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HIDE AND SEEK

One of the favorite childhood games is hide-and-seek. One person is chosen to be “it,” and closes his eyes and counts off a specified time period. Meanwhile everyone else has to find a place to hide. Then “it” tries to find everyone, and the last person to reach a designated “base” without being tagged is the new “it.” My older brother was a master of this game. We played it at night in a large yard. He could even hide “in plain sight.” One time he found a slight depression in the ground and just lay there. We must have stepped on him several times (“we” being those that were found and tagged, who then joined in the search), and yet he made no sound. After everyone was clear of the area, he got up and ran safely to base.

Even the old game of “peek-a-boo” with a baby is a variation on this. Since a baby does not realize that just hiding your face does not mean you are no longer there, the peeking out from behind your hand is the same as “finding” you. Most babies will giggle with delight for a long time with a good game of peek-a-boo. Psychologists relate this to a failure to understand “object permanence,” the idea that just because you cannot see it, an object may still be there.

Sometimes we play these games with God. In our early stages it may be peek-a-boo. As we mature we may still play hide and seek with God.

Object permanence, as it applies to God. God is always there, wherever there may be. But we tend to think that when bad things happen or things don’t go our way, he must not be there. But he has not gone; he is just hiding behind his hands. We lose sight of him, and think he is gone. Like in the game, though, he is still there, wanting us to keep an eye on him.

“Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually.” (1 Chron 16:11)

David says this seeking is not just a one-time thing. It is more than peek-a-boo with God. It is the more mature hide and seek. We know that God exists; we just have to find him in all of life’s events. It involves leaving the comfort of base and seeking him continually.

When playing hide and seek, the temptation is to stay at the base and wait for people to get tired of hiding and figure they can try to make base before being caught.

Most players make a rule that after counting, “it” must actually leave base and seek the other players. This involves a little risk. Suppose you go the wrong way and somebody sneaks in behind you. Suppose one player is hiding within stepping distance of base so he can call “free” as soon as the counting is done. We cannot stay where we are comfortable and expect to win fairly. It also makes for a long and boring game. As long as “it” remains at home, nobody will come out of hiding.

God is waiting for us to find him. He will not, however, force himself on us. He will not approach base unless we actively look for him.

God calls us to seek him; and sometimes that means we will be a little uncomfortable. We may have to give something up that we don’t want to. We may have to learn to do something we thought we would never do. We will have to leave our zone of safety. If we do that, though, we can find God. He is waiting for us; he is not going to just run to base and hope to get caught.

And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; hat they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. (Acts 17:26-27)

He is not far. He is not hard to find. He is even hiding in plain sight, in the light. The thing is, God wants to be found. In this it is not like hide and seek. He is not trying to get safely to base to avoid being caught. God want to lose, so that you can win. The good thing is that if he is found, he becomes “it.” All the problems of the game fall on him. But that is the way he likes it.

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RE: RE

It's the modern mantra of the green revolution: reduce, recycle, reuse. Some people who don't like the idea of reducing anything may change it to "reuse, recycle, repurpose." Either way, it is only popular with a portion of our society. Many people are into the consumer revolution, instead. Its mantra appears to be, "replace, replace, replace." When was the last time you heard of the average American darning a sock? One man recently wanted to repair an ancient (by electronics standards) musical keyboard. He was told to take a screwdriver and an ohmmeter, and if he could find the bad part he could try to resolder it; otherwise his best and cheapest bet was to throw it in the trash. Most things Americans buy, including our cars, now are subject to planned obsolescence; they aren't expected to last. Isn't it good that God thinks of us in a green way?

Reduce

When it comes to reduction, most of the time the lowest you can go is zero. That is why that number is very popular in the names of so-called "diet" drinks (which

God can take the sinner
and reuse, repurpose
him.

generally actually cause an increase in weight). Instead of reducing the calories to zero, it is usually better just to reduce the soft drinks to zero and replace them with water. Still, zero calories is sometimes a reasonable goal.

God has a reasonable reduction goal for us, as well. In this case, it is not zero calories, but zero sin.

Now, some might not consider that a reasonable goal. They will say that sin is so natural to man that reducing it to zero would be more comparable to reducing breathing to zero. Certainly, without God they are right.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 Jn 1:8-10)

We have sinned. We do sin. We will sin. If we say otherwise, the truth is not in us. If we say otherwise, God's word is not in us. And yet, between those two phrases there is a reduction in sin. If we confess our sin, God faithfully reduces our sin to zero. He will cleanse from *all* unrighteousness. In the verse immediately

preceding this, John says that if we continue to walk with God, God will continue to cleanse us from all sin.

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. (Ps 103:12) Kipling said, "East is east, and west is west; and never the twain shall meet." So we shall never meet our sins again. We may sin again. But as long as we walk in the light of God, it is immediately reduced to zero. That is a reduction plan that takes little effort, but has great reward.

Reuse/Repurpose

Quilters know there is no such thing as an unusable piece of fabric. A patchwork coat or a quilt block may be made of small pieces of material that others might throw away. Others have gotten into the business of reusing or repurposing items. One company makes houses out of the large metal shipping containers, such as you might see on cargo freighters. There is a huge trade in used books. Even children repurpose old socks or paper bags into puppets.

Man has a purpose, and it may not be God's purpose. Left to himself, it will not be God's purpose.

