



24. GOD'S RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF HIS WAYWARD CHILDREN

*I will never leave you nor
forsake you.*

#NCSAMENTALHEALTHDEVOTIONS

GOD'S RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF HIS WAYWARD CHILDREN

Isaiah 41:10: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

It is only natural for a person to do introspection during a time of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. Asking questions like, "Who am I? Have I succeeded in my life? Have I become the man or the woman I've always dreamt I would be?" We do spiritual self-examination especially as the world keeps falling apart: "Am I truly a child of God? Have I grown in righteousness or have I not?" Let me ask you: "Are you the person you always imagined you would be, or have you missed the plot?"

While growing up, I had this very perfect image in my head of who God desired me to be. A very idealistic and hopeful image of who I would be and what my life would turn out to be like. The reason for this image in my head of how things should be, came from the Book of Revelation.

Revelation 12:1 talks of God's church using the image of a woman: "*And a great sign was seen in heaven; a woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars*". It says that this woman was dressed in perfect white and whenever we talked about this woman who represents God's church on earth, it was this perfect bride dressed in white. That was how I imagined God wanted me to be. This perfect woman dressed in white with the moon and the stars and the sun behind me. In other words, really perfect in every sense. I wanted to be the person He has shown me in His Word.

**ARE YOU THE PERSON YOU ALWAYS
IMAGINED YOU WOULD BE, OR HAVE
YOU MISSED THE PLOT?**

I was also reminded of this perfect image in Matthew 5:48: *“Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* I had this very extreme imagery of perfectionism in my mind of who I needed to be and what I needed to accomplish in order for God to love me and for me to be His daughter, His bride on earth. Not only did I have this biblical imagery of perfection, I also thought of God being the Groom and the church being His bride. I thought of the earthly imagery of a groom and bride on television shows and in beauty magazines. The perfect look. The most beautiful women who are never fat and with no flaws. They always say and do the right things.

I developed this image in my head of what I thought God wanted from me, so I started to plan on how I was going to accomplish this. It might have been a very prideful plan, but I had a plan. I told myself I want to be like them and my motives were truly sincere. I really wanted to be that person I thought God had shown me to be. Growing up, I always thought I knew God, knew what He wanted, what He liked and what His plan for my life was. It was a beautiful vision and I was sincere in wanting to accomplish this plan for my life. I set goals for myself. I will work for Him. I am going to be clever and popular and amazing and people will love me. I will have a happy marriage one day, we will be like two peas in a pod. We will raise our children in the fear of God. There was that specific plan and mission.

My calling was sure, my mission was sure, the purpose and the plan were laid out before me. I needed to be this woman arrayed in white with the sun, the moon and the stars behind me. As I had gone through life and in retrospect, I realised that I was not the only one who had this very perfect ideal for my life in terms of what I believed God wanted for me.

**GROWING UP WHO DID YOU IMAGINE
YOU WOULD BECOME, AND WHO ARE
YOU NOW? WHAT TYPE OF PERSON
HAVE YOU BECOME?**

Peter the disciple also was a very proud, very arrogant, very sure-of-himself type of disciple. He was always the first to speak, the first to answer and he had all the answers to life. I realised that it was very much what I was like growing up. Maybe you also felt the same? As Jesus and the disciples spent time together, the time for Jesus to die came closer. Jesus spoke to Peter and the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. In Matthew 26:33, Peter declared to the Lord what his mission was and what he would do. In other words, Peter had a very clear vision of who he was and what he was going to do: *“Though all men will forsake You, I will never forsake You. I will never be ashamed of You.”* Peter said he would not run away if everybody else ran away. He was going to be that perfect disciple. But God knew better because God knew the plan of the enemy. He also knew Peter’s weaknesses (as He knows ours). In Matthew 26:34 Jesus tried to help Peter, saying to him that he was not as strong as he thought he was. *“Jesus said unto him, verily I say unto thee that this night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”*

You also will experience trials and tribulations which you did not plan for. In Isaiah 55:8 the Lord says: *“My thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways.”* God says you might think and believe certain things, but He knows better. He can see things for what they really are and the path you planned for yourself to tread on is not as safe and secure as you might think it is. His ways are better. I believe *Romans 3:11* says to us that there is no one who understands and really seeks God. If we can just understand that this is truly the state we are in. No matter how sincere our motives, no matter how we believe we are going to be or what our lives are going to turn out like, God says we should be a little more humble and not so arrogant about how we think life is going to turn out for us.

