

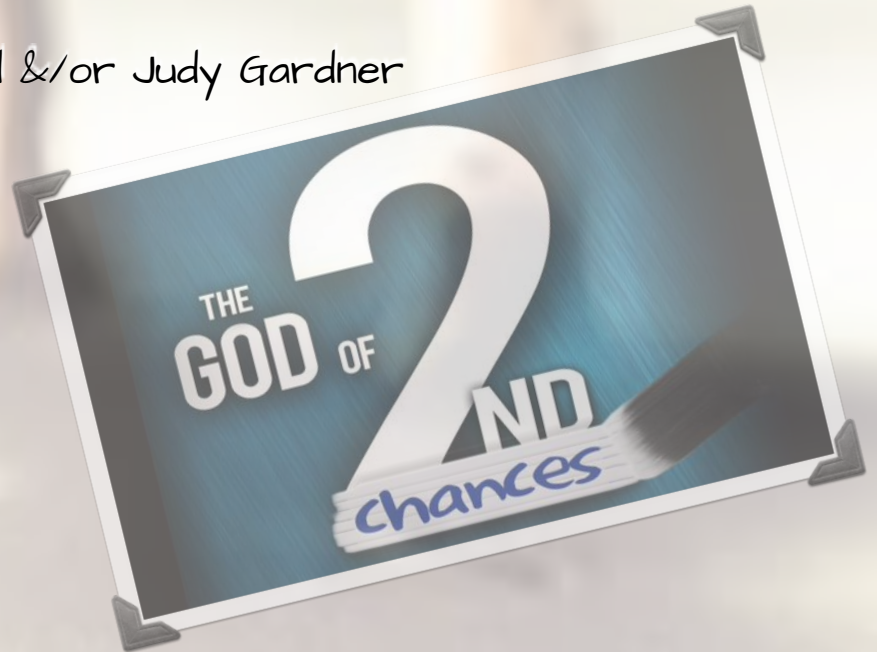
October 6-10, 2025 Edition

Following  
The Year<sup>(s)</sup> Of Jesus Part 196

The God Of 2nd Chances (and 3rd and 4th and 5th and...)

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

\*\*\* These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

\*\*\*\* Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside](http://www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside)). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

**Monday Reflection:** This week we are going to be looking at something strange Jesus says at the beginning of Luke chapter 13. He was teaching a large crowd of people and from time to time someone would lob a question at him. We don't get to hear the question that was asked of him at the beginning of chapter 13 but I think it will become obvious what it was as we read:

About this time Jesus was informed that Pilate had murdered some people from Galilee as they were offering sacrifices at the Temple. Luke 13:1 (NLT)

Ok so what's going on here? Well Pilate is the Roman governor of Judea in 33 AD- he's most famous (or I guess we should say infamous) for sentencing Jesus to die even though Pilate couldn't see anything that He had done wrong. Obviously Pilate was a brutal governor and he was responsible for some pretty horrific things during his tenure. At one point he brought Roman military standards (poles with signage and imagery of the Roman army) with Pilate's own image on them into Jerusalem. This was a sacrilege to the Jews who were offended by any graven image. There were mass protests and a bunch of Jews even went to his summer palace in Caesarea to protest. Pilate sent his military out and told the Jews to go home or he would have them slaughtered. The Jews bared their necks to him and said they'd rather die than accept the military standards in their most holy city. Pilate relented and took them out.

Another time Pilate took money from the Temple treasury and used it to build aqueducts for Jerusalem. When the Jews found out there were mass protests in the Temple and Pilate had Romans dressed as Jews go into the Temple with clubs and swords and on his cue they waded into the crowd injuring many and even killing some of them. And then there was the time Pilate heard about a group of Samaritans who were gathering on Mt. Gerazim and he thought it was a rebellion so he sent his army up there and they wiped out thousands of them. That was the last straw and Pilate was recalled back to Rome and had his governorship taken away. Turns out he was too brutal even for Tiberius Caesar (which I wouldn't have thought was possible based on everything I know about him).

