

**GREATER THAN > WK6**  
**“GREATER THAN ANY DISTANCE”**  
**JACK SCHULL**  
**8.10.08 (MAIN SERVICE)**

Intro

*Good morning friends...turn with me too: Psalm 145:3 (we'll start here and see where we end up)*

T today, we're bringing to a close a series we started in July – (greater than)...leaning into the reality that God truly is that → He's GREATER THAN

> our failures

> our doubts

> our hurts

> our past

> our disappointments (He is in any / every way > greater than)

**Psalm 145:3** *the point of this whole series has been for us to lean into truth that God is >*

→ the Hebrew word for great = brings the connotation of 'someone who towers over; who has this towering presence'...that God 'towers' over all other man-made gods, any situation, all circumstances that you and I will ever face...

**GOD is >**

Today: let's explore the reality that... (God is > than any distance)

*(distance is something we can measure, can sense, can see, can determine)*

T we typically measure as the space b/t POINT A - POINT B

How far is it from here to there...? We calculate the distance...

*(place 2 poster boards on stage 'point a/point b')*

Quiz on distances

Q if we left from Tucson – drove to NYC (how far from pt a – pt b?) 2441 miles (google maps)

Q stood on top of empire state bldg – how far down? 1,240 ft (102 stories)

Q stood on the edge of the Grand Canyon – how far down 2 river? 6,000 vertical ft. @ deepest

Q how far is a marathon? 26 miles & 385 yards (set in 1908 olympics/1921 IAAF adopted)

*(as the Olympics have started – let's test your metric measure calculations)*

*1 meter = 3.28 ft. - we know this...*

- 100 meter dash      how many yards is that?      109.36 yards / 328.08 ft.
- 400 meter swim      how many inches is that?      15, 748.03 inches
- 5000 meter race      how many feet?      16, 404.20 ft.

→ *this is where my head began hurting – so we'll stop...*

T distance can be that space b/t PT A – PT B; it can also be a measurement of time; the time it takes to accomplish goals we're seeking to achieve...

How many of you have goals? Sure you do: (it can be as simple as cleaning a room – to finishing a paper or building project...)

Ex: I'm doing a couple weddings coming up – couples are today single; but soon married (every couple has this internal countdown going – calculating the distance left 'til that day)

Ex: we do this with diets = we stand on the scale and say to ourselves, today I weigh this, and on this day (for some it's an imaginary day) - I'll be.... heavier, I mean skinnier

Ex: today I'm in seminary – but next May I'll be a graduate!

T we can measure distance as space b/t pt A – pt B; we have distance b/t now and the finishing of a goal → we can also encounter a sense of distance relationally too? can't we? We've all experienced relational distance...

...Your best friend in jr high, may not be your best friend at the end of high school...

...the relationships we have always seem to be in this flux of proximity...of closeness...

...we have a fall out with a friend and suddenly we describe that relationship as “we're just not that close anymore”

→ Distance can creep into any relationship...

Q let me ask you: have you ever felt like there was a distance b/t you and God? you're stuck at pt A and He's way out there at pt B and you're not sure how it got that way, why it's that way or what the remedy is...

I talk too many who sense that to be reality...

b/c the truth be told: distance can creep into any relationship...

(pause)

(move?)

ST sometimes we like distance – we like the freedom to run, to chase after things in a new direction – out on our own...

everyone who has a toddler or ever watched a toddler – you recognize that we come hard wired to explore...to go our own way...to blaze our own trail.

Calista loves to explore...I remember being in this sporting goods store – we're up by the counter trying to check out and Cali was – I'm not sure how to explain it other than she transformed: into a wild stallion...and she took off running as far away as her little legs could carry her. I had just turned around for a split second and (isn't it amazing how fast those little legs can go?)...suddenly she grew wings and is half-way across the entire store...it's not just her, her brother and sister had the same agenda – WE ALL COME WITH this BUILT IN AGENDA TO WANDER...

But we also want – strong desire for security of being close...whenever Calista gets too far away, she begins to yell “daddy”...calling for that distance to be closed.

T → this duality of wandering and yet wanting to be close ...and it's not just a kid thing – it's a humanity thing...it's not something we outgrow

*Practical examples:*

- God, I want to spend my money how I want, when I want...on what I want...

- God, I want to pursue pleasure how I want, when I want...with whomever I want...  
 - God, I want to live my life! I want to live it how I want too and where I want too...  
 → but yet God, I want you close – when I need you...  
 → I want the security of you close... but yet I really want to wander... *THERE'S THIS TENSION*

The scriptures capture it this way...

### **Isaiah 53:6**

**We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost.**

**We've all done our own thing, gone our own way.**

And God has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong,  
 on him, on him. Isa 53:6 (MSG)

Unpack Isaiah – why he wrote this, king Uzziah – nation of Israel wandering nature and then wanting to be close again...

- How many times we read in 1 & 2 Kings – of the leaders who rose up to lead and followed after God – and others that did evil in the eyes of the Lord
- Uzziah had a long run as a king – led well, but in later years, his heart wandered with pride
- Nation of Israel (time and time again) in scriptures is seen in the reality of their wandering hearts – stray away from God to worship false gods and become entranced by the things of the world around them – only to get so far away...they'd cry out – sometimes even feeling like they were too far gone and they'd give up hope – can't overcome that distance, so they'd wander further off track...

Isaiah is lamenting over this reality – capturing this profound truth of our condition...

Yet - God understands this about us – it's the condition we all have - we wander...that's why Isaiah places this snapshot of reality, within the very chapter (*Isa. 53*) that's all about Jesus – foretelling of what Jesus would do to reconcile – close that distance...it's a beautiful chapter...

b/c we all wander - we want to run – we want to choose our own way...

T in Mark 5 – there is this man...and he's wandered...not sure how he got to this place, he may not even know himself...

### **Mark 5: 2-5**

The region is described for us as the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. In this area, there was a sharp drop off from the mainland to the sea. Caves in this hillside served as tombs...and here is where we find this man...

- Lost all contact with people – become devalued as a person
- Insignificant and isolated
- Tormented and crying out for relieve
- Cutting himself to try to escape the pain
- The chains can't hold him – but he is far from being free
- Distance is all he knows and all he can feel...

He's living in a graveyard – alone, isolated, tormented – total despair...

**Maybe that's where you are: *you're not in a literal graveyard...but***

your graveyard is a big giant house...filled with all sorts of things, but as empty as can possibly be...as you've worked so hard to achieve and acquire – only to realize you're still tormented by not having the peace or contentment you truly desire

Maybe your graveyard is nothing anyone can see – b/c you've cloaked it well – you hide and bury the pain deep inside. You've been cutting – hiding the scars – and just like this guy: you're crying out for relieve...and its still eluding you...

Maybe your graveyard is your career – you sacrificed all, to move it forward and yet your family has been blown up and cracked beyond your repair...you're live your life completely surrounded by people, but totally alone...

Maybe your graveyard is the hamster wheel of busyness – you're a follower of Jesus even, but you can't remember the last time you felt close...so trapped in the hustle of doing – and not able to just be with your Creator – to sense that God might truly be GREATER THAN...the things you face – you're held hostage by your worries and the insecurity

T Most people in Jesus' day would look at this guy in Mk 5 and say the distance is too great...

This guy is so far gone – so much distance ...he couldn't be further away... no hope left!  
(*cliff-hanger pause*)

→ But here's what you gotta understand about God's heart →

- He hated the distance that Israel's wandering created...
- He hates the distance this man is suffering from
- He hates any distance that has isolated you...from Him

→ and B/C God is > any distance – b/c his heart is moved – B/c He so loves...  
He can't just stand by and watch, He has to do something about it...

T the creation story captures this reality...Adam and Eve are created – have all of God they want, conditions could not be more pristine

→ but there is this looming choice...follow God's way or choose their own way – and their hearts begin to wander...and their wandering leads to a decision of destruction...

