

Finding God Every Day

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I've never seen a golden stairway into the heavens, or radiant angels with impressive wings. No booming voice from the clouds that shook the earth. But I have experienced God; not just conceptually, but real experiences. Many, many times.

The glorious stairs or shimmering wings are Hollywood's theatrical way of expressing something indescribable. Something that is so powerful and life-changing that it has to be portrayed as magical and supernatural. And encountering God can seem "Supernatural" if we think of nature as just this physical world around us. But if we define our reality in terms of both the visible physical surroundings and the invisible spiritual surroundings, then an encounter with God is just "Natural". That encounter is just a natural connection of my heart to the heart behind all existence. It's natural, and that's super!

The simple people like David in the Bible often experienced God more easily than we do, because they didn't try so hard to understand God, but just appreciated what it felt like to be with God. You can take a minute to read the 23rd Psalm below. It's only six sentences. In the first three sentences David speaks to us, the reader, trying to explain God:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Then his heart opens, and he starts to pray directly to God:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. (Psalm 23)

He can't contain himself, and he says, "My cup runneth over". I've never heard that phrase used in any other context except to explain God. David recognizes that God is giving him more beauty than he can imagine, more truth than he can understand, and more love than he knows how to receive. When David's "cup" is filled and he can't receive any more, God has infinitely more to give and keeps pouring. The cup can't hold any more, but David recognizes that it is abundantly overflowing and that the goodness, truth, and love from God are limitless.

How can I do any better than David did over 3000 years ago to explain something that is indescribable? Jesus used parables of everyday situations that illuminated the indescribable reality of God in ways that helped people understand it. All I can do is tell you stories of what it feels like, and how it works when we experience God. The stories worth sharing are the many times when I actually responded to God, took action, or witnessed unexplainable events. There are thousands of other times when I did NOT listen, I did not respond, and I ignored the small voice calling me in an unexpected direction. Those are the stories that will never get told because nothing extraordinary happened.

Here are a few stories that I hope can shed some light on what I'm trying to express.

In the mid-1980's my two brothers and I were full-time missionaries in the San Francisco Bay area. It was a gorgeous Saturday two weeks before Christmas, and I wanted to connect with my younger brother to buy a gift for our parents and get it in the mail on time. It was early afternoon, and I had just finished a 14-hour shift of strenuous night work, but I knew this was my one chance to get together with my brother and buy the gift. I wanted to head right out to find him and was told that he had gone out witnessing "down near Market Street". As I walked down the steep hill of Powell Street toward Market Street, I could see a sea of people. As far as I could see in both directions, the sidewalks and plazas were filled with people from shoulder-to-shoulder. There had to be 100,000 people out there, all bustling around to get their last-minute shopping done. How would I ever find my brother Doug? I had no idea where to start or how I could find him. I turned to God in my heart and said, "I'm gonna need a little help here." I immediately felt that I should go to the bank of phone booths in the BART station (the subway), and I started off jogging in that direction. You guessed it, Doug was there and said, "I was just trying to call you!" As we shopped, both of us talked about how many times we fail to listen to that intuitive voice, and instead listen to "reason". We put more faith in "reason" (which in this case was saying "There's no way you'll ever find him down there.") than we do in God. We believe we can figure things out ourselves instead of trusting that God is trying to guide us. Whether it was my lack of sleep, our missionary mindset, or just an opportune moment, I had been able to listen to God. We knew that what happened that day was not a coincidence, and it taught us both a lesson that we used many times in the following years to listen for God's guidance.

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There was no huge providential purpose or intensive prayer conditions; I just really wanted to find my brother, and sincerely asked for help. Then listened. And my cup ran over with the realization of how much God is always there.

In 1996, there was an ongoing prayer condition at the Holy Rock in Belvedere, NY. The prayer started at 11:00 pm each night, finishing after midnight, and this was a time when we were committed to getting up at 5:00 am every day to gather and study. My wife Miki started to attend it first, and I didn't want her to make the 20-minute drive alone on snowy roads at night in the winter, so I decided I should drive her there. My first thought was that I would snooze in the car while she "did her thing" but there was a holy atmosphere there, so I joined the prayer. The Bible says that when 2 or 3 are gathered together, God will be present. We learned that when 20 or 30 people gather together with conviction, God gets really excited! We would sing holy songs and have representative prayers before 40 minutes of individual prayer in the clear, frosty New York nights.

The first few nights, I felt that I was "sacrificing sleep" when getting home close to 1:00 AM. I soon recognized, though, that my prayer time at the rock was so much more beneficial and fulfilling than sleep time. I'd feel much more energized and awake the following morning after spending those late night hours praying than I would have if I had used them for sleep. "Who would ever choose to sleep during that time?" I came to wonder, "if they knew how much better it is to pray!" I kept a small notebook and a felt tip pen with me, and started writing down answers, insights, and inspirations in the dark, cold nights. I still have those dog-eared notebooks, and often turn back to them when I want to remember what's most important in life. During that commitment to extra effort in prayer, we conceived and gave birth to our second son, nine years after our first one. We weren't specifically praying for it but had longed for it in our hearts. The atmosphere of inviting God into our lives every day opened the way for personal miracles as well as providential progress. And, God, did our cups run over with blessings!

We're meant to have these experiences of God every day. I don't think many people do, but we can find God more often if we make more effort to look for God. One more quick story to illustrate that point.



We recently moved to a new neighborhood in a house with a small yard. We put up a hummingbird feeder and soon would see a hummingbird hovering there. I got to know what they sound like, and what they look like when they flit around the trees. Now, every time I go for a walk around the neighborhood, I am excited to see or hear five to ten hummingbirds. I mentioned this to one neighbor a few doors down, and she replied that she had lived here for over ten years and had never seen a hummingbird! Like God, the hummingbirds are often hidden and are easy to miss. If we're not looking for them, we don't see them. If that neighbor tells me that she doesn't believe

there are any hummingbirds in the neighborhood, I will listen carefully to what she has to say and why she believes that. Then I will describe how I look for hummingbirds and ask her to keep her eyes open or invite her over to watch our hummingbird feeder. Then, maybe next time we meet she will have put up a feeder of her own!

Keep your eyes open and learn to look for God in many small ways all around you. You'll be surprised how many times you will find God in every day!