The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined. For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth. The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it. (Ps 10:2-11)

This is man at his worst, perhaps, but to one degree or another, it is each of us before a knowledge of God. There may be men who are essentially good, but sinners nonetheless. There may be the vilest of sinners. And there are many degrees in between. God can take the sinner and reuse him, repurpose him. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." (Heb 10:24)

The writer goes on to say that repurposing is the intent of the assembly of the church. We gather together to encourage one another, and to incite love and good deeds in others. Then we are to go out and live in a way that we have been encouraged to.

Love and good works. Those are the Christian's purposes. We love because we are loved by God. We do good because God is good. We don't earn our salvation by our good deeds; we do our good deeds because of our salvation.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. ... Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (Rom 6:3-7; 12-14)

Neither can you separate love and good works. Good works without love are useless. (1 Cor 13:1-3) Love without good deeds is not love; it is selfishness.

Nor can you demonstrate love in hatred. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (Jn 13:35) People do not know we are God's people based on hateful speech. They don't see our love when we are telling them they are sinners going to hell. They might see our love if we tell them that we don't want them to go to hell, but only if our words and our actions together demonstrate our love.

God has repurposed us. Let us not corrupt that purpose.

Recycle

Some things cannot be reused. They should not be thrown away, but they can be recycled. What results may look nothing like what went in. Rubber tires may be made into running tracks, or into retaining walls along a riverbank. Plastic jugs may become playground equipment. Waste paper may be pulped and turned into cardboard boxes. It is said that the natives of the American plains used almost every part of a bison (buffalo), either for food, shelter, or clothing. Even bones were made into sewing needles, and intestines into thread.

God is the ultimate recycler. He is going to take this tired, old body and recycle it. He is going to make it

into something new and glorious.

But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. ... So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. (1 Cor 15:35-38; 42-44)

We have no idea what our recycled bodies will be like. Just as a seed gives no clue as to the appearance of the fully grown plant, so our bodies give no clue as to what our celestial bodies will be like. Therefore, many questions we may have about life after death cannot be answered. Will we know one another? Will we miss those

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who don't go to heaven with us? Will we ask questions of Peter, Paul, or Moses? We cannot say, because we have no idea what our bodies or our environment will be like. Even the scriptures only give us hints, and those in terms we can understand in this body.

Regift

One thing that has become popular, but which is not usually mentioned with the other "re's," is regifting. This is the practice of taking something that is given to you and wrapping it as a gift to another. It usually happens with something you didn't want in the first place, but sometimes you may regift because the present held meaning to you and someone special admired it. You give it because of who is receiving it, on occasion. So it is with the gospel.

We have been given the greatest gift in the world, salvation from sin. The great thing about this is that we don't lose it when we regift it. In fact, it is a gift that compels regifting.

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. (2 Cor 5:14-15)

While we may ourselves be subject to recycling, reusing, repurposing, and reducing, it is we, rather than God, that must do the regifting. God is the original green revolution; he just needs us to do our part.

THE SECRET

You hear the question every time someone passes the century mark. What is the secret to your old age? Some have said that it was a glass of wine or a cigar a day. Others attribute it to clean living. Still others attribute their longevity to unclean living. Nobody seems to have the real secret to old age. Nobody except the Bible.

Before looking at the secret, though, it must be understood that there are no guarantees. Whatever the secret of long life, there are other factors involved. You may follow the secret, but get killed by a drunk driver, or cancer. Any number of factors may shorten your life, no matter how closely you follow the secret. Some believe that God sets the day of your death before your birth, and nothing can change that.

So what is the secret to long life? Keeping your mouth shut, when appropriate.

Does any of you want to live a life that is long and good? Then watch your tongue! Keep your lips from telling lies! (Ps 34:12-13, NLT)

Some have jokingly said that if you talk back to your mother, you won't live to see twenty. That is a more specific variation on the negative side of this secret. Many a person has said the wrong thing to the wrong person, and suffered for it. In some of the old western genre movies, a man could get killed for saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. (Or even the right thing at the wrong time or to the wrong person.) The psalmist here is being very practical. Watch out how and to whom you speak.

He continues by saying that lying shortens lives. Again that may be a factor of whom you lie to. There may be another consideration, though. It has often been said that the liar has to have the best memory in the world. If

you tell a lie, and don't want to get caught in it, you have to remember every lie you tell, and to whom. Then you have to maintain the lie, often by compounding it. One lie leads to another, just to cover it. How will this shorten your life? Worry. The chronic liar must always be worried about being found out. The stress of lying can sometimes be enough to shorten one's life.

Solomon had a similar admonition to that of his father. "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth life, but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction." (Prov 13:3) This is sometimes paraphrased: "Better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and prove it."

James continues the thought. He describes the destructiveness, to others and perhaps oneself, of careless or improper speech.

Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. (Jas 3:5-6)

The secret to long life sounds simple. It is not. "But the tongue can no man tame." (Jas 3:8) It is easily said, but difficult to do. Perhaps the easiest acrobatic feat is to "put your foot in your mouth." Every time we begin to speak we come in danger of not watching our mouths. Even when one tries to "engage the brain before putting the tongue in gear," things don't always come out the way we intend.

The secret to long life is to watch the mouth. Maybe that is because if you are careful about that, being careful about the rest is easy.

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