

FINDING GOD

(Excerpts: Raccoons in the Alley & Where's Clyde?)

by Charles Redding



BE ALERT AND OF SOBER MIND. YOUR ENEMY THE DEVIL PROWLs around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

Years ago, we lived in a tiny duplex. It was nice enough, just small. There were no driveways or garages in this neighborhood. We had alleys. Once a week, the garbage truck drove up the alley and collected the garbage. We lived on the last street of the neighborhood. That was good, in a way, because we had more privacy than some. Behind us was an open field, large trees and a little stream. Having no people behind our place all the time was good. Having a community of raccoons who lived under the shady trees by the stream was not so good.

I had heard stories and seen Nat Geo specials about urban raccoons, but I had never experienced them – until we moved into the duplex. Cute as a button and mischievous enough to live up to their masked reputations, every day they opened our garbage cans and tore open all the garbage bags. They didn't just "shop" for tasty morsels. They had a frat house party with every disgusting thing they could find in the trash. Every morning the leftovers from their night of revelry were scattered over thirty yards of the alley. Every day I would pick up the trash. The next morning it was there to pick up all over again.

We tried every recommendation we could find. We poured hot sauce over the bags. It turns out raccoons like hot sauce. Our landlord built a wooden trash can “safehouse” to keep out the raccoons. They just opened it and helped themselves. We tried storing the garbage inside the duplex. We had a toddler in diapers. That wasn’t a good solution.

Finally, we just began stacking it on our back porch hoping the raccoons would not wander up to our back door looking for their “goodies”. That worked for a while until one night at bedtime I heard something tearing open trash bags and rummaging for loot. I threw back the curtain and grabbed the sliding door to fling it open and there, six inches in front of me, stood a skunk. I swallowed my angry “get out of here you crazy raccoon” scream. Instead, I breathed a “thank you, God, for the glass door” prayer. I was six inches away from danger and didn’t realize it. I was suddenly very thankful for a thin wall of glass.

How often are we just inches from danger and don’t know it? Peter tells us there is a roaring lion on the prowl looking for someone to devour. We are to be clear-headed, vigilant and alert so that we stay away from those dangers.

We also need protection. Ephesians 6:11-18 tells us to be active in putting on the protection God provides – His salvation, His righteousness, His truth, His peace, and to pick up His shield of protection – our faith, and His sword of the Spirit – His Word. That means we do this purposely. Daily. Don’t enter the arena of daily life without His protection.

Additionally, God provides shelter for His children. He hides us in the shelter of His presence to protect us from all human intrigues and from accusing tongues (Ps 31:20). We can take refuge in the shelter of His wings (Ps 61:4). We can even dwell in the shelter of the Most High and rest in the shadow of the Almighty (Ps 91:1).

That’s where I want to be, sheltered in the shadow of the Almighty, protected from human intrigues, accusing tongues and from the evil one who is out to get me. How about you? Walk through this day, moment

by moment, with God. He is our Protector and Defender. He is the Mighty One who saves. Trust in Him.

Keep digging: Gen 19:1-17, Judg 16:1-21, Acts 5:1-11

1. Are there any areas in your life that you already know are “danger zones”? If so, run away from those. Don’t flirt with danger. Take active steps to move away from the danger and to put boundaries in place.
2. Do you know how to put on God’s armor and to live under the protection He offers? If not, seek out a mature Christian friend to help you learn how to do so.

Excerpt from *Finding God*
Where’s Clyde?

Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you.” Joshua 3:5

One weekend while my sister was in college, she went with her roommate to visit her roommate’s family. The family had a cat named Clyde. Clyde was nice enough as cats go. He basically stayed around the perimeter of the room, behind drapes and underneath furniture.

Night time came and eventually everyone wandered off to bed. In the night, my sister, Nancy, heard an unfamiliar sound, and being in an unfamiliar room in an unfamiliar house, she reached for the bedside lamp. Rather than clicking the switch to turn on the lamp, surprisingly, she grabbed Clyde around the neck and squeezed. Clyde screamed. Nancy screamed. The roommate screamed. The family screamed. Everyone screamed. No one expected Clyde to be sitting underneath the lamp shade beside the bed in the middle of the night, but sometimes unexpected things happen.

The citizens of Jericho found this to be true. They stood on the double-thick walls of this insurmountably fortified city and watched as the silent Israelites paraded around the city behind the horn-blowing priests. For six days – nothing. But on the seventh day, what a shock! Their impenetrable walls crumbled in total devastation. Surprise!

It also happened to the early Christians in Acts. James had been killed. Peter had been arrested and was being guarded by 16 soldiers. God sent an angel in the night to spring Peter from jail. The angel led Peter past the guards, out of the jail and through the city. Peter reached the home where the Christians were praying for his release and began to knock. The servant, Rhoda, was so surprised, she left Peter outside and ran to tell those who were praying that Peter was at the door. The believers who were praying didn't believe her until they went to the door and found sore-knuckled Peter. Apparently, they weren't expecting God to answer in that manner.

What about you? Have you experienced a turn of events that you didn't see coming, and you found yourself standing there, wide-eyed and mouth open? Have your walls unexpectedly collapsed leaving you standing in the wake of utter destruction? Maybe your unexpected thing is that God seems to be moving in a way you weren't expecting. Maybe you've been wanting to use your battering ram and spear to attack your Jericho, but God has said to walk silently and wait on Him.

Have you been trying to keep God in a box of your expectations? What if you're praying and expecting God to answer in the way you've dreamed, but you're missing it because, like Peter, the answer is already knocking, and you need only to open the door?

When you reach out and discover an unexpected Clyde-like something nearby, remember to look to God. He can work His wonders in amazing ways (Ps 17:7). He is infinite – unlimited – so don't box Him in with limited expectations. He wants to do amazing things in your life – Surprise!

Keep digging: Num 22:21-33, Jonah 1:1-2:10, 1 Cor 1:18-21

1. Are you trying to hem God in with your expectations of how He should come to your aid, solve your problems, untangle your dilemma? Don't try to limit God. Instead, thank God that He is limitless.
2. When those moments of shock, anxiety or fear seize upon you, are your first thoughts of God and the promises found in His Word? Make a list of verses you can cling to when times are tough.

3. Have you been obediently walking silently around your Jericho for days and you're wondering when God is going to show up and shake down those walls? It's hard to wait but, be steadfast and faithful in doing the last thing God showed you to do until He shows you the next thing to do. He has promised us He is always working (John 5:17). Deut 31:8 says, "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." Be encouraged! God is at work and He is with you.