And then there's this example from Luke 13 where Pilate murdered a bunch of Galileans in the Temple while they were worshiping and bringing their sacrifices to God. Why did he do that? Nobody knows for sure. For one thing Galileans were known to be more revolutionary than Judean Jews. So there's the possibility that these particular Galileans were wanted for crimes against Rome and when Pilate found out they were in the Temple he took the opportunity to wipe them out. No matter the reason it became the big headline in the Jerusalem Gazette when it happened. Everyone was talking about it. It's like my favorite joke when I was in kindergarten. Did you hear the one about the elephant with diarrhea? No? That's surprising, it's all over town! I didn't say it was funny I just said it was favorite when I was 5 even though I didn't really understand it. But when I was 5 any joke with diarrhea and elephants was good enough for me. My kindergarten teacher, Miss Petapeace was not amused at all.

Anyways, it's all anyone was talking about at that point in time in Jerusalem. So what was the question that they asked Jesus about all of this? Well I think it had to be, why did that happen to those poor Galileans? When we see tragedy we want answers, don't we? We want to know why it happened, presumably so we can avoid making the same mistakes that the people whose lives ended so tragically made. But we're going to see in Jesus' reply just what

He thinks of that way of thinking. We'll start with that tomorrow but for today maybe let's you and me spend some time reflecting on what questions run through our own minds when we see tragedies all around us that just don't make sense.

**Tuesday Reflection:** This week we're talking about how to deal with all the questions that run through our minds when tragedy strikes and nothing seems to make sense. The year just before Jesus died was a particularly brutal one for the Jews of Jerusalem. One of the things that rocked them the most was the slaughter of Galilean Jews in the Temple. Not only were they slaughtered in the Temple, they were slaughtered while they were offering sacrifices to Yahweh. I don't think you and I could possibly understand just how violated and angry this would have made the Jews. So the people of Jerusalem did what most of us do when we see tragedy- they started asking "why?" And Jesus' answer may surprise you:

*"Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than all the other people from Galilee?" Jesus asked. "Is that why they suffered? Not at all!" Luke 13:2 (NLT)*

One of the easiest things for us to do when we see tragedy is to blame the people that were impacted the most. Jesus understands that and wants to nip it in the bud. He says what they were all thinking- that those Galileans who died had done something to deserve what they got. And Jesus makes it clear- it's not that simple. He tells them the Galileans weren't any worse than all the other people from Galilee. It's interesting that Jesus tells them that tragedy isn't about blame. And it would have been easier to blame someone, wouldn't it? We love to assign blame. And there would have been plenty of the usual suspects to point to. The most obvious is Pilate and let's face it- Pilate was to blame for this. But Jesus doesn't take the easy way out and just tell everyone it was the governor's fault.

It also would have been easy to blame the people who were killed. They must have done something to deserve it, didn't they? And it wasn't only the slaughter of the Galileans in the Temple that everyone was talking about in Jerusalem. There was another disaster that was on everyone's mind as well:

*And what about the eighteen people who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Were they the worst sinners in Jerusalem? No!" Luke 13:4 (NLT)*

The tower of Siloam was part of the wall that surrounded Jerusalem. There was a structural failure of some kind and the tower came down killing 18 people. Jesus points out that there was no blame to lay on the victims in that situation either. But that's hard for us. Why is that? Maybe because if the people who have disaster visit them did something to deserve it maybe that means that we're safe as long as we don't do whatever heinous thing they did to deserve their fate.

But Jesus tells that that's not what's going on here. He doesn't tell them what it is that is going on- He just tells them what's not going on. This isn't about blame. Those Galileans killed in the Temple and the 18 people killed when the tower of Siloam came down didn't do anything especially horrible to deserve what they got. It's not like God looked down and decided they had to go. Basically Jesus is telling them (and us) that sometimes bad things happened to good people for no good reason at all. But that's hard for us because it leaves us with so much uncertainty. So what does Jesus tell them? We'll look at that tomorrow but for

today maybe you and I could spend some time reflecting on what goes through our own minds when we see a tragedy befall someone else. What's your first thought when that happens? Do you immediately start looking for someone to blame? And let's face it sometimes you don't have to look far. Sometimes we can see exactly who we believe is to blame for a tragedy- just like it would have been easy for Jesus to blame Pilate for the slaughter in the Temple or the construction company that built that tower that came down. But Jesus warns us not to fall for the easy way out when we see tragedy.

