

**The Pursuit:
The work of the Holy
Spirit in evangelism**

Mike Mellor

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I The Pursuit

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat ...

‘The Hound of Heaven’ (Francis Thompson, 1859–1907)

The poem ‘The Hound of Heaven’ was written by the English poet Francis Thompson and graphically tells the tale of how we all, by human nature, flee Adam-like from the God who loves us and earnestly pursues us in order to rescue, redeem and reconcile us. The words stream dramatically from a tortured heart, the author’s personal life being one punctuated by failure, addiction and sorrow until his premature death at the age of forty-eight. But throughout his turbulent years, Thompson felt the hot breath of this ‘holy hound’ relentlessly in pursuit and recorded in his poem the heart-thumping experience which he so keenly felt.

The flight

Of course, we must start at the beginning. After that first and fatal act of rebellion in the Garden, the two insurgents,

overwhelmed with guilt and shame, run and hide. We can only imagine what avalanche of darkness must have descended upon the pair in an instant. What colossal sense of horror, loss and regret they felt as the madness and irrationality of sin in its grotesque and diverse manifestations began to break upon them in the twinkling of an eye.

Rather than running towards the God they loved, begging for forgiveness and reconciliation, they run from him, seeking to escape the presence and company of the One whom, just minutes before, they had revelled in. The air is thick with despair. Surely there is no possibility of a way back from this?

Nevertheless, they are sought immediately by their gracious, omniscient God who, knowing exactly where the guilty pair are, addresses Adam earnestly and tenderly with the rhetorical question, 'Where are you?' (Genesis 3:9). It is this great Seeker of souls who later would be revealed in His richest form as the Good Shepherd.

The vitally important point to grasp is that it is God taking the initiative, God making the first move, God doing the seeking. It seems that all world religions, apart from Christianity, emphasise man's seeking after God. Only the Bible reveals the God who seeks after guilty men and women. Millennia have passed, but the condition remains the same for the human race, the children of those first parents. We are all 'on the run' from our Maker. Our personal stories may differ, the escape routes we take may vary, but we are all prodigals and in desperate need of being pursued. The Apostle Paul drives this terrible truth home, underscoring the point made by the Old Testament Psalmist, 'There is no-one righteous, not even one; there is no-one who understands; there is no-one who seeks God.' (Romans 3:10–11). Of ourselves we have no desire for God and rely wholly upon His merciful desire for us. So we fugitives run, hide and escape

through an array of frantic scenarios during our lifetime. But there is a Pursuer! 'As the hound follows the hare, never ceasing in its running, ever drawing nearer in the chase, with unhurrying and unperturbed pace, so does God follow the fleeing soul by His Divine grace.'²

Although possibly aware of God's loving interest in us, the God-avoider flees, believing the devil's lie that submitting to God will mean forfeiting a life of happiness, which always eludes us anyhow, for one of tight-laced toil and joyless drudgery. Prolific Oxford academic and author C.S. Lewis famously captures this 'great escape' as he recalls his own conversion:

You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape?³

Futile pursuit

Of course, attempting to escape from an omniscient, omnipotent God is the height of folly, because 'Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered