

So, I like this passage from Acts for a lot of reasons. But I'm going to be honest with you and say that the first time I read it, I did feel a little uncomfortable about the part about groping for God. It's a weird word that I honestly don't use very often. But when it's used in the Bible, in this passage, we have to ask what it's conveying here. It says that "God made humans so that we would seek and grope for God." The Greek word that's translated here as "grobe" can be translated a few different ways: In one translation, it says God made the world so that we "would reach out for God." Another translation says "so that we might feel after God." The meaning of the word is that it is conveying a physical connotation, it's tangible when we read it. God made us to reach out for God, to feel after God.

So let's talk about the context of this passage from Acts and the context of Genesis.

Luke is the author of Acts, and he is writing about Paul's visit to Athens. Specifically, in this passage, Luke is quoting Paul speaking there. Athens is known as this city of high culture and of the elite. Intellectualism is honored and so new ideas are studied pretty intensely, the Athenians wouldn't just accept new ideas or beliefs without question. And this high culture not only included intellectualism but also large buildings, elaborate religious shrines, what Paul called idols.

So, Paul is a traveling preacher, and in this passage, he has travelled to Athens. He is kind of an outsider coming into this city with his ideas of Christianity, which was not the mainstream religion at that time. He's there trying to talk about his faith with people and of course, the Athenians are wary of his ideas, but they're curious, wanting to know more. So he visits the places of worship there, and he kind of argues with people, trying to tell them about Christianity. But the people he's arguing with are having trouble understanding his ideas. So they end up questioning his spiritual authority and Paul is asked to officially and publically explain his beliefs. This ends up being one of Paul's three sermons known as his missionary sermons and it happens in response to Paul seeing the idolatry happening in Athens, in the elaborate religious shrines.

Now I want to talk a little about the context of Genesis. The story of creation is told in both Genesis chapter 1 and Genesis chapter 2, which are known as the first and second creation accounts. Genesis 1 is the story of the six days of creation, where it says, "In the beginning, God created..." Genesis 2 is the story of Adam and Eve. Today we're looking at the second creation account, the story of God creating humans. The passage says, "Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed." God made us

with intention, with care, with Divine breath. We know God, we feel God around us in the garden. This is way before Acts, of course, when things are a little messier.

In Acts, Paul says, “The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands.”

Paul says this in his sermon to the intellectual high society in Athens. He is essentially trying to convince the Athenians why the God he is talking about exists not only for Jews but for all people in Athens, as well. He is appealing to them, telling them that God is bigger than human recognition of God and that God exists not because of humanity, not in the shrines they have built, but that God *created* humanity, that humanity exists *through* God. Paul is emphasizing that God does not live in shrines made by human hands in response to the all of the false shrines he sees happening around him.

Paul wants the people to see that God is not in these shrines because they actually pull their attention away from seeking God. These elaborate shrines were distractions, were claiming people’s attention, energy, dedication when God was not even in those shrines. Paul is saying that God is bigger than these shrines, that the power of distraction and draining that these shrines held over people were not of God. God did not dwell in these false shrines.

Just like this Athenian community where Paul is speaking, haven't we also made false shrines that now hold power over us? Such as money? Such as Convenience? Systems of oppression, systems of patriarchy, white privilege, consumerism. These systems we've been conditioned to depend on hold power over us.

For a really serious example, if the grocery store is closed when I'm craving ice cream at 11pm I feel kind of annoyed. Maybe I feel entitled to conveniences, like I know there are grocery stores that are open 24/7, why is this store not open right now when all I want is ice cream? Sometimes I feel that way, maybe sometimes y'all feel that way about certain things, maybe ice cream makes you feel this passionately, too, I don't know. This is the shrine of consumerism—I feel this false sense of entitlement to be able to have what product I want when I want it.

Or we can think about the holidays. Often we want to make those we love happy with presents, we want to buy the gifts that will make them smile. But this has become such a big way of showing love—through purchases—that it doesn't feel so focused on the happiness part sometimes. The shrine of money is powerful in our lives. It drains our energy, it distracts us, it brings us down.

These systems, these shrines, are not where God dwells. They may hold power over us, but God is bigger, more expansive, more wonderful than these shrines.