**Wednesday Reflection:** Yesterday we were looking at what Jesus told the crowd when they asked about the Galileans killed by Pilate in the Temple and the 18 people who died when a tower in Jerusalem collapsed. He started by telling them that tragedy isn't always about blame. In fact blame can be counterproductive because it lets us off the hook from having to give too much thought to what tragedy might mean for each of us. And yet it's human nature to look for someone/something to blame when we see a senseless tragedy.

At one point in Jesus' ministry He and His disciples were walking through the streets of Jerusalem when they came across a man who had been blind since birth. Those kinds of people always make us feel uneasy because we wonder why it happened to them but not to us. We love assigning blame. And so did Jesus' disciples. When the disciples saw the man they asked Jesus whose fault it was that he had been born blind. It was the worldview at the time that God would punish parents for their sin- or even a fetus for his own sin (yes they believed a fetus could sin in utero so heinously that God would strike that fetus blind and cause him to live out his entire life without sight just to teach him a lesson) with birth defects. Jesus puts the kibosh on that idea really quickly:

Jesus said, "You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause- effect here. Look instead for what God can do." John 9:3 (MES)

What did Jesus say? That there's no one to blame. That's not what most tragedy is about. Sure some tragedy can be and that's where wisdom comes in. The Bible will sometimes give the impression that if we do the right thing and make all the right decisions then God will protect us from harm. But the harm that we're told God will protect us from is harm that is brought into our lives by our greatest enemy on this earth- ourselves. I don't know if you ever saw the comic with the guy who is praying, "God strike my greatest enemy with a swarm of bees" at which point a giant swarm of bees comes and starts stinging the guy. The guy immediately says, "perhaps I need to rephrase that prayer?"

Perhaps. Wisdom does protect us from harm that we bring into our lives ourselves. But wisdom cannot and does not protect us from the harm that living in this broken world that is infected with sin and death. Jesus was the wisest man who ever lived and He had plenty of harm in His life. And it wasn't brought on by His own bad decisions. Most of it was brought to Him by other people- some of whom claimed to love Him. So Jesus tells us to stop looking from someone to blame. Ok, then what do we do with ourselves when we see a tragedy that staggers us? Well, Jesus tells the people to stop the blame game and use it as an opportunity to examine their own lives:

Is that why they suffered? Not at all! And you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God. John 13:3 (NLT)

When you are shaken by a current event and you start asking who's to blame Jesus is basically saying, stop it. Stop what you're doing and use that tragedy as a mirror to take a good look at the kind of life you happen to living. Are you proud of the life you're living? Do you like the direction you're headed in? If not what would Jesus' advice be?

Repent.

What does it mean to repent? Well repent is an old English word that doesn't get used much in our modern world outside of religion. But it was used all the time up until just about 100 years ago. What do you think the word means? You can find it in Captain Cook's ship logs and maybe that will help us define it. When Cook sailed into what is now called Cook Inlet he was looking for a northwest passage around North America. He was hoping the Cook Inlet would be it. He sailed in and headed up what is now called the Knik arm. But he soon found out it was a dead end and so he wrote in his ship's logs that they had to "repent". Was he saying they had to ask for forgiveness? Nope. He was saying they had to turn around and go the other way.

That's what it means to repent. To stop going the direction you're headed, turn around, and go in the complete opposite direction. That's what it means to repent. God says when we see a tragedy that leaves us with more questions than answers we should use it as an opportunity to examine our own lives and the direction we have been going. Is it the right direction? Is it taking you where you really want to end up? If not Jesus says then you need to stop, turn around in the opposite direction and start heading in the direction you know you should've been going all along. And when Jesus talks about "perishing" if we don't repent we often think He's simply talking about the final destination of our souls but this is so much more than that. More often than not when Jesus talks about death and perishing He isn't talking about eternity- He's talking about a kind of living death sort of like the zombies from the Walking Dead. He's not only concerned about the final destination of our souls- He is concerned about the condition of our souls while we are still walking this earth.