*-(if we're honest, we're not any different) been there, done that...bought the t-shirt...you have too*

They go their own way – wander and stray – and all of the sudden their entire world is shattered...all humanity gets impacted → **this invasion of relational distance creeps in...**

### **Gen. 3:8**

→ they heard – and they hid...1<sup>st</sup> time this separation had been felt, 1<sup>st</sup> moment of guilt, 1<sup>st</sup> moments of stress and worry, 1<sup>st</sup> occurrence of brokenness and hurt → distance can creep into any relationship...

Q What did Isaiah say: “we've all wandered, done our own thing, chosen our own way...”

**Let me unpack this a bit:**

Remember: Gen 1-11 has these patterns and paradigms of great theological significance & if you miss them, you can miss the point... taint the view of how and what God intends for us...

Gen 1—creation & relationship of God and Man – we have purpose & responsibility

Gen 2 – relationship b/t humanity, created to need and to be in relationships w/ one another

Gen 4 – relationship of what it means to worship – how we're to worship

Gen 3 → you have to catch what transpires about our condition and God's intentions

Q let me ask you: what is the 1<sup>st</sup> question posed by God in scripture?

**Gen. 3:8-9**

**It's not:**

- What did you do?
- How did this happen?
- Why did you do this?
- Why didn't you listen to me?

**→ It's: 'where are you?'**

→ a highly relational question → God recognizes that there has been distance created and He's wanting to restore the proximity – to reconcile...

**b/c: God is > than the distance we create...**

Our wiring to wander – is not a surprise to God. He knows us better than we think...

**T turn with me to Psalm 139**

We've spent some time looking into the life of David in this series. This psalm, unlike any other – captures some profound spiritual truths. **This is David's theological thesis on how intimately he/we are known by our Creator...it captures so much of who God is and His nature...**

It's probably his most comprehensive view of God from the psalms.
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We can learn so much about our Creator from this Psalm:

- V 1-6: we see God knows all things (omniscient) – therefore He knows everything about us; He's dialed into us (He's not disengaged)
- V 7-12: God is everywhere (omnipresent) – therefore we can't escape his unrelenting love (He's not distant)
- V 13-18: God is all-powerful (omnipotent) – he created us wonderfully, is in control of all our days and sovereignly working his plans (He's not disinterested)

*Unpack and read some of these verses...?*

David says things like:

- Before a word is on my lips you know it – You are familiar with all my ways...
- If I went to the highest of mtn. – you're already there
- If I go to the other side of the oceans – you're there
- You created me – you've searched me and know me

T we want to be close – but yet we really like to wander –and God knows us – knows us better than we realize...  
 He is always initiating the approach, His heart is always inclined toward proximity – to close the distance we create

*(stage signs of point A and point B - begin moving the signs to center stage together – move ½ way to center)*

Jesus came to show that He is > any distance – that he's always thinking about how to close that distance – always focused on reconciling wandering hearts...

That's why the gospel of Mark records chapter 4 – verse 35

**Mark 4:35**

*Return to finish the story of Mk 5*

-so, Jesus has a great ministry going...people are flocking around him...so many that he has to preach from a boat to the crowds on the shore – things are going great – notoriety is getting out...

Yet, in the midst of the crowd – Jesus is thinking about the 1...1 on the other side of the lake  
 No one else is thinking about him

No one else is aware of him – or even cares...

No one in Christ's day would have given him any hope – he's too far gone...

Yet Jesus said: **Mark 4:35**

- Jesus is the only one aware and tuned into that guy
- Jesus is the only one who thinks he's worth crossing through a storm for
- Jesus gets in that boat for that ONE GUY
  - *And Jesus still does that today, friends!*

→ this guy: Probably never thought he'd ever show up on God's radar screen; that he'd be worth crossing over for; that he would matter to someone like Jesus...**and Jesus proves him wrong!**

*let them finish reading the story on your own...*

This guy grabs a hold of Jesus and he is reconciled to God, he's set free from the torment that plagued him, he's given a new purpose and mission in life – he's changed, transformed, healed, and given hope! He's forever different...

