

God^{for} *Everyone*



Is there a God?

Does He care about me?

Who am I?

Why am I here?

What am I supposed to do?

Does it really matter?

Heather Edon

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Chapter 1

~Welcome ~

“But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe.”

- C.H.Spurgeon

The Heart of God revealed ~

My Take ~

My Disclaimer ~

C.S. Lewis’ appraisal ~

Your Challenge ~

Your Thoughts ~

Some Activities ~

The Heart of God revealed ~

Know what’s in the heart of God?

- You.



That's right; **You** are in the heart of God. God knows your name, your weight (aggh!), your history, your hurts, and your heart. God knows what makes you tick. He knows what you ate for breakfast this morning. He knows what you love and what you hate. And, He knows how you got that way. He knows your parents, and siblings, and friends. He knows the dog who greeted you on your way to school every day, and the stuffed bear you cuddled with to dry your tears. He knows the great job or friend He plans to give to you next year. He knows when and where you were born, and when and how you'll die. He knows how many hairs are on your head, (and on your knuckles!). He knows what you want, and even more importantly He knows what you *need*.

So welcome to the heart of God - revealed.

I know God's heart, because I'm in it too! I've been exploring it for decades and now the Lord has asked me to help Him show you His heart.

Will you come with me on a journey into the heart of God? I can promise that you'll find yourself there, and many, many, fulfilling surprises. Honestly, you'll find some disturbing ones too, but don't let the land-mines get in your way. We're on a journey together, and I'll point out the land mines, as we walk *around* them! You get to decide later whether you want to de-activate (or explode!) those.

My Take ~

Whenever we talk about God, we have to realize that we are coming from a perspective. Sometimes we name that perspective "recovery" or "rose-colored glasses" or "dysfunctional." Usually, we name that perspective with a religious title, like Mormon or Muslim, Hindu or Zoroastrian, Evolutionary or Heinz-57. I come from a Western Judeo-Christian perspective. That means that my perspective on God comes through a history of Judaism that went west and became the Christianity that haunts America today. I've come through the "rose-colored glasses" into the "recovery" and now I'm exploring "freedom." **We're all "dysfunctional!"**

Welcome Home

By Tammy Trent

I was taken back when You took me in
Just to wipe my tears away
You made no demands chose not to
blame
Though I knew You had the right to
And I saw the years I wasted
Searching everywhere in vain
Finding nothing to believe in
Until I finally heard you say

Welcome Home My mercy's waiting
Welcome Home to open arms
There's no shame in your returning
Though you may have wandered far
Welcome Home

That was years ago so far away
At an altar on my knees
But I can still recall like yesterday
How Your love forever changed me
Oh I see how You've been faithful
Though I've often caused you pain
And I've learned you won't forsake me
When I need to hear you say
Welcome Home ...

My Disclaimer ~

This book is not presented as the definitive work on or about God – assuming that anyone could *totally* understand or define God. It is presented only as an invitation to explore God and to gain meaning from what we have discovered about God to date. Theology is simply the study of what we know about God. It is an on-going work. **Every time you pray, meditate, read scriptures or any sacred book, attend religious services, or discuss God or the meaning of life with someone, you are dealing in theology** – you are entering into the discussion.

C.S. Lewis' appraisal ~

From atheist to preeminent 20th century Christian theologian; the beloved English author of the Chronicles of Narnia, Professor Clive Staples Lewis described the situation this way:

“Theology means “the science of God,” and I think any man who wants to think about God at all would like to have the clearest and most accurate ideas about Him which are available. You are not children: why should you be treated like children?

In a way I quite understand why some people are put off by Theology. I remember once when I had been giving a talk to the R.A.F., an old, hard-bitten officer got up and said, “I’ve no use for all that stuff. But, mind you, I’m a religious man too. I *know* there’s a God. I’ve *felt* Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery. And that’s just why I don’t believe all your neat little dogmas and formulas about Him. To anyone who’s met the real thing they all seem so petty and pedantic and unreal!”

Now in a sense I quite agreed with that man. I think he had probably a real experience of God in the desert. And when he turned from that experience to the Christian creeds, I think he really was turning from something real, to something less real. In the same way, if a man has once looked at the Atlantic from the beach, and then goes and looks at a map of the Atlantic, he also will be turning from something real to something less real: turning from real waves to a bit of colored paper. But here comes the point. The map is admittedly only colored paper, but there are two things you have to remember about it. In the first place, it is based on what hundreds and thousands of people have found out by sailing the real Atlantic. In that way it has behind it masses of experience just as real as the one you could have from the beach; only, while yours would be a single isolated glimpse, the map fits all those different experiences together. In the second place, if you want to go anywhere, the map is absolutely necessary. As long as you are content with walks on the beach, your own glimpses are far more fun than looking at a map. But the map is going to be more use than walks on the beach if you want to get to America.

Now Theology is like the map. Merely learning and thinking about the Christian doctrines, if you stop there, is less real and less exciting than the sort of thing my friend got in the desert. Doctrines are not God: they are only a kind of map. But the map is based on the experience of hundreds of people who really were in touch with God-experiences compared with which any thrills or pious feelings you or I

are likely to get on our own way are very elementary and very confused. And secondly, if you want to get any further, you must use the map. You see, what happened to that man in the desert may have been real, and was certainly exciting, but nothing comes of it. It leads nowhere. There is nothing to do about it. In fact, that is just why a vague religion – all about feeling God in nature, and so on – is so attractive. It is all thrills and no work; like watching the waves from the beach. But you will not get to Newfoundland by studying the Atlantic that way, and you will not get eternal life by simply feeling the presence of God in flowers or music. Neither will you get anywhere by looking at maps without going to sea. Nor will you be very safe if you go to sea without a map.

In other words, Theology is practical: especially now. In the old days, where there was less education and discussion, perhaps it was possible to get on with a very few simple ideas about God. But it is not so now. Everyone reads, everyone hears things discussed; consequently, if you do not listen to Theology that will not mean that you have no ideas about God. It will mean that you have a lot of wrong ones - bad, muddled, out-of-date ideas. For a great many of the ideas about God which are trotted out as novelties today, are simply the ones which real Theologians tried centuries ago and rejected. To believe in the popular religion of modern England is retrogression – like believing the earth is flat.”¹

Your Challenge ~

Everyone has notions about what they believe or don't believe about God. That's their theology. We can choose to let Hollywood and the evening news determine our theology; trusting in others' opinions, or we can begin to study and make our own informed decisions about what we are going to believe.

I love Wm. Paul Young's appraisal of the problem in the runaway best-seller *The Shack*, where God explains Divinity:

“I am what some would say ‘holy, and wholly other than you.’ The problem is that many folks try to grasp some sense of who I am by taking the best version of themselves, projecting that to the nth degree, factoring in all the goodness they can perceive, which often isn't much, and then call *that* God. And while it may seem like a noble effort, the truth is that it falls pitifully short of who I really am. I'm not merely the best version of you that you can think of. I am far more than that, above and beyond all that you can ask or think.”

It is my prayer that you will be inspired and challenged by this book to consider what you believe and the possibilities that are presented here. I can't promise that all your questions will be answered in this book. It is just a practical, working introduction to a topic beyond human exploration, of a personality beyond human definition. **This book is**

¹ *Mere Christianity*, and also in *The Joyful Christian*, 127 readings by C.S. Lewis.

simply an invitation to join in the exploration of perhaps the most important journey any of us can take in learning more about our world - Finding out about the personality who made it – for YOU; the personality who wants you to know that - God.

Welcome to the journey of attempting to understand a world beyond knowing, and a God beyond understanding. Welcome home, to the place you already were, even if you didn't know it. You'll see.

*Your Thoughts ~
Journal your thoughts while reading this introduction.*

*Note the Date:
(You'll be glad you did later!)*

Some Activities ~

Consider adapting an open attitude toward God ~ Three things you can do to move in that direction:

1. Open your mind and heart to God.

At middle-age now, I have found that most of the things I've been terribly proud of in the past, embarrass me terribly now. Remember the huge bell-bottom pants many of us strutted around in?! I've thought I knew about life. I've thought I understood the world or at least my part in it. With every passing year I discover more things I had wrong; more ways that I was reading the signs around me backwards or not at all. One of the best things I've done over the years has been learning to acknowledge this fact and open my mind and my heart up to God. Admitting I don't have all the answers somehow opens me up to new answers. When I stop telling God what needs to be done, and look at what *is happening* around me, I can learn and grow and participate. Most importantly for us as miniature control freaks, we need to give God some breathing room. Take The Holy One out of the box we have Him in and allow God to reveal Himself to us as Divine. Could the maker of the universe have really flooded the whole world? Could The Almighty have really plagued Egypt and set over a million people free to wander a desert for forty years? Why would Divinity choose to reveal Himself to us tiny people on this tiny planet not even in the middle of the universe by becoming one of us? Could this Infinite Creator really be interested in ME?

2. Getting more personal, ask yourself "What are my current assumptions about God?" "How did I get them?" Most of us see God initially through the lens of our parent's behaviors; after all, they were our first gods. Was your Mom a control freak – scheduling every moment of your day, and every plan for your life? Did your Dad discipline you severely for every infraction of the rules? If so, your god is probably a demanding, menacing, taskmaster. Any chance your subconscious expectations of God might be at all skewed, based on some of the imperfect people from your past?

3. As you consider these new thoughts about who God could really be, if you catch yourself dismissing an idea easily, reconsider. Remember we all begin to approach God thinking small thoughts. Just because you have a new idea doesn't make it wrong, if it's big and bizarre – could it be other-worldly? Really ponder it for just a few extra minutes before you dismiss it.

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

~ About God ~

“Where I found truth, there found I my God, who is the truth itself.”
- Augustine.

Chapter 2

Who is God?

“The greatest and most unusual thing about Christianity is that it allows any Human being to stand face-to-face before God without fear.”
-Morton Kelsey in Dreams: a way to listen to God.

Introduction ~

Somewhere to start ~

What is God? ~

God is something like us ~

Some of God’s characteristics ~

Some of God’s desires ~

Some of God’s names ~

Introduction ~

Have you ever had a friend introduce you to another friend?

“Kathy, I’d like you to meet Vikki. I know you two will enjoy each other - you’re so much alike!” Often your friend has told you in advance about the person they want to introduce you to. “She’s 5’ 10” tall, normal build, and very athletic. She loves hockey, like you do. I met her in the gym working out about 5 years ago. She’s married and has 2 kids.” This is how we all start any relationship – with only some basic information. Then over time, we fill in the blanks with our own observations and experiences. That is what I have to offer to you in this book.

“Precious person, I’d like to introduce you to God.”

It’s the divine characteristics that follow. They’ve been collected, researched, tested, and experienced for millennia. Now you get the complete introduction -

~ God is Real ~

“There are only two things in life of which I am absolutely certain; that *there is a God*, and that *I am not it*,”² the rest is a mixture of conjecture [guesses] and trust from a human standpoint. The good news is that our lives need not be based only on our human standpoint. God wants to be involved!

~ There is a God ~

I am absolutely certain that there is a God because I have met Him. I recall the divine moments in my own life when the natural world around me vibrated with supernatural life and energy and love. The natural world was at peace in a way that emanated energy, pulsating with richness and joy from every direction - perhaps every dimension! I was caught up in the ecstasy of the moment and desired nothing and no one beyond this present moment. It was much more than a just a connection with a presence. It was as if the entire cosmos were breaking in on a moment between me and God, or as if God were bringing all of Divinity into my humanity, and flooding me with awareness, openness, and beauty. I wasn't scared, and I wasn't overwhelmed. I was in *awe*. I was at peace that passes understanding. I was in the presence of a mysterious God who clearly loved *me* – to expend such energy into this small moment, and allow me to bear witness to it. In those fleeting moments, there is no room for worries, doubt, or fear. I am too filled with awe, and peace, and love-of-God for any negativity. Those moments have come to me alone and in groups. They have come at home, and abroad. They have come to me and to many, many other people. These are the moments that God and I connected most closely.

My first and favorite experience with God's presence was before I was a teenager. We were on a family camping trip in Big Sur California and the family was at the campground. I wandered off into the woods alone. As I headed into the deepening forest it became quiet and I could no longer hear the noise of human commotion. I found a big rock that seemed unusually inviting and I crawled up on top of it. Instead of the usual childlike actions of standing atop the rock, pounding my chest, and feeling like 'king of the mountain' (where a sense of conquering nature is involved); I just sat and became part of the nature that was around me. Maybe the first step in maturing – I was just one part of and with my surroundings. The world did not revolve around me. I was involved with the world. Birds chirped. Wind rustled the leaves. The air had depth and a substantial quality. I had been cool in the moist coastal breeze, and the rock was bathed in a circle of sunlight. As the warmth penetrated my body I felt it begin to penetrate my soul. Suddenly I was aware of being part of a greater world than I had ever felt before (and have only felt very occasionally since). I looked around somehow expecting the birds to talk to me and the critters to come running up, like a Disney movie. They didn't of course, but I was uniquely aware that I was not alone. I could almost feel the moss on the rocks and trees growing and giving out oxygen for me, contributing their tones to the rich, silent symphony. I could almost touch our connectedness. I could almost hear a song of invitation to join in some dance I'd been missing. The dance seemed to be gracefully swirling around me with the caress of the wind and the pulse of the sounds of my heart beating in time with nature's cadence. My heart wasn't alone and I knew it. I was no longer cold or hungry or tired or even curious. I was at peace. I wanted to get up and dance with this newly perceived music and energy, but I chose to

² Quote from movie "Rudy"

sit and absorb it. I didn't want to risk disturbing the peace of the joy I was suddenly a part of. I just wanted to bask in this dimension of grace. I felt a whisper of a voice welcoming me to a world I had been in and not understood. Welcoming me into a heart I had been rambling in rudely and blindly (like a bull in a china shop!). That was the first time I understood some of the depth of God's heart toward me. The profound inclusiveness, the complete belonging, the hint of a role I had to play in a drama I didn't know I'd auditioned for, (but was thrilled to discover I'd already gotten the part); **This was a moment that convinced me beyond a doubt that there is a God.**

~ I am not It ~

The "I am not it" part was learned trying to recreate such moments and finding a total inability to do so. I cannot control my own schedule, let alone any of the events happening around me! I am not God. Divinity is something other than me. I cannot control God! God breaks in on us *as He desires* with creativity, humor, love, and comfort that defy my human ability to communicate.

Somewhere to start ~

Many people will point out that to know God you must *experience* God. Talk about God is simply *talk* – it's not GOD. This is True. But God is also the "Word-made-flesh" according to the New Testament Scriptures³. So, needing a starting point for this introduction, we will start with words describing God - hoping those will encourage you to desire to experience God more fully ... in God's time. Many of the words about God that you will read here are the historical record of many individuals experience of God. Each unique glimpse of God has contributed more information fleshing out our picture of the unseen. Like Lewis' map in the last chapter, all these glimpses combine to take us farther than our own experience alone can take us.

~ Creator ~

Since we have to start somewhere, the beginning is always a good place! **According to the Scriptures God is the eternal, pre-eminent power, and creator of the universe.** As such, God created the sun and planets, the earth and all that it includes, and all life that inhabits earth - as an expression of God's Creativity. All that can be experienced with the senses (and much beyond that!) has been created by God. The first words in the Scriptures tell us this:

"In the beginning *Elohim* [Gods] created the heavens and the earth."⁴

³ "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." - John 1:14

⁴ Genesis 1:1

~ Plural ~

This one sentence tells us much more about God! Not only is He creator, but **God is a plurality**. In Hebrew *Elohim* breaks down as *El* meaning “mighty” or “strong”, and the *him* ending is plural indicating three or more. OK, so right off the bat we know that God is powerful and has multiple personalities, facets, or aspects! In Deuteronomy 6:4 the Hebrew Scriptures say “Our God is One God.” The “one” is the Hebrew word *echad* meaning “united one,” as in “altogether.” Even plainer is Genesis 3:22 where God is speaking and says “Behold the man has become like one of us.” From that I gather God talks to Himself!

Looking up the scriptural reference:

In the Bible, the Torah, and the Qur’an, the word is the book name. The chapters are the first number and the verse in that chapter follows the colon. So for this reference you would look in The Bible in the book called Deuteronomy, in Chapter 6 verse 4.

~ A Relationship ~

God can be well-defined in theological [the study of God] terms as a relationship: **God the Father in relationship with God the Son, in relationship with the God the Holy Spirit** (hence why He talks to Himself!). Three revealed aspects of One God, much like facets of a cut diamond, or the three connected lobes of a clover leaf, the three states of water -solid, liquid, and gas, or the three indivisible aspects of humans – body, soul, and spirit.⁵

We see this relationship reflected in the different aspects of God participating in creation. In Genesis 1:2-3 we have “**the Spirit** of God moving over the surface of the waters. Then **Father** God said, ‘*Let there be light*’; and there was light.” Colossians 1:16-17 specifies that in **Jesus Christ** all things were created; in heaven and on earth, and in Him all things hold together. These verses give us a hint at the unified efforts of God in the work of creation. The Holy Spirit hovered around preparing the way, God the Father said “do it,” and the Son made it happen and holds it together. Three aspects of One-God creating together: Father God, Holy Spirit, and Son Jesus Christ. This relationship is called the Trinity, or the God-head.

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Revelation 3:1 tells us of the seven Spirits of God that surround the Throne.

The number seven represents perfection.

Do you suppose that only these three Spirits of God are currently revealed to us? It takes all of our lifetime to comprehend the Trinity. Do you suppose that all of eternity is required to come to know the other four?

I saw this relationship example in my own life recently when our trailer-tire separated from the wheel. It took all three Edons to fix it. My daughter drove the truck up onto the lifts. I held the nut on one side while my husband turned the bolt on the other side. Together, we had that tire changed in 5 minutes. Alone, it would have been a nearly impossible job.

⁵ 1 Thess. 5:23 “may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete.”

It is perhaps this relational aspect that motivated God to create humanity, in the image of Divinity; creatively continuing to create, and relationally adding more to love - as an expansion and expression of Deity. I relate to this desire for I remember when my husband and I had been married for five years; we were happily married, but something was missing. We wanted more to our relationship. Holidays lacked the enthusiasm I remembered from growing up as a child. We needed that wide-eyed wonder back in our lives; we needed children!

It would seem to be this relational aspect of the Trinity which motivated God's self-revelation to creation, for God walked with Adam and Eve in their original home, the Garden of Eden. **God wants to be known and loved**; therefore God has gone to great lengths of self-revelation (which I will review in Chapter 4, God's Self-Revelation). Just as parents talk and sing to their babies in utero so the baby will recognize their voices at birth; God wants to be known and loved by His creation. God has a completely fulfilling relationship with Himself, and wants to expand that joy to include a relationship with you!

What is God?

~ Spirit ~

Ever felt the wind on your face, the energy all around you, smelled the moisture in the air, and known that a storm was coming? God is like that. **You can't see divinity but you can feel it in a very unique way.** By fitting together hints that are all around you, such as; feeling the unseen wind and knowing it has power even when it feels so gentle; and perceiving energy around you in the air and the movement of trees and birds; together with the sweet smell of rain and your experience that when these things



happen storms come; all this makes you aware of an unseen presence. Or what about the times you're sitting at your desk and you feel a presence behind you and turn to find someone standing there. God is like that. When we are connected to Him we feel and see the clues to His existence everywhere. **But we have to be looking and making an effort, to "see" God.**

Just like this picture – do you see Jesus' face? Once you see it you'll always see it!

It is this presence and energy that we don't know where it comes from or where it is going, that we call spirit. God is Spirit: other-worldly, perhaps other-dimensional, non-physical, and not-limited by time and space. God is therefore non-definable and un-containable; a bigger and more complex being than we will ever be able to comprehend.

Just because something or someone is beyond comprehension doesn't mean that it's not worth the try. Here we are making the attempt! Here we are trying to comprehend God.

That is true of us too!
Knowing my name, history,
and physical description does not mean that you know me.
Even those who know me swear they don't know me sometimes!

God is something like us ~

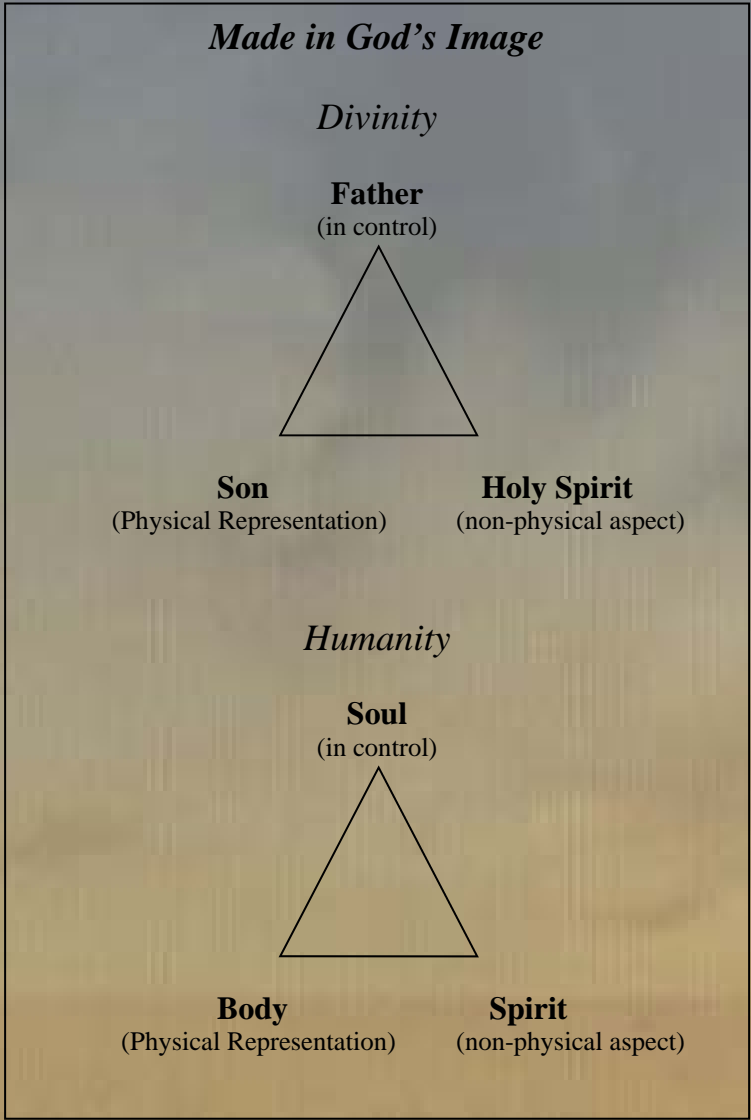
~ Gender Inclusive ~

God is inclusive of all male & female characteristics. Genesis 1:27 tells us that God made humanity in the Divine image, “*God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.”* Knowing that we are made in God’s image gives us perhaps the greatest insights into God as we examine ourselves. Aldous Huxley observed that “The finding of God is a coming to one’s self.” As we look at humanity as creation-in-God’s-image we learn much. Since we are male and female – Divinity must have male and female characteristics. The Jewish name for God is YHVH; understanding God’s gender inclusivity, the YH of God’s name is masculine and the VH is feminine. The two together represent a complete unity to Jews, and are God’s name.

It is unfortunate that so many languages arbitrarily chose gender-specific references for things and do not have gender-inclusive words such as:

- Hes meaning “he & she”
- Himer meaning “him & her”
- Hiser meaning “his & hers”
- Himerself meaning “him-self & herself”

I wish I could use these word creations throughout this book, but that would focus on only one issue and distract from the real purpose of the book. So please note that just because we tend to use masculine pronouns referring to God does not mean that God is *only* masculine. In order to emphasize this point; **throughout this book I will use both He and She interchangeably when referring to God.**



~ Trinity ~

Historically God the Father has been seen in the masculine, and Jesus the Son humanly embodied Himself as a male, while the Holy Spirit has been seen as the feminine figure of the Trinity, for She embodies the collection of the more feminine attributes of comforter, counselor, intercessor, and companion. (See Chapter 5, *Who is Jesus Christ?*; and Chapter 6, *Who is the Holy Spirit?* for much more on this aspect of the Holy One.)

We too are three-in-one! **Our Trinitarian design of soul, spirit and body reminds us of God's Trinitarian design which is composed of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.** Our humanity is ruled by our soul just as the God-head is ruled by the Father. Our spirit quietly supports all of our activity without much fanfare, just as the Holy Spirit most often defers to the Father and the Son. And our body enacts our will and is the physically identifiable portion of us, just as the Son is the producer of God's will, and the physical manifestation of the Trinity.

Our soul is also Trinitarian made up of our will, mind, and emotions. Our will controls our psyche, our mind (or brain) houses our psyche, and our emotions are a powerful, non-physical force to contend with.

~ Wants to be Known ~

As we continue to examine ourselves for clues about Divinity, we can see many hints into God's feelings through our own. **We see our need to be loved-for-who-we-are mimicked in much of Biblical history:**

- Joseph throwing off the headdress of Pharaoh and revealing himself to his brothers as one of them is a wonderful example. When facing his brothers after many years on his own, he did not want to be seen as Pharaoh's governor, the second in command in all Egypt; he wanted to be seen as one of them! This story is told in Genesis 45.

Soul is called Psyche in Greek.
It is the psychological part of us—
containing emotions, intellect and will.

Will
(In control)

Mind
(physical) **Emotions**
(non-physical)

- The Greeks thought you could separate Psyche/Soul from body and be “out of your mind”.
- Jews saw no such capability of separation and saw humans as a unity of body, soul, and spirit.

Any chance God wants to be accepted as The Almighty, but seen as related to us?

- Another reflection is seen in Samson's worn-out willingness to reveal the source of his strength to Delilah in vain hope that she really would love him. After wooing this foreign lover for many years, if he really let her in – and told her his secret, would she return the trust and intimacy? This story is told in Judges 16.

How about your life?

- Have you ever distanced yourself from a friend because she just wouldn't let you be who you are, and kept trying to change you?
- Have you ever wanted to be included in a special family?
- Have you ever risked-it-all for love?
- Have you ever been rejected; violated; betrayed?

Do you think God might feel that way too? – Since we do?

~ Truth ~

We see our desire for truth reflecting God's character, for **God is the God of Truth.**⁶ This theme of truth is clearly displayed for all humanity throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. The Psalms and Proverbs are all about Truth.

- **Some truth is conditional** - right now, under these circumstances, something is true.
(Right now because I'm hungry – I'm grumpy. That's not always true about me, but right now it is!)
- **Other Truth is eternal** – true in all circumstances and for all time.
(I'm female – that will always be True about me.)

God's Truth is eternal. She knows what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen. God knows *EVERYTHING!* He knows how everything works; therefore, when She says something, we can count on it to be accurate. To help communicate this, I have capitalized the word Truth when talking about God's eternal Truth, and left the conditional truths in small letters to help distinguish the two throughout this book.

Fun Fact:

It's very interesting that the word, *truth*, and the word, *peace*, are each used in roughly 350 verses of the Bible. And there are 12 verses in the Scripture in which truth and peace occur in the same verse. Twelve is a number that has to do with divine order, with God's order. If we will let Him line us up with the Truth, we will be at peace.

-taken from *Rescue the Captors 2* Russell Stendal's book about his true life adventures

Some of God's Characteristics

~ Eternal ~

God is eternal, "*From everlasting to everlasting you are God*" we are told in Psalm 90:2. God has always been and always will be. We see this suggested in the expansion of the cosmos, and the scientific theory of the multi-millennial age of the earth, and the eastern religious concept of reincarnation. All these may not be Truths, but they certainly reflect humanities efforts to explain scopes beyond our understanding. God is clearly not limited as we are by time or space. God is all places all the time. Divinity has all the time in the world just for you and me, and everyone else – all at the same "time." For "time," only constrains us - not God.⁷

⁶ Psalm 31:5

⁷ "His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Micah 5:2

~ All-Powerful ~

God is all-powerful and limitless we are told in Psalm 147:5. We see this all-powerful characteristic suggested in nature by thunder & lightning, in typhoons & hurricanes, and in volcanoes & earthquakes. We see a suggestion of God's limitlessness in the Cosmos, as well as the creation and recreation of the earth. (Having destroyed Earth once with a world-wide flood, God is planning to destroy it finally with fire, before recreating it again as the paradise it was originally intended to be.) There must be no shortage of creativity or resources with plans like those!

Another place we see God's limitlessness suggested is in the growth and regeneration within the seasons. The fall season seems to suggest that God is not economic as each tree loses every leaf it owns each winter, and many plants appear to cease to exist. Yet, each spring they reappear in their full glory. Even while God does not guard each created item, but seems to "waste" much, God also "wastes" nothing as scientists tell us that each molecule simply breaks down and joins another form of creation. **Everything is shared, nothing is permanent. All is lost so that more can be gained.**

~ Mysterious ~

Theology [or the study of God] can be very confusing, because God is confusing. The Trinity is so big and so diverse that it is quite impossible to truly understand Divinity completely – perhaps that's what eternity is for! **We can only begin to understand God now and so must leave lots of space for the Holy Ones' mystery.** (Learn to be Ok with not 'getting it'!)

A Friend called Grace -

By Phillips, Craig & Dean

Tears dripped off her crimson face
She covered her head tryin' to hide her shame
Caught and condemned, now she can't get away
Just a pawn in the hands of a Pharisee game.

The noise and the rage of the frenzied grew as they
struggled for the power in an ageless feud
And as she softly cried, They again reviewed
The obvious fate of this ill-repute

Then a voice ended all debate
His words of hope sent the crowd away
The hand that flung the stars in space
Lifted her face and she heard Him say

Let me introduce you to a friend called Grace
Doesn't care about your past or your many mistakes
He'll cover your sins in a warm embrace,
Let me introduce you to a friend
A friend called grace.

~ Paradoxical ~

A paradox is two seemingly opposite things which co-exist. **God contains both characteristics and everything in the middle.** For example, God is both love & justice – at the same time! The best example of this paradox I ever heard was the story of the judge who heard a case in court. A man had a pricey ticket for something he admitted doing. The man was clearly remorseful and down-on-his-luck. He had no money to pay the ticket and would have to go to jail. But he had committed the crime, and the judge was legally-bound to bring justice. The judge pronounced the man "guilty-as-charged" and dropped the gavel. He then called the bailiff over and handed him a \$100 bill. "Pay this on that man's ticket so he is free to go" were his instructions to the bailiff. He had pronounced the just sentence and then shown love. **It requires phenomenal strength, wisdom, and resources to be able to be both just and loving at the same time while acting on both simultaneously, but God is that big.**

~ Love ~

We feel our thirst for love, and our willingness to do just about anything for it, in the passion of Jesus Christ.⁸ (See Chapter 5, Who is Jesus Christ?) **For God is Love.**⁹ His proof of that is:

- Our daily provision of light and air and food and beauty and opportunity;¹⁰
- God's historical pursuit of relationship with us;¹¹
- God's willingness to forsake limitlessness and become human;¹²
- Jesus' obedience to overcome evil¹³ through His death and resurrection;
- The Holy Spirit's offer of adoption into the family of God.¹⁴

God loves us so much He was willing to go to Hell, so He would not have to live in Heaven without us. Paradoxically, God loves us in spite of our sinful condition and yet loves us enough to seek to improve that condition. He loves us as we are, and loves us enough to challenge us to become more than we currently are.

~ Just ~

Justice is adhering to a standard that requires the solution that is best for everyone and requires compensation for wrongs done to others. God wants to be included in that scenario – what is the solution that is best for me and you and God altogether?

The Scriptures clearly show that God's morality is just and retributive (God takes slights personally!). "*An eye for an eye ...*"¹⁵; and "*vengeance is mine,*"¹⁶ both came from God's lips. Jeremiah 51:56 tells us:

"For the Lord is a God of recompense, He will fully repay."

God will bring justice to those who oppress others and ignore Her.¹⁷ The Scriptures are equally clear that the just sentence for humanity is eternal condemnation.¹⁸ Yet; paradoxically, God offers grace through His sacrificial death which brought justification. He *will* pronounce the just sentence, but *has already* offered the way of escape, at the dearest possible cost to Herself.

⁸ "God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romas 5:8

⁹ 1John 4:8

¹⁰ "From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another." John 1:16

¹¹ "Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you...and gather you from the west..." Isaiah 43:4,5

¹² "The Word [Jesus] became flesh and made His dwelling among us." John 1:14

¹³ "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy works of the devil." 1 John 3:8

¹⁴ "Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12

¹⁵ "But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise." Exodus 21:23,24

¹⁶ "*It is mine to avenge; I will repay.*" Deuteronomy 32:35

¹⁷ "*Every knee will bow before Me; every tongue will confess to God.*" Isaiah 45:23

¹⁸ "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romas 3:23; "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romas 6:23

~ BIG ~

When I begin to think about all the characteristics and paradox's that are God, if I try too hard my internal computer crashes and I can make no sense of God at all. It is at those times when I have to remind myself that we are talking about **God** here! When I am up in an airplane, I can no longer even see the humans down below; and I am still in earth's atmosphere. Yet there is

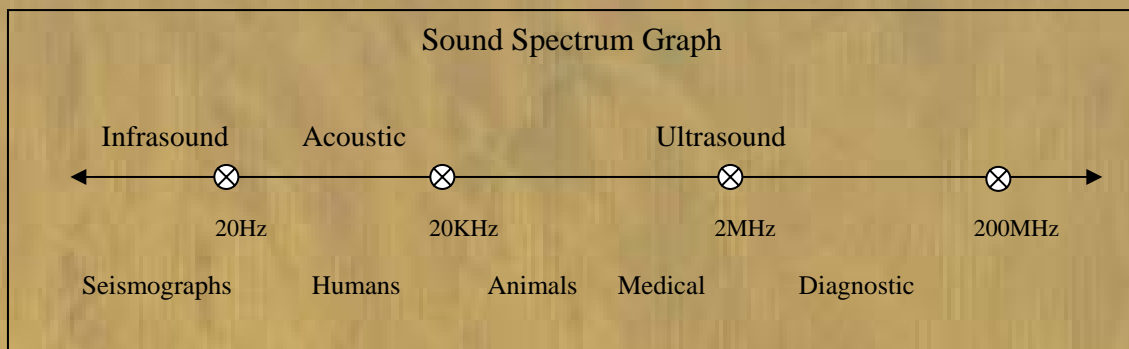
still an entire universe above me! God is **really, really**

BIG.

Can an amoeba fathom me?

~ Whole ~

Another way to think about God is using the sound spectrum. Scientists tell us that there are sounds too low for us to hear with our ears, so we use them in seismographs to monitor earthquakes. Then sound passes through the frequencies we can hear, and into the ones our pets can still hear, but we can't, and up into ones still higher that we use for radio waves, and ultrasound. We hear and understand only a fraction of that spectrum. But **God for this example would be the whole spectrum! Nothing is lacking.**



~ Extreme ~

Let's play devils-advocate for a moment. I was just talking about God being really, really **big**. But what if God's really, really small?

Just because humans built the Beijing Birdsnest doesn't mean we're bigger than our creation (those Olympic engineers were not several acres in size – Chinese people are normally small in stature!).

Molecular scientists are now looking at the universe and looking for the “God particle,” the smallest unit in the universe that is in everything. Evidently this miniscule element keeps cropping up in their calculations. Jesus did say that He holds the universe together! Whether God is **extremely large**, extremely small, or neither - **She's extreme!**

~ Judge ~

I've only touched on a *few* of the aspects of God for this book. It's encouraging to know that God may be mysterious, unknowable, and extreme; but we also already have a tremendous amount of information about the Holy One! Here, I have tried to cover the basics and I will provide “For Further Study” suggestions throughout this book on ways to continue your study in your areas of interest.

Because; as I mentioned earlier, **God is Just and will judge everyone** based not only on what they've done, but **maybe more importantly on what they have *believed* about God.**¹⁹ So I encourage you to study and consider God and enter into the discussion, so that you can determine what *you* believe; separate from what your parents, your spouse, Hollywood, or the evening news believes. **How will you answer your God when He asks what your life has been about?**

~ Trustworthy ~

We are told in Psalm 20:7 that “*Some boast in chariots, and some in horses; but we will boast in the name of the Lord, our God*”. In Hebrew, the phrase *to boast in* means to have confidence and trust in. **I hope that as you've read about God, and many of the Divine characteristics, you will have increased confidence and trust in Almighty God and boast away!** For as Oswald Chambers tells us:

“The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.”

¹⁹ “The Lord judges the peoples; Vindicate me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and my integrity that is in me.” Psalm 7:8

~ Holy ~

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty,”²⁰ sums up the theme of the whole Old Testament. Holy means “set apart” the basic concept is that of separation, or separateness. As much as I have used our similarities to God to reveal Divinity to us in this book, it is important to remember the paradox - God is other than us. **Divinity is not limited by the constraints that define humanity.** God is other-worldly; above the fray that consumes us. God is higher, bigger, wiser, and totally better than everything in creation – in every way. We must attempt to rise up to God’s level and emulate Him, not attempt to bring Her down to our level and pretend that we are in charge. **Trusting God is easier as we begin to comprehend Her Holiness.**²¹

For Further Study – on The Names and characteristics of God

- Check out Kay Arthur’s book ~ *Lord, I Want to Know You*. A short study that guides you to look up and learn the many names of God.
- Then there’s J.I. Packer’s classic ~ *Knowing God*. A very thorough and illuminating review of God’s character.

Some of God’s desires ~

~ Perfection ~

God desires that all of creation be restored to the original, perfect design. Then we will proceed with whatever Divine plan was originally intended for perfect creation in co-creative²² relationship with the Almighty. God doesn’t want you to be perfect or earn your own way now. **God wants us appreciative of and dependent upon Divinity - now.** God is building that relationship and trust for the time when we will be restored to the perfection of the original design and can move on together from there – having known evil.

~ Relationship ~

God created us to be in relationship with Divinity. We are told in Genesis that upon creation, Adam & Eve walked in the Garden of Eden with God daily.²³ They walked and talked and laughed and played – together, sharing themselves and the unfolding experiences – together.

This life is practice for choosing relationship through obedience to God now. God wants us to begin walking in relationship with Divinity even in this fallen world; even though it is harder and more complicated. God wants us to be Godly hands and feet in this world revealing the Divine love we discover to the hurting people around us.

²⁰ Isaiah 6:3

²¹ “The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble... He is exalted above all the peoples...Holy is He.” Psalm 99:1,2,3

²² Genesis 2:19 “Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast ...and brought them to the man...whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name.”

²³ Genesis 3:8 “They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”

~ Obedience ~

God desires that we live life to its fullest and since He made us and knows our frame; She guides us in how to do that. Like the owner's manual on the human, the Scriptures are full of specific instructions and guidelines on how to do this. This is one of the areas of Scripture that overwhelm people. "I really can't do all that!" they moan. ***That's the point!*** God knows us, and that we were made in His image to reflect Her love and power. That fact requires constant reminders that ***we are not yet perfected***, and will only become so in ***constant unbroken dependence on GOD***. So The Almighty gives us BIG challenges to make the point. And when we give up and ask for help – it's possibly His favorite moment! God comes riding up like a prince on a white horse and saves us, making miracles happen in us and around us. We all know the story – Sleeping Beauty has been poisoned by the evil witch and can't save herself. The prince rides up, kisses her, and restores her to life. Then, they ride off together to unknown exploits "happily ever-after."

Some of God's names ~

The vast majority of the time when people use the title **"God" they are referring to all the characteristics of Divinity**. The Jewish tradition so highly values the name of God that they will not say it out loud for fear of saying it "in vain" which is the third commandment (not to misuse the Lord's name). They only use the consonants to write God's (proper noun) name – **YHVH** (they call this a Tetragrammaton).

Christians go beyond Jewish tradition and often refer to the different aspects of God's character using the personalities of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In those situations they are focusing on different sets of characteristics of Divinity. Using the name "Father," they might be focusing on God's familial orientation, His ultimate authority, or His protective capacity. When using the name "Son" or "Jesus Christ," they might be connecting to God's redemptive plan, or His desire to reveal Himself to us, or His sacrificial qualities (See Chapter 5, Who is Jesus Christ?). When using the name "Holy Spirit," they could be wanting to point out God's comforting capacity, Her intimacy, Her power, or Her promise of perfection (See Chapter 4, Who is the Holy Spirit?).

The first name God revealed for Himself was "I AM". I exist. I was, I will be – I Am. **"I AM WHO I AM;"**²⁴ meaning I define myself, I'm in charge, I am the ultimate authority (I make the rules!).

My favorite name for God is the one Jesus Christ used when talking to His Father ~ "Abba,"²⁵ an endearing title translating to something along the lines of **"Dearest Daddy."**

²⁴ Exodus 3:14 "God said to Moses, **"I AM WHO I AM."**"

²⁵ Mark 14:36 "And [Jesus] was saying, ***"Abba! Father! All things are possible for you."***

Thoughts while reading this Chapter ~

Date:

Activities ~

Consider building a relationship with God ~ Three things you can do to head in that direction:

1. Think about it. What an amazing thought – that an Almighty God who created me would want to talk to me. Especially in light of the fact that I usually want to complain! But think about it; have you ever painted a painting that you worked really hard at? Did you find yourself thinking out loud “you need something there – yes, some more red, that’s it!” We laugh and say “Oh it’s just an object!” Yes, and it’s an object of our affections! Our painting brings us joy based on the time and energy we invested into it. Now think about God’s perspective - we bring our creator joy just by being, simply because God has invested time, energy and effort into us. Imagine the enhanced level of joy and relationship possibilities if God’s painting would really answer back to Her compliments!

2. Open a dialog. Anytime we want to build a relationship we need to talk to the person and open a dialog. Talking to God is usually called Prayer. In spite of the different title, approach it as you would any new acquaintance.

“Hi, I’m _____. I’m honored that you might want to talk to me.”

Or, there’s always my personal favorite:

“God I’m having a tough time here – help!”

3. Consider every attribute a perfect Father would have in your opinion. Write them down. Then, consider the possibility that God is those attributes, and look for confirmation of that assumption in reality. For instance, if a perfect Father is generous; do you have all you *need* and much more? (The fact that you don’t have a Roles Royce is *not* a realistic standard!)

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

Chapter 3

Who isn't God?

“Lucifer has merely been allowed to exist. He is deceived by design and obligated to have all of his acts ultimately recoil back on to him.”
- Mario Murillo, in *I am the Christian the Devil warned you about.*

Introduction ~
Lesser gods ~
Little g or a big G? ~
Satan ~
Father of Lies ~
Good ~ verses ~ Evil ~
False Worship ~
Demand Worship? ~
Settling for the parade ~
Limitations of Evil ~
Good Wins! ~
We are at war ~

Introduction ~

Have you asked these questions before?

- If God is so good – why do bad things happen?
- If God is so big and paradoxical – is God evil also?
- If God created everything – did He create evil?
- If God created evil – how can He be good?

Here I attempt to address these questions using the historical thoughts of much greater minds than mine. Again – please remember that there is a differing opinion from nearly every theologian and serious student of God, (just ask my Uncle Don!) but there is a large consensus on the position I'm giving you here.

I have found that in order to comprehend this part of God's plan (which I want to skip), I have to constantly remind myself that God is *r e a l l y b i g* – maybe not in size so as to encompass evil, but in scope so as to use evil. Judeo-Christian theology shouts that ***God is not evil!*** - but He did create it. I may not understand and really don't like that fact, but I have to embrace Reality – and **evil is our Reality.**

Lesser gods ~

Ever wondered why God in Scriptures says one minute ‘I am the only God’ and then turns around and gets upset because people have followed after other “gods”?

Scripture presents a number of lesser “gods,” or fallen angels²⁶ which have limited power and authority. Satan is their chief. One interpretation is that one-third of the created angels chose to rebel with Satan and were banished from heaven and thrown down to earth.²⁷ We have more evidence that gods are fallen angels from the story in Daniel 10 where Daniel is praying and fasting and asking for understanding. An angel comes to him saying that he was held up in coming by ‘the prince of Persia’ (suggesting an adversarial angel); “*and behold Michael one of the chief princes came to help me*”. We know that Michael is one of the Arch Angels, and “*the great prince who stands guard over the sons of [God]*” from Daniel 12:1. **These passages hint at unseen battles in unseen realms with unseen warriors – all affecting us.** With these passages and many others, Scriptures present many spiritual beings who imitate God and “*dress as angels of light*”²⁸, pretending to be divine and assisting Satan in his temporary ruler-ship on this earth.

Little g or a big G? ~

In Scriptures the capitalization is the textual hint as to whether it’s talking about YHWY the God Almighty; or one of the many ‘lesser gods’ or fallen angels. Where the first letter G is capitalized, the Scriptures are talking about The Holy One, Trinitarian God, True Divinity. Where the first letter g is not capitalized the scriptures are talking about lesser “gods” or spirits created by God who are not Divine.



²⁶ “And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. Revelations 12:7-8

²⁷ “Then another sign appeared in Heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.” Revelation 12:3,4.

²⁸ 2Corinthians 11:14 “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.”

**Webster's
Dictionary defines:**

- **Satan** as “the adversary of God and lord of evil in Judaism and Christianity.” (Perhaps they should add Satanism!)
- **Devil** as “lit., *slanderer*, the personal supreme spirit of evil often represented in Jewish and Christian belief as the tempter of mankind, the leader of all apostate angels, and the ruler of hell.”

Satan ~

Satan, Lucifer, the Dragon, the Devil, and the Serpent; are all names for the representation of evil in our world.²⁹ This is the entity who presented himself as a serpent in the Garden of Eden and tempted Adam & Eve with eating one of the forbidden fruits. Their obedience to the serpent and disobedience of God evidently surrendered their ruler-ship of this world over to Satan for the time being.³⁰

Jesus Christ acknowledged Satan's power on this earth while being tempted in the desert when He did not correct Satan for stating that he could give Jesus “*all the kingdoms of the world*” in exchange for worshipping him. Christ only refused Satan's temptation saying that we are to “*worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.*”³¹ Christ knew that **Satan's power and authority are limited in scope and time**, and that Satan cannot do anything without God's specific permission. We have this reality communicated in the Scriptures in the beginning of the book of Job³² when Satan is allowed into God's presence and asks to test one of God's most faithful men. God grants him temporary and limited access to test Job.

Father of Lies ~

Being a created entity, and lacking the power and creativity of the Almighty; Satan always imitates God - but conversely. God is the Father of Truth, and all creation. So **Satan is left only to father lies, and destruction.** Satan is obsessed with 'beating' God and usurping Her power. Yet he only has God's creation to work with, and God's idea's to imitate. Counterfeiting God, he presents himself as an Angel of light (good), and always misrepresents himself to humanity in an attempt to gain worship or at least redirect worship away from God. In the end Satan will imitate God's structure, attempting to create a trinity of evil; Satan being the dragon/or serpent, will produce a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth to assist him.³³ Since Satan is not powerful enough to actually create anything new, and always resorts to warping something God has created, it is easy to see that these beasts will be people acting in concert (or possession) with Satan as the Anti-Christ, and the False Prophet.

²⁹ The great dragon was hurled down-that ancient serpent called the Devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.” Revelation 12:9

³⁰ “The whole world is under the control of the evil one.” 1 John 5:19

³¹ Luke 4:1-8

³² Job 1:6-12

³³ Revelation 17:7

Jesus warned us that Satan is the Father of lies,³⁴ **always distorting the truth and warping God’s creation into something foul.** Adam and Eve’s temptation is the classic example. Satan came to Eve and tempted her with the fruit, saying that “*God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*”³⁵ The implication being that they were not yet like God – a bold-faced lie, for they were already made in God’s image, lacking only an appreciation of their ‘Divine-likeness,’ and the maturity to understand “evil.” Wanting to please God and be more like the Father they loved, they bought the lie and disobeyed a very clear directive; killing their relationship with God, surrendering their ruler-ship of this earth, and warping the perfection of the original design, all by choosing to learn about evil before they were ready.

Good - versus - Evil ~

It is this deception which people buy into when they get angry at God for the bad things that happen. God is a good God; True Divinity only creates and imbues life. God blesses, and allows Satan to do the cursing, *only* within divinely established constraints (moral and physical and spiritual “natural laws” if you will). It is Satan and his evil agenda that twists, warps, and destroys life. Our ancestors chose to know evil, and this lifetime is that opportunity. Adam and Eve bought Satan’s lie, and now we have a lifetime to learn to reject it. Satan is merely the vehicle that God is using to honor Adam & Eve’s choice and teach us the maturing lessons we need to know about distinguishing good from evil. Bad things happen because Satan is in charge on this earth right now. We gave him the control.

How can God be happy and decree calamity?
Consider that He has the capacity to view the world through two lenses.
Through the narrow one He is grieved and angered at sin and pain.
Through the wide one He sees evil in relation to its eternal purposes.
Reality is like a mosaic.
The parts may be ugly in themselves, but the whole is beautiful.

- from *Desiring God*, by John Piper

Why does God allow Satan to deceive us and usurp our powers? - Because Divinity has a plan to perfect us, and **we improve faster under pressure and in pain.** Think about it: when you are playing a game that involves running and you twist your ankle, do you stop playing? Not unless it hurts. If you keep running on an injury you risk serious damage. If you stop and let it heal you get stronger. Pain gets our attention and refocuses it on the issue. God is not competing with Satan. God is using Satan – to bless us. I just hurts right now. What hurts in your life? What do you think God might want to do through that pain?

³⁴ “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” John 8:44

³⁵ Genesis 3:5

False Worship ~

Our attention is always focused on our priority. **Worship is prioritizing something above all else, and giving ourselves to it.** God wants our worship.³⁶ God wants to be our priority. She wants our attention focused on God. In our society many people worship their work, their health, their families, and their other interests. Much is sacrificed to their all-consuming priority. Many others worship “stuff;” and shop ‘til they drop’, at every opportunity; renting storage units to house the endless finds. Some parents worship their children and allow them to run rampant over their own needs, and others.’ Other people worship their pets, or recreation, or vehicles, or drug of choice, and spend hours and hours with them to the exclusion of everyone and everything else. All of these things are false worship: something that brings a momentary “high” but does not meet our internal need, and so drives us into addiction.³⁷ As Augustine observed, we are God-shaped and only find peace when fitted into our housing [God].³⁸ Like a gear, only when we are attached to the motor that is God do we function well! (A single gear sitting on someone’s workbench is essentially dead – accomplishing nothing and participating in nothing!) Do we want to be part of a greater good, or do we just want to exist? **False worship is existing, and True worship is the door to the greater good.**

Demand Worship? ~

Being all-powerful; does God not have the right to demand our worship, or first priority in our lives? That’s part of what makes God so amazing – The Holy One does *not demand* our priority. **God asks for our worship, but does not zap us off the face of the earth if we say “no”.** If we want to mindlessly wander through our days thinking about our to-do list, or politics, and ignore God; He allows it. Now if you were inventing a “God” wouldn’t you assume that they would demand worship?! The Greeks certainly did.

Satan and his evil spirits suffer from the same malady we do – rebellion against God. They demand worship, and God allows them to. They use humans for our power (for we do have much!) and possibly in an attempt to damage God by destroying us, for they know how highly God values us. Historically, evil spirits, have demanded child sacrifice, physical mutilation, orgies, and every possible kind of human degradation in the name of worship and religion.

I had a precious friend who first told me about the reality of an evil spirit trying to destroy her when we were barely in our twenties. She had suffered incredibly in her young life, but was growing in her new relationship to God. The Holy Spirit with-in her was making her more and more aware of the spirits at war for control over her. As a first step toward physical healing, she was struggling to overcome her addiction to cigarettes. She would sit in the bath tub and try to relax. Smoking a cigarette, she could see the

³⁶ “*Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.*” Deuteronomy 6:13 and Matthew 4:10

³⁷ “For by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.” 2 Peter 2:19b

³⁸ “Thou made-est us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee,” *The Confessions* by St. Augustine

spirit's face laughing at her in her mind's eye. **She was very aware that there was a malevolent force trying to destroy her through her addiction.** She was working hard and trusting God with all her might to help her turn from those old attachments and worship Him, but it was a gut-wrenching struggle which the malevolent spirit clearly reveled in.

Settling for the parade ~

The story is told about a mid-western farm-boy who had heard about the Circus with its amazing animals and talented clowns and trapeze artists traveling from town to town. He had never been outside the twenty-five mile radius that encompassed his families' farm and the local town; and he very much wanted to see the Circus. He planned on traveling to see it – someday. Then, one day, he heard the excited townspeople talking about the Circus that was coming to town. The boy was thrilled. “Here’s the chance I’ve been waiting for!” He saw a flier on a post saying that the Circus parade would be the following Saturday morning, and the Circus was twenty-five cents. So after dawn chores that next Saturday morning, he dug into his piggy bank and took out twenty-five cents walked the couple miles into town and watched the parade. He was enthralled by all the colors, music, and activity. He’d never seen an elephant before, and was amazed by the size and apparent power of the lions that rolled by in their colorful cage. The trapeze artists did flips down the street, and the clowns were such a hoot. As the parade wound to an end, he found a clown and handed him his twenty-five cents. He thanked the clown profusely and walked home very content. “Wow, Circuses are amazing!” He reported to his inquisitive parents. It wasn’t until he was much older that he discovered, had he followed that parade into the Circus tent on the other side of town, paid his money to the ticket-taker and come in; he’d have seen an even bigger world of wonder with trapezes, lion tamers, delicious scents and snacks, and many more amazing sights.

When we worship anything besides God, the Almighty, we too are settling for the parade and thinking it was the Circus show at best; being slowly destroyed in the process. The Almighty doesn’t want his precious creation settling for less than all the All-mighty can give us. As my dear friend learned beating her cigarette addiction; God does not want us being destroyed by Divine enemies while we think we’re having a good time.