**SOMETIMES YOU DISAPPOINT
YOURSELF BY BECOMING A
COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PERSON
THAN WHAT YOU IMAGINED.**

But we are in denial. We may say things like 'that will never happen to me', exactly what Peter said. None of us plan on failing. We do not plan on betraying God, or losing our way. We plan to have success, but then life gets in the way.

After Jesus said to Peter that he was going to deny Him, "*Peter says unto Him, even if I have to die with You Lord, I will not deny You.*" (Matthew 26:35). I used to be like Peter. I looked at my family, I looked at my parents, I looked at my friends, I looked at my friends' parents and the world and the church and I saw all the faults. I saw all the things they were doing wrong and I thought to myself, "Are you guys blind? Don't you know what you are doing, is wrong?" I promised myself I would never be like that. Kind of like what Peter said about the other disciples who might deny the Lord, but he won't. I remember when I was younger, I said that I would never:

- be sexually immoral;
- drink alcohol;
- fight with my family;
- be poor or have financial struggles;
- have to face death because I am going to see Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven;
- betray my faith or betray Jesus;
- drink or eat unhealthy things;
- be like my parents and my family and the church and the people out there that make mistakes.

I said I am going to be perfect; I am going to have many friends; I am going to be popular and I am going to be holier than anybody who ever walked the face of this earth.

GOD KNOWS THAT SATAN IS LIKE A KIDNAPPER THAT COMES AND EVEN THOUGH YOU DO NOT WANT TO GO WITH HIM, HE GRABS YOU & HE PULLS YOU AWAY. HE DRAGS YOU OFF.

I am sure you are laughing by now, because what actually happened was that sin dragged me off as it does with many of you. And the Lord knows that. He knows that sin is like a kidnapper. Satan is like a kidnapper that comes and even though we do not want to go with him, he grabs us and he pulls us away. He drags us off. Sometimes he does it while we are kicking and screaming, other times we go willingly. We did not plan for this, but it has happened.

Hebrews 3:10 tells us how God sees us as a generation: *"I was grieved with this generation, and said, they always err in their heart, and they don't know My ways."* So God knows that we are weak and that we are dragged off by sin. He says in Isaiah 53:6: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one of us to our own ways; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." In other words, the Lord says He knows our weaknesses, He knows that we are not as strong as we pretend to be.

What really has to happen is for us to come to grips with reality of where we truly find ourselves today. If we are broken, we need to admit our brokenness because then only we will realise that we are in need of somebody who can heal us. The best of it all is that we do have a Healer who can heal us. Some of those things I said as a young child I would never be, I have been. Perhaps it is the same for you where you planned things and it did not turn out the way you've planned. Life is not what you imagined it would be. I remember there once was a man who made an appointment to speak to me. During the appointment, he spoke to me very tearfully and very broken and ashamed. He said he did things that he never imagined he would have done. He said things he never imagined he would say in his life.

**IF YOU ARE BROKEN, YOU NEED TO
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He even laid his hands on his wife. He hit her because she would not back off. She would not stop nagging him and he went blind with rage. He has become this man he never imagined he would be. When things like this happen in our lives, we feel ashamed, because it wasn't our plan. We did not want to be dragged off by sin, but it happened and God understands. Just like He said to Peter, He is saying to us: "I know you did not want to deny Me, I know you were not planning on betraying Me, it was not in your plan for your life.

But I understand the power of sin and how strong it is, and how it drags you off." After this, we end up feeling very ashamed, we feel very disappointed in ourselves and we may even feel like a failure.

That is the time when we have to admit to God that things did not turn out the way we've planned. We have not become that perfect bride, dressed in white, all beautiful and perfect and without sin. It is in our brokenness that we realise we are in need of a Healer. We have been kidnapped by Satan, by sin, and sometimes we become unrecognisable. We end up being dirty and sometimes we even fall in love with the kidnapper. We struggle with Stockholm Syndrome. After the kidnapper dragged us off, we actually started liking sin and the things of this world. Not only have we been dragged off by sin, we are stuck in it and we do not know how to break free from it. Sometimes we do not want to break free from it because we've started enjoying the things of this world. It is time for us to realise that we are in need of healing and we are in need of a Healer.

**THIS IS THE TIME WHEN YOU HAVE
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THAT PERFECT PERSON YOU
HOPED TO BE.**

If you are anything like me, when I realised how broken I was, I tried to fix myself. I tried to be better, to be worthy of God again. I said to myself what I needed was to keep trying because I needed to make myself acceptable to God. But I ended up looking worse off than what I was before. Let me illustrate this. When I was a child I liked dressing up like an adult. I remember one birthday party I invited all my friends and we dressed up like adults. All my friends had their parents helped them. They were wearing nice little heels and nice dresses and they had their hair and make-up done. They came with little handbags and things that kids don't really do.

I remember that I did not ask my mum to help. I just went to her closet and got her adult dress out and I wore her shoes. I tried to put make-up on and I ended up looking really dumb. Don't know whether you have ever seen kids trying to put on their own make-up? They end up looking dumb.

Sometimes in our Christian characters and in our Christian lives, when we try to fix ourselves, when we try in our own strength to become that perfect bride, we end up looking like a cheap whore. Sorry, but it is the truth. We become like prostitutes, trying to look nice, trying to look beautiful, but actually we end up looking worse than what we were before.

The beautiful thing about the Bible is that we always find answers in it. We read that God says we don't have to fix ourselves. He will fix us, He will dress us, He will put on our spiritual make-up, if we can call it that. Matthew 22 tells us when God invites us to His banquet feast, He supplies the gown, He supplies our righteousness. He is the One who covers up our imperfections, our lies and our deceit. We wash the cup on the outside, we try to act and behave right.

**YOU DON'T HAVE TO FIX
YOURSELF. GOD WILL FIX YOU, HE
WILL DRESS YOU, HE WILL PUT ON
YOUR SPIRITUAL MAKE-UP.**

This is how we try to be acceptable for the Lord. This is how we try to earn righteousness. When we wash our cup on the outside it does not help because the inside is still dirty and broken. The way God heals us is to come and live in our lives and to make us perfect from the inside out. Many times, the way we try to fix ourselves is to look righteous. We go to church, we say amen, we say hallelujah, but on the inside we are withering away.

The Bible tells us all we need to do is to admit to the Lord that we cannot fix ourselves and to ask Him to work in us. In Psalms 32:3-5 in the Bible in Basic English, we read: "When I kept my mouth shut, my bones were wasted, because of my crying all through the day. For the weight of your hand was on me day and night; my body became dry like the earth in summer. Selah. I made my wrongdoing clear to You, and did not keep back my sin. I said, I will put it all before the Lord; and You took away my wrongdoing and my sin. Selah."

David keeps on talking, explaining how he felt more energised after he confessed to the Lord his filth and his dirt. That is what we need to do. We need to say to the Lord that we've planned to be the pure white bride, we've planned to be that perfect image, but we have turned out to be this cheap prostitute. Our make-up is disgusting, our clothes look horrible. We wanted to be beautiful, but we've turned out not so beautiful.

The way God makes us perfect and the way He fixes us, is to say to us: "You do not have to keep struggling to be that person you wanted to be. I will give you rest." Jesus says the mistake we make is that we think we need to be perfect before He can accept us. We think we need to fix ourselves before He can accept us. That is very much an imagery of the world, because Jesus says while we were yet sinners, He died for us.

