I prefer to see God in the patient care and nurturing of that mother deer. I see how God watches over us, protects us—all the while trying to teach us lessons that will cause us to grow up healthy and strong.

Our Father challenges us to learn His ways, so that we might know Him more intimately. But when we falter along the way, when we stumble—when we are too afraid to make that leap of faith—He patiently returns, takes us by the hand, and leads us to safety.

God is indeed there. He is there as He is here and everywhere, not confined to a tree or stone, but free in the universe, near to everything, next to everyone, and through Jesus Christ immediately accessible to every loving heart. This truth is to the convinced Christian a source of deep comfort in sorrow and of steadfast assurance in all the varied experiences of his life. To him "the practice of the presence of God" consists not of projecting an imaginary object from within his own mind and then seeking to realize its presence; it is rather to recognize the real presence of the One whom all sound theology declares to be already there, an objective entity, existing apart from any apprehension of Him on the part of His creatures. The resultant experience is not visionary but real.

A.W. Tozer

Intimacy

More than thirty-six years ago, during the waning days of my very young bachelorhood, I was stationed aboard the *U.S.S. Chicago*, just off the coast of Vietnam in the Tonkin Gulf. My even younger betrothed was back

in Iowa, being distracted by college while she planned our impending nuptials.

It is true that I yearned for her, but I was nonetheless kept far from my beloved. She may have been constantly in my thoughts and dreams, but our moments together consisted entirely of written correspondence and, during the six-month period of the cruise, one aching brief phone call placed from the Philippines.

As a result of this and other periods of separation, by the time the ship finally docked in San Diego upon its return voyage, the young woman awaiting me on the pier was, in many respects, a stranger. We had dated for about a year prior to my entering the service, but since then had had only pe-



riodic visits to replenish the longing we felt for each other. So by the time our wedding date arrived, we had been mostly apart for more than a year.

Memories and photographs and hand-smudged letters written from the depths of a lonely heart cannot faithfully stand in for a loved one's physical presence. All that time apart meant that we had a lot of catching up to do. It meant that even though we loved each other deeply, there were still many things about each other that remained a mystery.

And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

Matthew 19:4-6

Linda and I have been married thirty-six years now. During those years the earlier pattern of separation has been mostly reversed: our almost constant time together has been only rarely interrupted by brief separations. As husband and wife, Linda and I have seen wondrous sights and have visited far-off lands; we have passed through times of great joy and withering sorrow; we have grown and shared and have faced side-by-side the many surprises that God has thrown our way. As a result, we now have a profound and intimate knowledge of each other. Where once there were mysteries, now there is a deep and abiding understanding. Distant longing has been replaced by the embodiment of God's mystical "oneness."

The God-seeking believer longs for this same level of intimacy with the Lord. But, just as with Linda and me, such intimacy does not take place over great distances; one must draw near to the object of one's desire.

"For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and I will build them up and not overthrow them, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart."

Jeremiah 24:6-7

Intimacy with the Father—and with His Son, Jesus Christ, and His Holy Spirit—is something that must be nurtured and cultivated, much like a boy and girl court, then begin building a lifetime relationship through shared experience. It does not happen overnight and it does not happen by accident. It is not naturally in the heart of man to see God in the objects, people and events which surround him.

Just as a man and woman do not necessarily become "one flesh" on their wedding night, the believer does not enjoy this level of intimacy with the Father on the day he or she accepts Christ. It comes into a believer's life through practice, and a deep-seated hunger to know this One who is at once Lord of the universe and keeper of each individual's heart.