Limitations of Evil ~

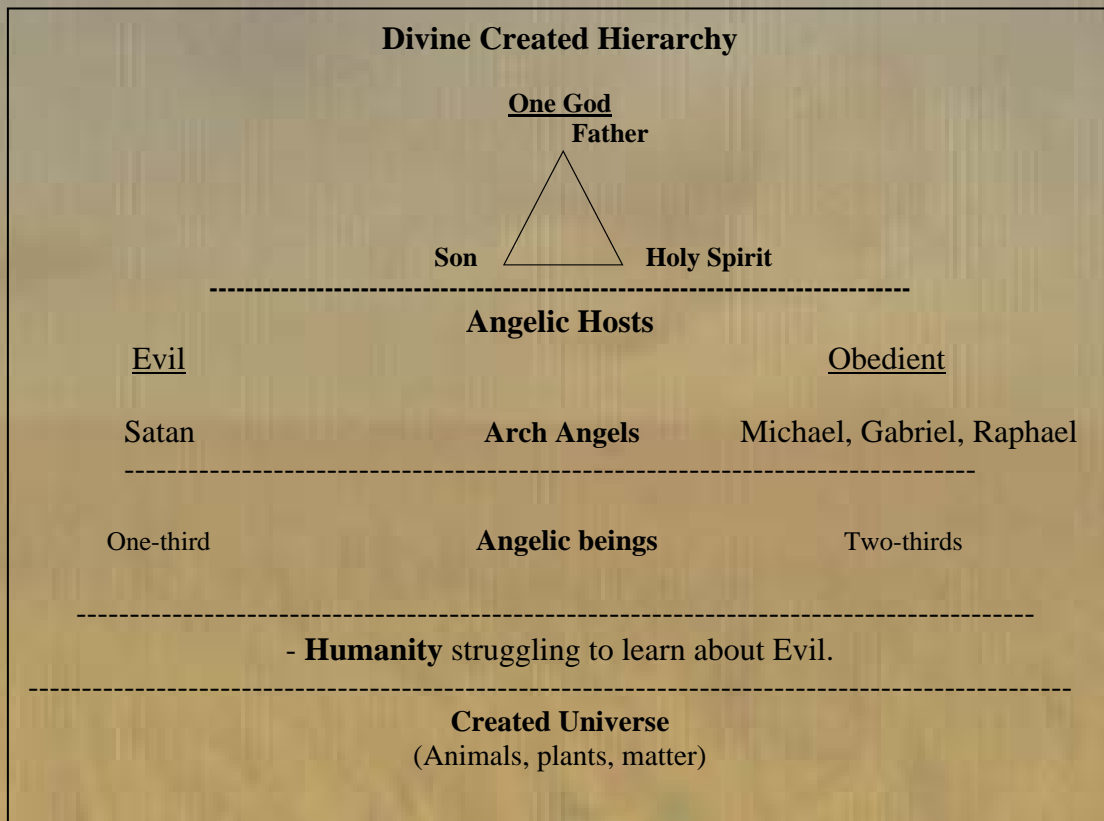
Evil constantly chooses to contend with God. Satan sets himself up as an option to God – a ruler on the ‘other-side’ of the issue. But consider this: Satan is a created being. The creation can never best its maker – will a cake ever be better than its baker? - Will a pot ever exceed the potter who shaped it? It’s not really God-vs-Satan; it’s God using Satan.

We are told in Scriptures that humanity was created a little lower than the Angels.³⁹ With this context in mind, It’s really amazing to learn how powerful Angels are. 2 Kings

³⁹ “What is man that you are mindful of him... You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings”
Psalm 8:4,5.

19:35 tells us that the angel of the Lord (one angel) wiped out the entire Assyrian army (185,000 men) which was attacking Israel - overnight.⁴⁰ Angels are very powerful. Yet Satan can do no more than the angels – He cannot come close to wielding God’s power. He can destroy, but not create; He can lie, but not tell the truth. He exists by God’s grace as do we! God loves us so much He has commanded His Angels to care for us!⁴¹ All that created power is to be available to assist us not destroy us. Satan will answer for his misuse of his powers of persuasion.

The book of Job makes it clear that **every move Satan makes must be cleared by God**, and the book of Revelation shows that God is using Satan to destroy the evil he has inspired.⁴² Revelation also tells us that only one of God’s angels will be required to bind Satan and throw him into the Abyss⁴³ – so clearly Satan isn’t even the strongest Angel! The created order clearly shows the eternal limitations Satan is constrained by. And under the circumstances, attempting a coup seems really insane. Because at the very *least* it’s three to one!



*One God,*⁴⁴ *Arch Angels,*⁴⁵ *Angelic beings,*⁴⁶ *Humanity,*⁴⁷ *Created Universe.*⁴⁸

⁴⁰ See Isaiah 37:36 for the story.

⁴¹ “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” Hebrews 1:14

⁴² “The Beast... will eat [sinful Babylon’s] flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose.” Revelation 17:16,17.

⁴³ “And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him. Revelation 21:1-3

⁴⁴ See Chapter One, Who is God?

Good Wins! ~

Perhaps God chose to create evil in order to define himself - as “I stop here”, “I am *not* this.” Or perhaps as the eastern religions teach, the ying had to have a yang. (But God has existed eternally, and Satan is a creation, so God predates evil. Therefore the ying existed a long period before the yang and that proves that God does not require evil in any way!) **Yes; light and dark, good and evil, God and Satan, all exist - but are not equal.** Dark exists in the absence of light, good exists in-spite-of and even through evil,⁴⁹ and **God controls Satan.**⁵⁰

Time has already proven that Satan is the chief sap, and every move he has made to usurp any portion of God’s power has been reflected to land squarely back on him. He attempted a coup, and was banned from heaven.⁵¹ Then he attempted to take what was God’s and was reduced to crawling on his belly.⁵² Next, Jesus entered Satan’s realm and overcame death at its door⁵³ (setting His captives free!); - Just when Satan thought he had won the battle and killed God! (I elaborate briefly on all these stories in subsequent chapters – so hang on!) Next, Satan will be banned from earth and eternally contained in the Lake of Fire. The good God wins in the end – every time.



- Picture circulated over Internet - Photographer unknown

If we look honestly at our lives and the lives around us, we can see this Truth displayed there too. If when I am hurt by someone I love, I lash out and hurt them back - I push them further away and lose the loving relationship I desire. If however; I chose to do the

⁴⁵ “And there was war in Heaven, Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.” Revelation 12:7

⁴⁶ “Then another sign appeared in Heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.” Revelation 12:3,4.

⁴⁷ See Father of Lies earlier in this chapter.

⁴⁸ “God blessed [Adam & Eve] and said to them, “...Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”” Genesis 1:28

⁴⁹ “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Romans 8:28

⁵⁰ “Does evil befall a city, unless the Lord has done it?” Amos 3:6

⁵¹ Revelation 12:9

⁵² Genesis 3:14

⁵³ “...so that by His death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the Devil.” Hebrews 2:14

loving thing and not lash back at the object of my affections – then, the distance is lessened and the relationship is eventually enhanced. I get a greater understanding between people, my hug, or that great make-up-sex. **Good absolutely IS more powerful and productive than evil.**

“If God would have to annihilate the present cosmos, Satan would have won a great victory... Satan would have succeeded in so devastatingly corrupting the present cosmos and the present earth that God could do nothing with it but to blot it totally out of existence. But Satan did not win such victory. On the contrary, Satan has been decisively defeated. God will reveal the full dimensions of that defeat when He shall renew this very earth on which Satan deceived mankind and finally banish from it all the results of Satan’s evil machination.”
- Anthony Hoekema from *The Bible and the Future*

We are at war!

God either created the tragedy of Satan or allowed it. Either way, God allowed the Devil to have access to humanity and steal our birthright. Instead of humanity ruling the earth as was the direction of God’s original design, the Devil does. Immediately upon the fall of humanity, God began the Divine plan of retribution and restoration. Genesis 3:15 tells us that God was speaking to Satan and said “**I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.**” Judaism has historically embraced their warrior spirit, and the history recorded in the Scriptures show this ongoing battle for God’s name to be proclaimed in the face of ever increasing evil. The New Testament Scriptures further personalize this battle-cry with the exhortation in Ephesians 6:11-12, to “*Put on the full armor of God so that you may take your stand against the Devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*”

WARNING: Sin kills. When we reject or disdain or even just ignore God we are sinning. Romans 6:23 tells us that *the wages of sin are death*. When we accept something of lesser value than God (people, activities, or “stuff”) we are settling for the parade. We are exchanging our divine potential for temporary gain. We are falling short of God’s design for us, and “missing the mark”,⁵⁴ God has called us to shoot for. God warns that there are dire consequences built into the system for such disregard for our potential.

⁵⁴ The word sin comes from an archery term that means “missing the mark.”

For further study ~

- I can suggest [This Present Darkness](#) by Frank Peretti (don't read it at night - alone!),
- You also might want to read Mike Warnke's story about being a Satanist priest and being converted to the worship of the One True God.* [The Satan Seller](#) by Mike Warnke and David Balsinger

*Much controversy has existed over Mike Warnke's life and testimony. Warnke admits literary elaboration, but stands by the "facts" of his experience. According to co-author Balsinger who is a professional consultant on occult related criminal cases, the Warnke account is fundamentally accurate and true except where the "facts" were purposefully changed to protect individuals, and prevent occultic imitation.

