



Finding God

3 STORIES OF FINDING GOD IN UNUSUAL
PLACES

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Prologue

I often hear how “bad” things are and how the “good” things are hard to find. The truth is, good is all around us. God is all around us and is working in ways and places we’d never expect.

How good are we at finding God in the world around us? This short book includes three different places where I found God working and communicating. I pray you are able to easily find God wherever you are and wherever you go. God is with you.

The stories that follow are just a few places God was experienced. You may and will have experiences with God. If you have an experience with God you’d like to share, feel free to email me (revryanstratton@gmail.com), I’d love to hear how God has been revealed to you!

The following “stories” first appeared on my blog www.revryanstratton.com

1

I Saw God at the Water Treatment Plant

Recently, I have heard about clergy turning in their credentials. The reason? He says he realized he doesn't believe in God.

Too often, I think we get so much in our heads and think too intellectually about God that we can miss the feeling/personal side of him. At the same time, we can get so caught up in the feeling/personal sensations we experience that we can completely miss the intelligence and logical aspects of God. We can completely miss God's presence and his work all around us.

I would not have expected to see God at a water treatment plant; but all of a sudden, there he was!

From the design of the plant to the area where the clean water comes out, the process involved is incredible. Imagine what you flush down the toilet, throw in a stream, dump down the drain, all ending up at the same place.

What you would witness would be something dirty and just plain gross.



Water was not meant to be filled with so much trash and unclean substances. But there it is. Gross water that really has no purpose...until...it gets cleaned and able to be used.

This is the same with humans. We can put so much gross stuff in our lives (pride, lust, laziness, greed, egocentric attitudes, narcissistic attitudes, and so much more) that we end up being completely unusable to do good work in the world because we get too wrapped up in ourselves. That is until...we realize Jesus Christ has already freed us from being slaves to ourselves, being slaves to sin. We all need to be cleaned and filled with the presence of God in our lives.

There is a process that cleans the water. First the filthy water has to get the big items out (money, turtles, snakes, basketballs, really anything that is flushed or thrown in the water). Then it goes through several other processes where it is filtered even more, and more each with each step. Finally, it ends up in a creek like area where it keeps getting more refined to get even cleaner to be sent for us to drink.



When I took time to look around, I saw the design of the facilities. Everything was designed with a purpose. The waste water was not able to get to the clean water. Yes, this plant was made by humans; but it was God who gave the people the gifts and talents to design and create these facilities to keep our water drinkable.

We read in Genesis 1 and 2 that God had a design when he spoke creation into existence. Everything that was made was made for a purpose. From the place where they collect

the water, to where the water is beginning to get clean, to where the water is clean, even in the lab to test the water. Everything has a design and it is perfectly placed. The same is true for creation and humans.



Then, we got to one of the cleaning ponds and they had goldfish in them. The purpose of the goldfish was to keep cleaning the water by eating and removing algae and other bugs. At this point, I was reminded of the Holy Spirit who works within our lives, constantly convicting and cleaning us out. John Wesley referred to this as “sanctifying grace,” the aspect of grace that is working to make you and I perfect in love.



There was something there that made me think about Jesus: solar panels. What was interesting was these solar panels did not work. I began to wonder where they got their source of energy. Then I remembered Jesus as the light of the world, and as the living (running) water. (In the beginning...the water...God said, “let there be light!”). If we pay close attention, Jesus is always in the picture.

The point of this is, just because we are in a somewhat “ordinary” situation, there are signs of God all around. God will always find ways to reveal himself to you and the world. Listen to the nudging of the Holy Spirit to show you his presence. God is even found at the water treatment plant...just keep open eyes.

I pray, you continue to seek and find God in your everyday life. He is there. As Jesus says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Where have you seen God lately?

2

Finding God at Walmart

Many people can find their “god” at a place like Walmart in the form of deals, money savers, etc. But I think, if we look close enough, we can find evidence of God wherever we are.

When I went to Walmart a few days ago, I went for groceries and other items; but I also went on a search to see if I could see God there. I left disappointed because the consumerism, rushed shoppers, and items all over the place were too much for me to see beyond. At that time, it looked like a bunch of people (I was in the crowd) just focusing on themselves and getting what they only wanted.

I found myself feeling discouraged especially when I was in the parking lot and saw a person asking other people for money. I left that day feeling disappointed because it seemed like the consumerism was too powerful.

But I couldn't let it just stop with that feeling. I was determined to see how we can find God at Walmart. So, I began looking at pictures of Walmart online and began to see pictures of many, many people. My mind started thinking about the memes and videos of the “people of Walmart.”

That's when it hit me. We can see God at Walmart simply by looking at the people!

“God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them.” (Genesis 1:27 CEB)

There is always an abundance of people, of diverse people, shopping at Walmart, even at 3:00am. The people are all different, in their own way. This is what I think we can think about to find God at Walmart.