And what do we do if we thought we had "repented" and then another tragedy comes along and we use it as an opportunity to examine our lives again- rather than just jumping into the blame game- and we find that we've once again gotten WAY off course? What do we do then? Well to answer that let's finish looking at Captain Cook's journeys in the inlet that would eventually bear his name. Remember when he got to the end of the Knik arm he said they had to repent. So they turned around, headed the opposite direction and then thought maybe the other arm of the inlet would take them to a northwest passage. But it didn't as you well know. Instead they hit another dead end and do you know what Captain Cook wrote in his ship's log when that happened? He said we hit another dead end and had to turnagain. And that's how the Turnagain arm of the Cook Inlet came to be named.

So what do we do when we need to repent again (which will happen over and over and over and over and over in your life)? Well just do like Captain Cook did and turnagain.

**Thursday Reflection:** Yesterday we looked at the concept of repentance and how Jesus tells us that when we see a tragedy that shakes us to our core we should react not by looking for who to lay the blame on but rather to use it as an opportunity to examine our

own lives and repent if need be (and if you're anything like me there's plenty of need for repentance in your life). Man that was one heckuva run-on sentence, wasn't it? But before you go judging my sentence structure maybe I should point out that the apostle Paul was also known for his run-on sentences. He also made up lots of words which I think is kind of awesomeriffic. Maybe if the editor in you was starting to see my sentence structures as a tragedy then you should use this moment to examine your own life and possibly repent for something? Maybe not. Maybe I should be the one repenting for daring to compare myself to the apostle Paul and his fantasmagorical way of structuring his sentences and making up new words by combining two already familiar words into one. But I digress (kind of).

Anyways, for the rest of today's reflection and then continuing into tomorrow we're going to look at one my favorite things about God- that He gives second chances when we need them. And if you're anything like me you need them a lot. Even the Old Testament is constantly talking about this second-chance God that we serve:

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)*

How often would you say you need forgiveness for something that required repentance on your part in a given day? Aren't you glad that God's mercies "never come to an end"? That they are "new every morning"? I know I am. It fascinates me that God never seems to get tired of throwing His mercy around. We don't often equate the God of the Old Testament with grace and mercy.

But the Old Testament writers did. Yes, He is also the God of justice and judgment but God's favorite way of referring to Himself in the Old Testament was as the God of mercy and compassion. Did He overlook sin? No. Was He always looking for ways to bring sinners back into the fold and shower them with mercy? Yep. And if you think God does get tired of offering mercy to those who repent when they are shown the error of their ways then you need to re-read the Old Testament. Go ahead, I dare you. And get out a pencil and some paper (or the notes app on your phone) and write down all the times that someone comes to God sincerely and humbly repenting and asking for forgiveness but God refuses them. I don't believe you'll find one instance. And even when His people were unrepentant God is SO patient with them giving them more time than they deserved to come to their senses. In the opening prologue of the book of John this beautiful statement is made:

*From his abundance we have all received, grace upon grace. John 1:16 (ESV)*

Grace upon grace. What it literally says in the original language that the New Testament was written in (Greek) is, grace in place of grace. What's the supposed to mean? It's like standing on the beach and watching a wave come in. One wave comes in at a time but there's always another wave where that one came from. I guess you could say that if you were watching the ocean you'd be seeing "wave in place of wave". They never end. There always is and will always be another wave coming. That's the way it works with God's grace. No matter how many times you sin and then repent there will always be another wave of grace coming right behind the one you needed so desperately yesterday. His grace- like His mercies- are brand new every morning.

At this point many of you reading this might be thinking to yourselves, "but wait a minute. Are you trying to say that we can sin as much as we want and as long as we repent" afterwards then God's grace will keep washing over us and taking away our guilt and shame?" Well, yes. And no. It's not that simple. Is there any end to God's grace and mercy? No, there isn't. But are there consequences to the sin we bring into this world and into our lives? Yes, there are.

