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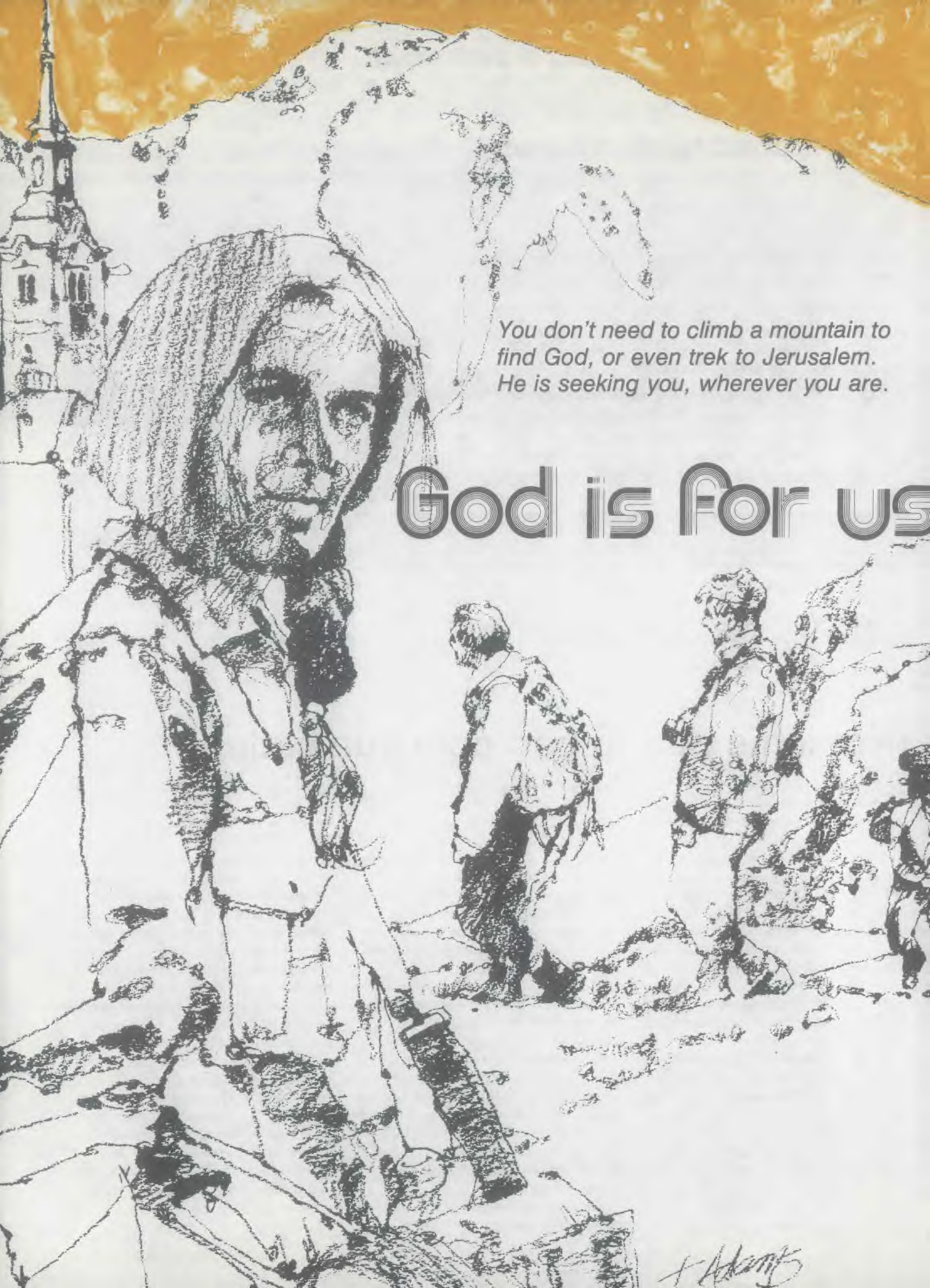
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God Is For Us

William G. Johnsson

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*You don't need to climb a mountain to
find God, or even trek to Jerusalem.
He is seeking you, wherever you are.*

God is for us

F Adams

by William G. Johnsson

ONE BRIGHT May day, high in the fastnesses of the Himalayas, I came upon a strange sight. A group of people—five or six—were making their way on foot up the trail. They had sticks in hand, possessions bundled on back, and the colored streaks of the religious devotee on forehead and wrists. Their clothes were dusty, their feet heavy. A band of pilgrims wending their way to a mountain shrine! Perhaps hundreds of weary miles lay behind them; the lofty peaks loomed ahead.

We greeted each other and passed on. But the good word that I wanted to leave with them, if the communication curtain could have been torn aside, was, *God is for us! My friends, why all this hard labor? Don't you know that God is on your side? You don't need to climb the mountain to find Him; He is seeking you, wherever you are!*

God is for us! This to my mind is the greatest teaching of the Bible. It is the word of hope that all men in every age and in each land of earth are longing to hear.

Not a self-evident truth. Much of the data of existence that daily confront us would seem to deny it. We have seen in these times cruel and bitter wars; we have read in the papers and now witness on our TV screens acts of brutality and bestiality. Our generation is wise but weak; we have put our inventive skills to destroying one another more efficiently, to lavishing

ourselves with the comforts of life.

And we confront—inevitably—the stark reality of tragedy. Senseless disease or blind accident cuts off close friends and colleagues at the high noon of life and usefulness. The young, the brave, and the beautiful fall before the mad scythe of the grim reaper.

Nor does human nature reveal this truth. Is there any man who does not have his price, who cannot be bought or sold? We have experienced the loss of confidence in leaders, known the sickening awareness when corruption has overtaken the highest offices of the land.