God does not live in shrines built by human hands. But are our bodies not shrines built by God's hands? We are God's creation, from the Earth God created the earthling, the human being, that is what we heard in Genesis. We are God's creation and the Divine dwells within us. In 1 Corinthians, Paul asks, "Do you not know? Your body is a temple." Even in the midst of these false shrines that hold power over us, God is not in those shrines. But God is not far from us either. Because God dwells within us.

"God gives to all mortals life and breath and all things...so that they would search for God and perhaps reach out for God and find God." This is how Paul says it in Acts, how God created us *so that* we would seek for God *and* so that we would find God. God dwells within us and made us to always be seeking her.

We were *created* out of this seeking, this reaching for God. In Genesis, God reached within Godself and formed us, formed this world, from dust and Divine spirit breathed into our nostrils. Seeking is our very nature. God reached within Godself, seeking within Godself, and created everything that we know, all that we can feel, our very selves. That is the nature of God, to seek, to create, to always be creat-ing. God creates through acts of seeking Godself. And God is always creating

through *our* acts of seeking God. God dwells within us always, and has called us to seek her.

God formed a human, from the dust of the earth, from the matter that had *just* been divinely created, and God breathed into their nostrils the breath of life, and the human became a living being. When you hear that phrase, God breathed into their nostrils the breath of life, can you feel that? Do you know that sensation, air in your nostrils. I'm gonna ask you to just feel your breath, just for a minute. Just take a breath in through your nose, and feel that breath on your nostrils. That's a tangible description, a physical connotation. And this physical description of our own creation in Genesis is just like the physical way Paul describes God's creation of humans, for us to reach out and grasp for God.

When I graduated college, I was coming out of a period of spiritual and emotional unrest—I was feeling lost, apathetic, removed from myself, God, my community...I didn't know what I was going to do for a job, where I would live, but I *knew* I needed to work at the summer camp I grew up attending in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Looking back, I can name that God was calling me back to camp, back to a place where I felt stable, strong, and in touch with God. But at the time, I just knew, from a place deep within me, that I needed to go to camp. I don't know how to describe it, I just knew. Have any of you ever just *known* something?

My time back at camp began my healing out of feeling lost and sad and confused. Don't get me wrong, it was a process, but this time at camp allowed me space to seek God again. I sat on a cabin porch every evening after spending my day teaching girls to kayak, and watched the sun set over the mountains. I had genuine conversations with people, I shared knowledge with kids, I ate breakfast every day.

After months of falling into apathy and *not* seeking anything, especially not God, in those mountains, at meals, on the water, with the people around me, I was able to escape the false shrines of my adulthood—shrines of not being enough, the shrine of needing more money, the shrine of productivity at all costs. I felt ground beneath my feet again—literally and figuratively. And this time at camp began a process of seeking God, within myself and the world, a multi-year long process. It's still happening, actually.

And this is the point of seeking God. It is in those moments of tangibly reaching out for God, reaching my hands into the dirt for God, asking someone about their day and listening to the details they share, seeing the power in the enthusiasm of the kids around me, watching the sun set every night, feeling the presence of the divine in the changing colors and shadows. God is not only at the finish line, God is not a goal to be attained. God is within us and within our seeking. My process of seeking God is where I have found God, over and over and over, where I continue to find God.

Even though we make false shrines that distract us, drain us, and bring us down, and even though sometimes because of these shrines, it's hard for us to feel God, God's true creation can be found all around us, in front of us, and within us.

God is always creating with humanity, through our acts of seeking her. "In God we live, and move, and have our being."

When we feel distant from God, when we can't find God in these shrines we have built, we have to ask, "How am I seeking God right now?" It's not about *making* it to God, we just need to be open to encountering her in our own journeys of seeking, in our own reaching out for her.

What are the ways you are going to seek God this week? Seeking God can happen in moments, it doesn't have to be time-consuming, or intimidating or inaccessible for us. We can seek God by making eye contact when we talk with people. By having a genuine conversation with someone we care about. By making a list of five things we are grateful for. How will you seek God?

Anytime you struggle to feel God, breathe in. And remember that we are God's creation. God is there, in that breath, in this breath, within you. Every time you take a breath, remember that you are God's creation and that God is within you always.