You can watch the apostle Paul wrestling with this concept in many of his letters. Well Paul's not wrestling with it, rather the people he's writing to are. Paul keeps talking about the wonderful grace of God that is never ending and there were some people in some churches that were using that as a license to sin and do whatever they wanted. The Roman church had a group of people who thought that meant that the more they sinned the better Jesus looked. And so they had a saying in Rome, "let us sin that grace may abound!" Paul writes to them and in Romans chapter six he deals with this misunderstanding of God's grace and mercy. He tells them that they were freed from the slavery of sin by God's grace and forgiveness and to return to that sin now would be plunging themselves back into slavery to that old way of life. But interestingly he never tells them they're wrong in thinking that the more we sin the more God's grace abounds. He just tells them that if they rush foolishly back into that old way of life, then their lives will once again be dominated by sin and death.

And in Corinth the Christians with that same mind set had another saying. They'd say, "I am allowed to do anything". It was the same idea- because God's grace is like the waves of the ocean then I can do anything I want to do and God will just keep on forgiving me. Paul writes to deal with his misunderstanding and I'd expect Paul to say something like, "No! You can't do anything you want to do. In fact if you do God will toss you out on your can (or whatever the first century equivalent colloquialism would fit here better than "can"). But he doesn't say that. You know what Paul tells them?

You say, "I am allowed to do anything"- but not everything is good for you. You say, "I am allowed to do anything"- but not everything is beneficial. 1 Corinthians 10:23 (NLT)

Paul makes a similar argument to the Corinthians as he made to the Romans. He almost seems to be saying, "ok, maybe you can do anything but be very careful because 'everything' is not good for you." Now I'll give you a disclaimer here- there are a TON of people who are WAY smarter than I am who don't think this is what Paul is saying, but it sure looks like that's what he's saying to me. I know it brings up as many questions (or more) as it does answers but ultimately you'll have to wrestle with this passage and decide for yourself what you think Paul is saying. Because when you stand before God He won't care what I thought of this particular passage of scripture and its meaning- He'll care about that when I stand before Him. But when you stand before Him He'll care about what you thought of this passage of scripture and what you did about it in your own life.

Is God the God of second chances (and 3rd and 4th and 5th and 6th and...)? Yes. Does that mean we get let off the hook on this side of eternity for the things that we do? Nope. That's what I think Paul is getting at in Romans and 1 Corinthians. Tomorrow we'll finish up looking at the God of second chances but for today maybe you and I could spend some time reflecting on the consequences we've seen be unleashed in our lives by some of the decisions

we've made and how we might be able to limit how many of those bad decisions we make in the future.

**Friday Reflection:** We talked yesterday about the God who gives second chances (and 3rd and 4th and 5th and... well you get the picture) but what does that have to do with the passage of scripture we started off this week with from Luke chapter 13? Well you might remember that Luke 13:1-9 is focused on how we should deal with tragedy when it strikes. That we are not to look for someone to blame (even if they would be REALLY easy to find) but instead use it as an opportunity to take a good look at our own lives and if need be to repent. After Jesus tells the people all of those things He tells them a story:

Then Jesus told this story: "A man planted a fig tree in his garden and came again and again to see if there was any fruit on it, but he was always disappointed. Finally, he said to his gardener, 'I've waited three years, and there hasn't been a single fig! Cut it down. It's just taking up space in the garden.' The gardener answered, 'Sir, give it one more chance. Leave it another year, and I'll give it special attention and plenty of fertilizer. If we get figs next year, fine. If not, then you can cut it down.'" Luke 13:6-9 (NLT)

Ok so who's who in this story? I mean the point of the story seems pretty straightforward, doesn't it? If trees don't produce fruit they get cut down to make room for a tree that will. So who is the landowner and who is the gardener (assuming we're the trees)? Well most scholars agree that the landowner is God and the gardener is Jesus. But it kind of sounds like the landowner (God) wants to get rid of a tree and is almost disappointed when the gardener (Jesus) asks for one more chance for the tree (us). But does that sound like the God we've been talking about this week? The God about whom we're told "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases His mercies never come to an end they are new every morning"? Not to me it doesn't.

