

BY RANDY ROBINSON

# Come Out Into the Open

**W**hen my sons Jason and Brandon were little, we would occasionally play hide-and-seek. It didn't matter where we were—in the house, in the yard, or on vacation somewhere—there were always enough hiding places to make it fun. I would count to 10 slowly with eyes closed, and the kids would scamper around attempting to find some item large enough to conceal them from sight. Finally, when I hit the count of 10, I would call out, "Ready or not, here I come!" I'd open my eyes and usually within a few seconds spot where each of them was hiding. In their minds, out of sight was out of mind. *If I am under the blanket in the middle of the room, they reasoned, Dad won't see me, so this is a great hiding place!*

Of course, I did what dads do. I would prolong the "hunt," saying out loud, "Now, where could they be?" I'd open cupboards, look around corners, and make a spectacle of it, until finally I would grab the little bundle in the middle of the room with a resounding "Gotcha," and a long round of giggling would ensue.

"Daddy, how did you find me?" they would ask.

With a glimmer in my eye I would answer, "Well, daddies just know where to look."

I have often thought of that when I consider my relationship with God, but I have thought of it in a different way. In my "game" with God I have wandered off somewhere, and I'm afraid my hiding technique is so good that I am out of His reach. My sin is so egregious that He has simply abandoned me to the things I think obstruct me from His sight. Convinced that I have gone beyond God's search parameters and that He has abandoned the search, I am lonely and afraid.

As a lifelong Christian and worker in the church, I know that sounds a little fatalistic and maybe exposes an immature faith. But I don't think I am alone. Somehow even those of us who have enjoyed long fellowship with the church and yes, with God, occasionally feel abandoned, unheard, and out of the reach of our

heavenly Father. Circumstances get hold of us, and we revert to a place of self-pity and hopelessness.

I am convinced that God knew this propensity would show up in failing humanity, and provided assurances in His Word. He did not use any equivocating language. He did not hedge or dodge. He said straight out, "I will *never* leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5, NKJV). He assures me that there is *nothing* that can separate me from His love (see Romans 8:38, 39). He promised that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13, NKJV). He assured us that "*whoever* believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, NKJV). And if that is not enough, He says that when I confess my sins, He is faithful and just to forgive my sins and cleanse me from *all* unrighteousness (see 1 John 1:9).

This is not a game to God. He is serious about assuring me that I am His. I have nothing to fear as I depend on and trust in Him.

When playing hide-and-seek with my kids, I never had to say "Olly olly oxen free," a phrase of debated origin associated with the game when players could not be found. This phrase is used to indicate that players who are hiding can come out into the open without losing the game.

God's promises go further and give sinners an invitation to come into the open because He has won the contest for us. Taking some liberty with the phrase, we can come out into the open with assurance when God calls out to us, "Olly olly God sets free." And when Jesus sets us free, we are free indeed!

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