



Unlost: Being Found by the One We Are Looking For

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More Than Maggots

Have you ever had moments when you've felt overlooked or out of place? Times when you felt lost? It's the feeling you get when you walk into a room filled with people in the middle of a conversation, and someone says something like, "Let me guess, he used mustard?" When everyone bursts out laughing, you get the sense you've missed something.

This is how I felt most of my life growing up in the church. People spoke about God and others nodded their heads or got excited, but the whole church thing never made much sense to me. I heard of God's redemption and renewal of the world, and assumed I'd be overlooked in the end. I never was able to locate myself in God's story and was sure he hadn't found me in it either.

The prospect of God ever finding me was terrifying. He was an angry, sinister God who would surely judge me for the life I was living. If I could just survive until the end, then perhaps he would begrudgingly welcome me into his kingdom. This is the idea of God I grew up with, and one I heard preached and yelled from pulpits from the time I was young. Even our church's youth group heard this message more than I care to remember.

When I was in high school, our youth group took winter weekend retreats every year. One particular retreat we had a guest speaker for the weekend, and we had no idea what lay in store for us. The first few meetings were fine, but the final meeting was completely unexpected. He began by speaking softly and slowly. With each passing moment he grew more passionate, his voice grew louder, and he spoke faster until he yelled at a rapid pace. With the aid of the massive sound system, his voice sounded like God himself thundering in that small room.

He yelled about sin, told us what miserable creatures we were, how we deserved to burn, and how Jesus came to save us from hell. The crescendo of his sermon was when he yelled, "Do you realize what God did to save you? YOU ARE A MAGGOT! You're all maggots! Jesus became a maggot for you! But you reject him! Do you know where God sends maggots who reject him?"

This probably wasn't the best thing to say, especially to a freshman in high school like me who was racked with self-esteem issues. I was barely five feet tall, weighed less than one hundred pounds, and was frantically knocking on the door of puberty – only to find, time and again, there was no answer. Now some preacher yelled at me about being a maggot.



BOOK EXCERPT



Michael Hidalgo is the lead pastor of Denver Community Church, which under his leadership has grown from forty people to over 1,500. A graduate of Grand Rapids Theological Seminary, Michael served alongside Ed Dobson as a teaching pastor at Calvary Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. With the ONE Campaign and Malaria No More, Michael has addressed thousands nationally. He writes regularly for *Relevant* magazine and *Sojourners*. Michael, his wife and three children live in Denver.

What he didn't know was I already thought I was a maggot. That was why I was hiding. I knew exactly what God did to maggots. The larger problem was I wasn't the only one in the room who felt that way. It's no different today. People everywhere believe the same thing about themselves too.

Some of us grew up in a world where we were routinely told we were worthless. We were made to feel less than. Even though those words were spoken years ago, we still hold on to them, and as painful as they are, those lies still shape us. So we numb ourselves because we can't stand living every day knowing no one could possibly ever desire someone like us. . . . Old tapes play in my head, telling me I am a fraud, a loser and nothing but trouble. So I hide and do all I can to survive. But this story is not about surviving or hiding; it's about being found by the God we are searching for.

And if this is going to happen, we first have to know where we are. The problem is most of us have been told *where* we are and *what* we are. Like that night on the retreat, we have been told we are nothing more than maggots, and that we were on our way to hell. But God took a different approach.

Though the man and the woman hid from God, he couldn't stand the thought of being separated from them. When the man and woman were overcome with fear, covered themselves with leaves and hid among the bushes, God did not come to tell them where they were. He came to them and asked, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). Because he came with a question, this means he wasn't only interested in speaking to the man and the woman, but he was also interested in *hearing* from them—really hearing from them. God is one who listens to us and doesn't just wait for his turn to talk.

His simple question demanded a difficult answer. This deep question tore away the leaves the man and woman used to cover their nakedness, and got to the truth of who they were and what they had done.

God's question struck a note of deep fear in them, so they lied, denied, blamed and claimed it wasn't really their fault. . . . Imagine if they had replied to God, "Well we wondered what the fruit tasted like, what it would be like to do it our way and not your way, so we ate it. Now we are in a big mess." They could have stated the truth, but instead they chose to blame and accuse the other. They continued hiding. . . .

Most of us are scared to admit we have made a mistake, to say we have messed up, to reveal our brokenness or to acknowledge the darkness within us. Perhaps it will be of some



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BOOK EXCERPT

“God did not stand far off from the man and the woman, demanding that they come to him – not then, not today. He is a God who is willing to come to where we are, so that he can invite us to where he is.”

encouragement to remember that everyone has messed up, made mistakes, experienced brokenness and discovered darkness within them. The difference in people is not whether they are messed up; it’s whether they are willing to admit it.

We are all at different places on our spiritual journeys. Some of us may have just experienced a heart-wrenching end to a relationship. Others may be racked with an addiction no one knows about, and it’s slowly killing us a little bit each day. Still others are on top of the world, riding a wave of success, while some of us have just failed again and are starting to believe we have nothing to offer.

We have all experienced different pain: abuse, shame, guilt, doubt, illness, the loss of a loved one and the list could go on. Wherever we are, God is there too, and he’s still asking, “Where are you?” This is his invitation for us to know him and ourselves. God asked the man and the woman the question; now it was a matter of whether they would answer truthfully.

But while the question takes a moment to ask, it takes a lifetime to answer. As difficult as this may seem, the confidence we have is that there is no wrong answer to the question, because we are where we are, which is the very place where God patiently waits for us. We don’t have to become a worthy person or strive to get to a new place to reach God. The spiritual journey is nothing like that. The real journey is the simple and challenging process of removing the leaves and coming out of hiding.

God did not stand far off from the man and the woman, demanding that they come to him – not then, not today. He is a God who is willing to come to where we are, so that he can invite us to where he is.

The good news is, wherever we are – no matter how miserable, shameful, sinful or dark it is – God is there with us. This truth is found in Genesis 3, and it forever changes the way we see God. Just as God went looking for the man and the woman, he is looking for us too. He is doing all he can to get to us, and his question invites us into the truth of who we are and, most importantly, who he is.

– Adapted from chapter four, “More Than Maggots”