B/C JESUS IS > ANY DISTANCE

T some of you today, you've been wandering – you're at a place you never thought you'd be – didn't realize how much distance had crept in...and Jesus is tugging at your heart right now – announcing his invitation to grab a hold of him. God's active right now in your mind – he's moving your heart to desire being close to him. Scripture describes God's activity as that nudging within your spirit – his still small voice...

Even now, He's deepening your desire to want to be close (God's the giver of that desire)  
 Even now, he's helping you awake to the reality of the emptiness you've felt from time-to-time – you sit here and had all these lofty goals/dreams and now you're realizing that they just don't seem to matter like they did...they're not leading to the life you really want...

And if you're honest – you'd say “I feel like I'm treading water – and I'm really tired.”

You're spiritually drowning – and yet there is a rising part within you that wants to be rescued...

Story: *Tay in pool...*

When my son was about 3-4 yrs old. We had this community pool we went too. great day for a swim...only ones at the pool – all to ourselves. Well, play for awhile – have to use the restroom...prop open the door with my flipflop – help him, finishing washing my hands – then hear this splash in the pool. Don't instantly think anything about it – then this sense comes over me – we're the only ones at the pool...I go running out of the room, across the cool deck – doing a survey across the area for Taylor – he's nowhere to be seen...run up to the edge and there he is under water – eyes as big as saucers – looking up at me.

You know what I didn't do in that moment:

- I didn't lecture him about pool safety
- I didn't ask him why he did such a thing when he knew he couldn't swim on his own
- I didn't question his loyalty and obedience to me his father

→ I ran across that cool deck – asking one question: where are you? I was searching...

Then I jumped in after him – rescue him without hesitation!

→ he grabbed a hold of me and I made everything alright! We surfaced – we were very close – and we still are...

Conclusion:

Maybe for you today: you'd say – that's me! I've wandered – I'm hiding – I'm crying out – I'm drowning...

→ and what you have to understand about God is: He's closer than you think  
(put signs together and flip over to opposite side: sign now says: *closer than you think*)

I'm going to ask Larry to lead us in a song – and I'd like for you to ask yourself some questions – listen to the words of this song – allow them to wash over you – listen for God's voice nudging your spirit deep within ... if you're here today and that's you – in a moment I'm going to give you a chance to grab a hold of Jesus – to have your life and living forever changed

...*b/c he's closer than you think!*

Song #1                      I'll be here

Gospel/invitation – prayer time with them...

What Taylor did in that moment – was he reached out and grab a hold of me...and that's what the bible states that each of us must do...that God is > than any distance – he desires proximity, but he won't force or coerce a relationship with anyone – we have to choose him...

So maybe you're here and today, you like to do that – grab a hold of hope, a reconciled life Jesus crossed the distance b/t heaven and earth – just for you!

To grab ahold of him – it's as simple as a prayer – choosing Him

God, I know I'm a wanderer at my core  
 I've separated my self from you and I can't get back to ya  
 Today – I place my faith in what Jesus did for me  
 That he died on the cross – that he rose again  
 so I could be reunited & reconciled with you  
 Thank you for coming into my life –  
 Thank you for being greater than my distance  
 Lead me forward and help me to follow you...

→ Now, with eyes closed – if you prayed that prayer would you just lift up your hand so I can celebrate with you...

--Amen --

John 1:12

We've got 1 final song we're going to join in together today – celebrating that we have a God who is > - that there are these that have joined His family...

→ if you prayed that prayer – that was you today, I want to invite you today to act upon it...to share that with the friend that brought you – I'd love to celebrate with you – to quickly pray with you (which is very difficult to do in such a big group) → so I'm going to ask you to join me over here by the doors – I want to personally invite you b/c I want to cheer you on and celebrate with you – I've got a bible for ya

Now I could make us all stand here and invite you down – but I'm going to ask all of us to stand – we're going to sing – but for you that made that decision today – you slip out during this song and come meet me. You're at point A – I've got point B (grab sign)...come meet me please – we're not going to linger, I won't come back up here to plead with ya – one song then we're out...don't leave here today without having us celebrate with you!