I don't think Jesus is saying God wants Him to get rid of dead wood that He wants to give a second chance to- because God is the God of second chances. He sent Jesus so that we could get as many second chances as we need. It wasn't Jesus' plan in an effort to foil God from saving us. This was God's plan as well as Jesus' plan. So what's going on here? I think Jesus is painting a picture of what the world would be like without His sacrificial death on the cross that brought our freedom, salvation and redemption. Without that we wouldn't get second chances. Now you might be thinking, but I thought you said God gave second chances in the Old Testament too. Yes, I did. But we're told in the New Testament that the sacrifice of Jesus that flows forward all the way to us 2,000 years later also flowed backwards all the way to Adam & Eve. So God could give second chances even though that's not how satan thought everything would work out. I'm sure satan wondered how God could possibly do that based on the "rules" but it wasn't until the cross that he probably sat, stunned by the beating he took when Jesus hit him with the cross (I'm picturing Tom from the cartoon Tom & Jerry with little stars dancing around his head and a "cuckoo cuckoo" sound reverberating through his brain) and thought, "ohhhhhhhh now I get it. I wish I didn't. But I do."

Yes, God is and was the God of second chances and Jesus was His secret weapon to make the deepest desire of His heart a reality. Nowhere is this more evident perhaps than in the book of Jonah. In the Old Testament book of Jonah God comes to Jonah and tells him to go preach



to the people of Nineveh (Israel's most hated enemy at the time. Asking Jonah to preach to the Ninevites would be like asking someone on the extreme right of the American political spectrum to go and preach to the people of the extreme left of the American political spectrum so that God could save them- and vice versa). Long story short, Jonah didn't want to do that. So Jonah ran. A prophet of God running from an assignment given by the Big Guy Himself. Doesn't sound smart, does it? And yet we do it all the time, don't we?

Anyways Jonah is supposed to go Northeast to Nineveh but instead He gets on a ship and goes Southwest as far as he can- at least that's his plan. But once he's on the ship bound for Tarshish (which would have been in modern Spain) a storm crops up and threatens the ship. Jonah finally fesses up to his shipmates that this danger is all because of him and the only way to save themselves is to toss Jonah overboard. Turns out Jonah would rather be dead than do what God asks him to do. Finally they do toss Jonah into the sea and the storm stops immediately. But Jonah doesn't die (much to his great chagrin I'd imagine). Instead Jonah is swallowed up by a giant fish and for three days Jonah is in the belly of the great fish. Jonah finally repents (there's that word again) and God has the fish vomit Jonah up onto the beach. Which I know sounds gross but when you think about it it's really the lesser of two evils when it comes to how he was getting out of that fish ;o) And it's at that point that we read one of my favorite verses in the entire Old Testament:

*Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time. Jonah 3:1 (ESV)*

Aren't you glad that verse exists? How many times have you needed a second chance (or a 3rd or a 4th or...). I know I've needed too many to keep track of. Thank God we serve a God of second chances and not the God of "3 strikes and you're out!" You even see it with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. After they ate the forbidden fruit and brought sin into the world (along with shame and guilt and regret and anxiety and fear and worry) they heard God and got scared so they hid from Him. Imagine thinking you were going to hide from the Creator of the Universe behind a bush? And yet we also do that all the time, don't we? I mean it may be a metaphorical bush but we still think we can hide from Him. Anyways at that point we read this:

*When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. Then the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" Genesis 3:8-9 (NLT)*

Now God doesn't call out, "where are you?" because He didn't know where Adam was. He knew exactly where Adam was. He just wanted to make sure Adam knew where Adam was. And it might be that today God has put you right where you are reading this very reflection just so He could get you in a quiet spot where you were listening just enough so He could call out to you, "where are you?" Not because He doesn't know where you are. But because He wants to make sure you know where you are.

And if you're not in a good place right now take heart- you serve the God of second chances. Jesus is awesome.