**WHEN YOU WASH YOUR CUP ON
THE OUTSIDE IT DOES NOT HELP
BECAUSE THE INSIDE IS STILL
DIRTY & BROKEN.**

He is looking for us even though we are not looking for Him. He wants us even though we are not perfect yet. In Matthew 22:10 we read the parable of the banquet where the master, who represents Christ, sent His servants to the highways and byways to gather all they could find, both good and bad, for the wedding feast. He then dressed the guests.

You need to change your thinking that God is expecting you to first be perfect before you can come to Him. He goes out and He looks for the ugly, for the prostitutes, He looks for the person who has not been there for Him, who has run away from Him. The imagery of the book of Hosea demonstrates this to us where the Lord says, "You have all left me. You have all been like prostitutes who went to be with your lovers." The Lord says He is not giving up on you simply because you are not perfect yet, or because you still haven't learned to love Him.

In Hosea 2:14 the Lord is speaking about us as if we are prostitutes: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and I will speak comfortably unto her." In Hosea 3:2 the Lord says: "So I bought her back for fifteen pieces of silver." He is going to buy us back, even though we are running away and we belong to Satan and this world. He is going to ransom us. He is going to buy us back from that kidnapper who took us captive and then He is going to help us to overcome our Stockholm Syndrome. He is going to speak comfortably to us.

The Lord has done all of this for us. He bought us back with His life. He gave His life for us, and now He is busy working in us and through us. Daily, through His Word, He is speaking soft words to us, calling us back to Him.

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The Lord works with sinners. He used Paul (who used to be Saul), a murderer. The Lord reinstated and worked in Peter, the betrayer, to become a powerful disciple for Him. We need to realise that the image of that perfect woman in Revelation is a woman who had already been worked on.

We forget that she was lost in the wilderness, scared and running for her life, persecuted by Satan, but it was God who saved her. It was God who made rivers flow in the wilderness in order for her to become that perfect, serene bride. It is the same God who makes us perfect now. In Luke 19:10 Jesus says: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Genesis 3:9 shows that even in the beginning when sin just entered into the world, the Lord came in pursuit of His wayward children. Adam and Eve ran from the Lord, they hid from the Lord, "but the Lord God called to man saying: 'Where are you?'" The Lord has not stopped calling you. The Lord has not stopped seeking you. When He finds you, even though you might not look the way you are supposed to look, He will cover you. Psalms 32:1 says: "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered." It is God who covers our sins. The story of the prodigal son demonstrates it so perfectly. The son did not deserve what his father gave him. He ran away, took everything his father gave him. He squandered his life, he became a sinner. Then interestingly, when the son finally came back, we find the father standing on the porch looking, waiting for his son. The father was not in the house busy doing his own thing, he was searching for the son and when the son arrived, he covered him with his best cloak and put his best ring on his finger.

**GOD IS SEARCHING FOR YOU, HE
IS STANDING WAITING FOR YOU
TO RETURN SO HE CAN THROW A
FEAST & COVER YOU WITH HIS
RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

The Lord says, "I am the Potter and you are the clay. I am the Vine, you are the branches. I am the Master builder, you are the house." Jesus never left Peter after the betrayal, He went into pursuit of him.

Today, the Lord is still in pursuit of His wayward children. He is in pursuit of me. He is in pursuit of you. He gives us numerous chances. He keeps working in us, even though we keep falling and failing, because He understands our weak natures and the strength of temptation.

God says, "I will never leave you and I will never forsake you." Jude 1:24 gives us a beautiful promise: *"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the throne of God with exceeding joy."* Philippians 2:13 says: *"For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."*

My prayer for all of us today, is that we will be humble enough to admit our faults, to admit our waywardness and to say to the Lord that we do have good intentions at heart, but we realise we cannot do it without Him. Let us ask God not to stop pursuing us, not to stop dressing us. Let us ask Him to make us perfect and create the image in us that we want and that He wants as well.

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