Now, are there people only interested in themselves and not interested in God? Yes. Are there people at Walmart who are not as kept as others? Yes. But this doesn't mean that anyone there does not have the attention of God. I am finding out one of the best places to have a Spiritual conversation is at Walmart. No, not in a creepy, dorky, or even weird way. When we have chances to be around people, do our lives reflect the light of Christ?

There are people at Walmart, people created by God, that need to hear there is hope. That need to hear they have a purpose. That need to hear God's love and desire for them. So the next time you're in Walmart, I invite you to pay attention to the people. You'll see a vast array of emotions, especially people hurting.



In your actions, words, and even thoughts, show the light of Christ to a world seeking healing and redemption. Who knows, you may be the person God uses to help others find God while at Walmart and help them become part of a community of faith.

Remember the words of Christ:

“I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.”

(Matthew 25:40 CEB)

3

Salvation from 30,000 Feet

Recently I was flying back home from a trip. When I fly, I like to sit by the window so I can see what is going on. (Also, I sit by the window because I am more relaxed in that seat.) Looking out the window, you can see beautiful clouds and designs in the earth below. People look like ants. Buildings look like children's toys you can move around.

Whenever I see pretty sights outside the window, I'll take a picture. I was flying back at night when I was also reading NT Wright's book, "Surprised by Hope", when I looked out the window and saw the dark earth illuminated by many tiny lights. Then, I had this thought about salvation, "salvation is so much more than we realize it is".

I would ask people, what are they "saved" from and they would say, "sin". This is true. Then I began talking more with the people and I finally realized, through Jesus Christ, I am saved from myself. Meaning it is the sinful desire

within me to do wrong and Jesus redeems this and works within me.

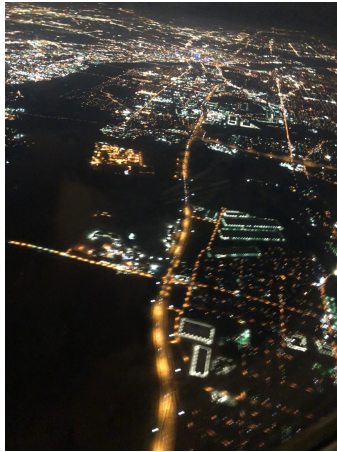
After we talk, I'll then ask people, "So, what are we saved for?" In the past few years, I have come to realize that salvation is not simply for the individual. It is not simply whether or not we will go to heaven after we die. Salvation is living in the presence of God.

The reality of being with God after this life is incredible. We can easily get swept up in the notion of "going to heaven" that we forget the line in the Lord's Prayer "on earth as it is in heaven."

Take some time to think about this. What if we shifted our focus on salvation being some "place" we go to after we die? What if we stopped thinking about "going to heaven" and getting away from this life? What if heaven is not a place in the sky?



Now, how would our lives look differently if we pictured salvation as this:



How does this paint a picture of salvation? It is what Jesus did. Jesus came into the dark world and shined his light which changed people's lives. See, salvation is not only for the individual. That is a very small glimpse of the work God is doing. Salvation, redemption, transformation is for the entire world.

When we begin to follow Jesus Christ and our lives are being transformed into his image, his likeness, the light he gives his people begins to reflect.

When I looked out the window and saw the earth with the lights, I thought, this is what we are supposed to do: shine with others so the world can see the Light. As we live out

our faith in community, we see more people added and more lights shining.

See, the point of salvation is not going to heaven after we die. The point of salvation is bringing heaven to earth. We do not have to wait to live in the presence of God, we can do that here and now. Everything good we experience here and now is a small picture of what it will be like when the earth is completely transformed and evil/sin is expelled for good.

Living in the Light of Christ, here and now, gives us the opportunity to live in true joy, true peace, true, hope, true love. We know this life is available because this is what Jesus Christ offered the world in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. The presence of God working within us, through the Holy Spirit, guides to be the people we were created to be and show the world Christ.

So let your light shine. Be a beacon of light in a dark world. Allow the light and love of Jesus Christ to live in and reflect through you. Watch. We will see more and more of heaven here on earth.

About Ryan Stratton

Ryan is a local pastor in the United Methodist Church in Texas.

For over twenty years, he has been teaching children, teenagers, and adults. While he was a teenager, he practiced TaeKwonDo and continued practicing and teaching the art form for fifteen years. After receiving a call to Christian ministry and leadership, Ryan is now in full time vocational ministry beginning with youth ministry then becoming a pastor. His priority in life is to help people see and experience life beyond themselves and the purpose God has for them.

He has a Bachelor's of Business Administration Degree from Stephen F. Austin State University and is continuing his education through Asbury Theological Seminary.

When not leading the church, studying the Scripture, speaking, writing (www.revryanstratton.com), or participating in community missions and outreach, Ryan is found spending time with his wife and four children.