We'll sing you slip out right now – come meet me down here – I'll wait for you...

## Song #2

### Backstage:

Can I trust you God? You said yes to God today → and you'll never regret it. There isn't one person in Scripture or one follower of Jesus I know who has ever regretted doing what you just did. I am so proud to be in the family of God with you!

We just wanted to celebrate with you – rejoice with you. I want to encourage you any way I can! We as a church really believe in this calling of following Jesus isn't meant to be a solo pursuit – so we eat, sleep and breath community here! I want so much to be able to encourage you and you encourage me, together. So here's what I'm going to ask:

- 1 – I want to write you a note this week (so I'm going to need some info from you)
- 2 – starting in July (July 1) we're going to have a NEXT STEP class – with all of you who just made this commitment to God – it's a few wks long and will help answer questions, journey together in following Jesus...get you to know one another and connected here at Casas so we can journey life with you!

Turn it over to Ray and Carol!.... pray for them together in the back room!

Extra notes:

So he sets in motion a rescue...

T I love rescue stories, did you hear about Wesley Autrey...he's the 50 yr old construction worker in New York City...

After entering a New York City subway station in the first week of 2007, 19-year-old film student Cameron Hollopeter suffered a seizure while waiting for a train. As his body convulsed out of control, the young man stumbled down the platform and fell onto one of the tracks—directly in the path of an inbound train. Fortunately, a 50-year-old construction worker named Wesley Autrey noticed his distress.

Standing on the platform with his two young daughters, Autrey realized that nobody else in the station was going to help. According to later interviews, he decided: "I'm the only one to do it." Placing himself in great danger, Autrey jumped down onto the tracks and grabbed hold of Hollopeter. With only seconds to spare, he rolled with the younger man into a drainage trough cut between two tracks. An instant later, the train cars thundered over both of them with only inches to spare. Amazingly, neither man was injured.

In the ensuing days, Autrey was rewarded handsomely for his bravery. Mayor Michael Bloomberg presented him the city's highest award for civic achievement, calling him "a great man—a man who makes us all proud to be New Yorkers." Autrey was also given \$10,000 from Donald Trump, a trip to Disney World, and a year's supply of MetroCards from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. His boss even bought him a "hero" sandwich.

He appeared on some Talk shows..., he is modest about his new status as the Hero of Harlem. "I just did it because I saw someone in distress," he told reporters. "Someone needed help."

*Van Morris and Sam O'Neal; sources: Verena Dobnik, "NYC Subway Savior Showered with Gifts," Associated Press (1-4-07); Jill Gardiner, "Subway Hero Gets the Red-Carpet Treatment," The New York Sun (1-5-07)*

T rescue stories move us...they inspire us. **The thing about rescues that makes them so amazing and memorable is that those needing rescued are completely unable to help themselves.**

The scriptures describe our wandering in this light! Unable to help ourselves...unable to make it from Point A where we are -- too Point B where God is... So, we're in need of God to close the distance that we created... (God's never content with us to remain at point A by ourselves)

**This is a before and after picture...**

**BEFORE-** (vv. 2-6)

- a.) Unclean- (v. 2)
- b.) Unsettled- (v. 3)
- c.) Uncontrollable- (v. 4)
- d.) Unhappy- (v. 5)
- e.) Unstable- (v.6)
- f.) Unclothed- (v. 15)

→ then Jesus steps in...he closes the distance

→ this man probably never felt like he'd be on God's radar screen...but He was on it brighter than he ever believed possible (and so are you)...

**AFTER-** (vv. 15-20)

- a.) Restoration-Reconciliation (v. 15)
  - Civilized
  - Clothed
  - Collected

Mark 5:1-

T

Conclusion

Song #1

I'll be here

Gospel/invitation – prayer time with them....

## Song #2

Sharing in the backstage:

T

You said yes to God today → and you'll never regret it. There isn't one person in Scripture or one follower of Jesus I know who has ever regretted doing what you just did. I am so proud to be in the family of God with you!

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