Lost Without a Trace
by Alyson R. Quinn

MALAYSIA – The world may never know what happened to Malaysia Airlines Flight 370. The aircraft, a Boeing 777, left Kuala Lumpur International Airport at 12:41 a.m. local time, en route to Beijing, China, with 12 Malaysian crew members and 227 passengers representing 14 different countries. Within 20 minutes, the plane, traveling at 542 miles per hour, had reached its cruising altitude of 35,000 feet. Forty minutes into the flight, the plane’s experienced captain, Zaharie Ahmad Shah, or perhaps the co-pilot, Fariq Abdul Hamid, said “good night” to the air traffic control crew. Radar pings showed that afterward, the plane made an abrupt change in course over the Gulf of Thailand. After that, nothing is known for certain.

A Boeing 777 has a 200-foot wingspan. It is 209 feet long, and it can carry 45,000 gallons of fuel. It should not be easy to lose, but after its final radio communication, MH370 and the 239 souls aboard disappeared as if into thin air.

For weeks, a team of searchers from many countries spared no effort or expense to find the missing plane and its passengers. Searchers have used satellites, an American P-8 spy plane, additional aircraft, ships, and even a British submarine to try to locate the plane somewhere in the Indian Ocean, where it is believed the plane would have crashed.

The hunt for MH370 has reportedly turned into the largest search and rescue operation in history. A few satellite images showed debris that might possibly have come from the plane, but on the date this newspaper was published, nothing had been discovered. Without hard evidence, some have speculated that the plane was hijacked – that it did not appear on radar because the supposed hijackers wanted to make it disappear by shutting off its communications systems.

A Hopeless Search
The Bible says that God has undertaken a similar search mission, looking for someone – anyone – who has a pure heart and does right. In Psalm 14, the writer says, “The Lord looks down from heaven on the entire human race; he looks to see if anyone is truly wise, if anyone seeks God. But no, all have turned away; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not a single one!” (Psalm 14:2-3, NLT)

Like the authorities searching for MH370, God combs the globe and finds nobody who meets His holy, perfect standard. Not you. Not me. Everyone – in prison or free – does plenty of wrong. We are all lost, adrift in the sea of our own sin, without a trace of hope.

But the Bible also says that God will never rest content until He finds us. He does whatever it takes to rescue us, even when all hope seems lost. In chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells this story: “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the 99 others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’”

Found at Last
Saul of Tarsus, another man we read about in the Bible, was one of those “lost sheep.” He thought he was perfect, because he had a spotless family pedigree, he was well-educated, and he never broke the law. But his heart reeked of pride and hatred, until God found him. Saul became a new man with a new name: Paul. He realized that all his outward respectability was a meaningless front, and he left everything behind for what he called “the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” (Philippians 3:8, NLT) He became one of the leaders of the early Christian Church, and he wrote a large chunk of the New Testament.

God is a seeker. He wants to find you, wherever you are. He spared no expense – not even the life of His Son, Jesus – in order to find you. At every step in your life, He has been tracking your movement, whispering your name, waiting for the day you would turn around and see Him pursuing you so He can pour out His mercy, grace, peace, and hope on you. The only question is: Are you ready to be found? ■

Search and Rescue
Our wandering and wrongdoing lead us far away from God, but He does not wait for us to somehow find our way back to Him, or do enough good deeds to make ourselves acceptable to Him. He shows us mercy. He goes out of His way to find us when we are unable to find our own way home. He only asks that we repent of, or turn our backs on, our sin, and believe in Jesus for forgiveness and new life. You can start right now by having a conversation with God. You can use words like the ones below. The important thing is to be sincere:
God, on my own I would be lost without a trace. I cannot save myself. Thank You for coming to find me. I want to turn my back on my old way of thinking and behaving. Forgive me for the wrong I've done. Make me a new person, and give me Your Holy Spirit to guide me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Being found by God is just the beginning of a lifelong journey of healing and restoration with Him.