No, it is not self-evident. Not from nature, the stars, history, society, psychology, or the newspapers would one conclude that God is good, for us, and on our side. Well might we decide from the evidence of our senses or reason that God is dead or inept or simply has lost interest in this planet in rebellion.

God viewed as the Heavenly Policeman. Even religious institutions might not help us to grasp this great truth. History reveals that religions, which supposedly are concerned with helping man to find God, frequently end up making God remote. They portray Him as the Heavenly Policeman, waiting to catch us out in our sins and to wreak vengeance upon us. God comes across as demanding, as punitive. To some He seems more intent upon keeping people *out* of His paradise than in getting them in, because He hedges the way about with rule upon rule, regulation upon regulation, burden upon burden.

Hence the pilgrims. And all religions have them, Christianity not excepted. In these United States how many people are spiritual pilgrims, struggling up the way of self-torture in an endeavor to find or please a demanding deity! How many young people,

born and bred in the Christian fold, look upon their religion as an irksome requirement, a set of "no-nos" submitted to for the sake of perhaps winning entry into a grudgingly opened heaven! How many feel hopeless as they face the fact of their moral frailty and sense how far they are from the goal of perfection held out before them!

A God who cares. But—God is for us! No wonder it comes as good news, the best news. God is trying to get people into His eternal home, not keep them out. He is a God who takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked." A God who weeps over the lost. A God who lifts the burdens from the weary ones. A God who cares. A God who is on our side, not against us. A God who comes to us even before we move toward Him. A God who has sought us with eager longing all the days of our lives—and who yet seeks.

But, you say, how do you *know* this is true? The evidence of life often points in the opposite direction; so why say God is for us?

The answer comes, not from logic, not from experiment, but from a person—Jesus Christ. The message shouted by His teachings and life is just this: God is for us.

Strangely—but, as we saw above, in keeping with the way of religious institutions—the people of Jesus' day felt remote from God. Matthew quotes the Book of Isaiah to describe them: They "sat in darkness . . . in the region and shadow of death" (Matthew 4:16). They were burdened with diseases, weighed down with guilt. The theology of the day, as so often, catered to the unsick, the unpoor, and the (apparently) un sinful. A person who suffered sickness or calamity was under the curse of God; hence a man born blind was reaping the consequences of his parents' or his own

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prenatal sin (John 9:1-3), and the Galileans who were slain by Pilate were worse sinners than others (Luke 13:1-4).

The God of the Old Testament cared about men. He had made the world and pronounced it good (Genesis 1:31); He had shaped mankind in His own image and sought them out when they disobeyed (Genesis 3:9); He had come to deliver His own at the time of the Deluge (Genesis 6:7, 8); supremely, He had led out the tribes from Egypt, raising up a leader in the person of Moses and constituting them a nation for Himself by entering into covenant with them (Exodus 6:4-8).

Over and over He had intervened in their history to deliver them. He was the One to whom they had turned for forgiveness (e.g., Psalm 51), who had led them, wept over them, guided them as a father his child (Hosea 11:1-4). He was the God who had given assurance: "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him" (Psalm 103:13*); "I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins" (Isaiah 43:25).

But the good news had been lost. It is quickly lost, in any place and age, because it is so *different*. The idea that God is for us always seems too good to be true. This is how a Christian writer describes the people of Jesus' day:

"The Son of God, looking upon the world, beheld suffering and misery. With pity He saw how men had become victims of satanic cruelty. He looked with compassion upon those who were being corrupted, murdered, and lost. They had chosen a ruler who chained them to his car as captives. Bewildered and deceived, they were moving on in gloomy procession toward eternal ruin—to death in which is no hope of life, toward night to which comes no morning. Satanic agencies were incorporated with men. The bodies of human beings, made for the dwelling

place of God, had become the habitation of demons. The senses, the nerves, the passions, the organs of men, were worked by supernatural agencies in the indulgence of the vilest lust. The very stamp of demons was impressed upon the countenances of men. Human faces reflected the expression of the legions of evil with which they were possessed. Such was the prospect upon which the world's Redeemer looked. What a spectacle for Infinite Purity to behold!" (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 36).

Into such a scene stepped Jesus of Nazareth. In the inaugural sermon to His ministry, preached in the synagogue of His hometown, He proclaimed His mission: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19). His entire life was devoted to the pattern laid down that day: "He went about doing good," says Luke elsewhere (Acts 10:38).


In His teaching, both public and private, Jesus spoke much about the character of God. He took over the Old Testament term *Father* and gave it a place of preeminence, teaching people to address God by this name and pointing out the tender care and compassion of the Father toward each person. The God proclaimed by Jesus was one who cared for the birds of the air and the grass of the field—hence how much more for His people

(Matthew 6:25-33)! He was one who eagerly waited to answer the requests of His children, who was all and more than the earthly model of fatherhood indicated (Luke 11:5-13). He cared for the world—cared supremely. Although Jesus did not use the expression, the essence of His teaching was this: God is for us, not against us.

How could Jesus be so sure? Perhaps He too was wrong. No, He spoke with authority on the subject. He said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." "I and the Father are one" (John 14:9; 10:30).

Christ's presence among mankind itself verified God's concern for us. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). And instead of merely drawing the people to Him to hear the Good News, Jesus went out to the people, bringing it to them. He came bearing salvation, salvation in Himself. The entire thrust of His life was, God is for us!

This is why the story of Jesus can never lose its power. Without it, life is a bewildering game where no one wins, a sadistic mockery, an empty jingle. But Jesus brings hope and meaning to existence as He assures us again and yet again, God is for us.

This is the saving word that transforms the concrete jungle. This is the comforting word that soothes the aches of grief. This is the promising word that bids us look up and pierce by faith the grossest darkness. 

*All Bible quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

Coming next month

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