See Ministry@mikewarnke.org, and www.cornerstonemag.com to investigate the issue.

Thoughts I am considering reading this Chapter ~

Date:

Activities ~

Learn to Worship God ~ Four things you can do to move in that direction:

Worship means consciously attempting to return homage to God, and raise The Holy One to the level of owning you. It is our human way of touching the Divine Being and appreciating, valuing, blessing, and honoring God. The kind of worship that God delights in is when it comes genuinely from our surrendered heart. Since God made each of us unique, our worship form and content will also be unique. Romans 12:1 tells us that we are to be a living sacrifice; our lives should be one big worship act toward God. My contentment in life has improved as I've been able to surrender my work as an act of worship, and realize that being a Mom, and driving carpool, can also be worship - actions that bless God as I consciously rejoice in my ability to do them, and do them to glorify God in an attempt to be God's hands and feet blessing those people around me. That's worship in the general sense of honoring God in all we do (See Chapter 9). Too often this moment by moment opportunity to worship is forgotten as we focus mostly on corporate worship with groups of people. These worship services are the most common and first thought, and should not be neglected, for we learn much about worshipping God from others and in practice. But some of my most precious times have been alone with God, when no one else has been around and just the Lord and I talk, and wander, and BE – together. There are probably as many ways to do this as there are people created, but I've listed four ideas to get you started.

1. Are you an active, kinetic person? ***Dance in praise to God.*** Turn up some music that moves your heart in appreciation to God for all He has done, and move your feet! Want something quieter? Walk in nature and compliment God on everything you notice. Or, walk in the city and compliment God on every achievement She gave to humanity as you notice it.

2. Listen to music that points you to God. Are you a classical fan? Handel's *Messiah*, or Bach's, *Jesu joy of Man's Desiring*, are timeless praises to God. Gregorian Chants were written to praise God. Then there's - Contemporary Christian, Worship, Country, and Jazz. If your tastes are more present day, there is even Christian Rock and Hip Hop! We mustn't forget historical Hymns like *How Great Thou Art*, and *Amazing Grace!* And finally; Hebrew music – since Jesus loved it on earth, it's a safe bet it'll be in Heaven! I love to listen to KLOVE, a wonderful Contemporary Christian radio station that is now nation-wide and on the web at www.KLOVE.com.

3. You can worship in prayer by praising God and listing all the things you're thankful for. ***Admire God's character traits that you recognize and appreciate.*** Some examples would be God's loving-kindness, patience and longsuffering, forgiveness, and creativity for a good start.

4. Does art minister to your soul and move you in indescribable ways? ***Paint a picture dedicated to God, write a song, or sculpt something.*** All artistic creations are expressions of you which when dedicated to God are a gift of action and intent which bless God and you during the process; and others for perhaps generations to come. Consider the Sistine Chapel, The Pieta sculpture, Silent Night the Christmas carol, and even the Cathedrals in Red Square. All of these are works of art which were created in worship of God, and which shine brightly to this day to the glory of God. Your creation might not get so famous, but it can be no less purely worship.

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

Chapter 4

What is God's self-revelation?

“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”

- WWII German prison camp survivor, Corrie Ten Boom

How does God reveal Himself to us? ~

- ~ Through Humanity ~*
- ~ Through our experiences ~*
- ~ Through Nature ~*
- ~ Through our Observations ~*
- ~ Through the Scriptures ~*
- ~ Through our Intellect ~*
- ~ Through our Need ~*
- ~ Through Example ~*

What is God's self-revelation in Scripture? ~

How does God reveal Himself to us?

Do you want to be known? Do you love to share your thoughts and ideas with anyone who will listen? I know I do. (So, thanks for listening to me – you're special to me because you're interested in the same things I am! We have a connection through this book that is very special.) If you and I feel that strongly about sharing our thoughts and there-by being known; Isn't it likely that God wants us to listen to Her and connect with Him? **-YES!** - God wants to be known!

~Through Humanity ~

God has gone to great efforts to reveal Himself to us. The Scriptures tell us that the Heavens declare the glory of God.⁵⁵ And we are made in His image. Being created in the 'image of God' suggests that God reveals Himself through natural human characteristics. How do we reflect God? **What can we learn about God from examining ourselves?** Let's take a look:

- Our creativity and drive to impact our world; reflect God's expressive character.
- Our need for relationships and interaction with others; reflects God's priorities.
- Our Spiritual curiosity, and ceaseless abilities to learn and grow; hint at God's commitment to growth.
- Our emotional ranges from anger to joy to consternation and back again in a split second, suggest a wealth of expression and flexibility and desire in the Holy One.

When we examine ourselves and the reality in which we were placed, we see many clues to God and His care and concern for this fragile life-form.

⁵⁵ Psalm 19:1

~Through our experiences ~

I love the country song *The Little Girl* which Harley Allen wrote and John Michael Montgomery recorded.

*Her parents never took the young girl to church
Never spoke of His name, Never read her His work.
Two non-believers walking lost in this world
Took their baby with them, what a sad little girl.*

*Her daddy drank all day and mommy did drugs
Never wanted to play, or give kisses and hugs.
She'd watch the TV and sit there on the couch
while her mom fell asleep, and her daddy went out.*

*And the drinking and the fighting just got worse every night
Behind their couch she'd be hiding, Oh what a sad little life.
And like it always does, the bad just got worse, with every slap and every curse.
Until her daddy in a drunk rage one night, Used a gun on her mom and then took
his life.*

*And some people from the city took the girl far away,
To a new mom and a new dad, kisses and hugs everyday.
Her first day of Sunday school the teacher walked in,
and a small little girl stared at a picture of Him.*

*She said I know that man up there on that cross
I don't know His name, but I know He got off.
Cause He was there in my old house and held me close to His side,
As I hid there behind our couch the night that my parents died.*

In real life, as in the fiction it spawns, story after story, after story, tell of God reaching out to touch humanity and build relationship. Thousands of people tell stories about being touched by God through music like *The Little Girl* above. I have heard stories about God reaching people floating lost at sea, drowning in drugs and alcohol, alone in their marriages, and alone on top of the social world. Yes, God wants to reveal Himself to us personally if we're open to it.

Allen received this story over the internet, and was brought to tears. He sat down and wrote this song in 10-15 minutes. He hasn't been able to track the source of the story, but he says "If it ain't true, it ought to be!"

Most people just slowly open their hearts and hear God’s voice in their minds, and begin to piece the puzzle of God’s love for them together over long periods of time. Yet myriads of stories are told of people waking to a presence sitting on their bed, illuminating their room; connecting with God in Church; or feeling the Truth suddenly strike them in the most mundane ways – often while driving a commute or in the shower!

The story of the little girl connecting with God in the song above, and my experiences with God which I shared in the first chapter, are only two examples of God reaching out to us moment by moment through our unique experiences. **God is constantly trying to open us up to the Divine presence.**

- The perfect song playing on the radio ministers to our aching hearts.
- The perfect book that we “just happened” to pick up which puts our questions to rest (for now).
- The “Ah-hah” thought that pops into our brain and fills in the missing piece, helping us see the whole picture and relax.
- The dark sky full of stars that finally inspires our spirits to reach out to the creator, and trust.

These are all examples of ways God is reaching out to us.

My favorite story of someone connecting with God happened in my presence (and shows why I love what I do so much!) A friend was in profound pain over her second divorce. She was feeling stupid, and lost, and scared, and value-less. As we took this pain to the Holy Spirit in a meditation together, my friend saw a vision. After the brief meditation she glowed. Through her tears of joy, she shared with me her experience. “It was so beautiful, and the colors were so vivid! I was in a grassy place with flowers everywhere. I was surrounded by children. There was laughter and fun everywhere. There were no adults, but Jesus was there. I knew he was there for me, but He was playing with the children. He was showing them a small hand mirror and they were each looking into it and laughing. I knew He wanted me to come look too, so I went over and looked in. It was my face, and so beautiful. Not like I look here; not like Hollywood beauty, simple beauty.” With that simple vision God met every one of her spiritual and emotional needs at that moment. She was freed of her fears and she glowed with the knowledge of Divine acceptance and love, and security. The divorce still happened, but she was carried through it, knowing deeply that she was loved by God.

Our experiences are as individual as we are. They are proofs building a case that God is reaching out uniquely to each one of us.

“God who reveals Himself in the harmony of all that exists.”
- Albert Einstein

~Through Nature ~

Have you ever noticed that you can look at a painting and not only recognize the scene or content, but beyond that you can often say “Oh that’s a Kinkeade” or “That’s a Picasso.” The art, although different scenes and topic’s, has a recognizable style and reflects similar tastes that make the artist identifiable.

As the Creator of all things, **God has left us lots of things to look at for reflections of Divinity.**

- Ever looked at full rainbow vibrant against the black stormy sky? Ever watched tropical fish swim in a tank, noticing their odd shapes, unique fin arrangements, and wild colors? This world is beautiful, **so God must value beauty.**
- Have you ever been blamed for something someone else did? Have you ever been robbed, or raped, or maimed? Have you ever listened to the evening news? This world is messed up, **so God must value struggle.**
- This world is diverse with no two snowflakes alike, and 2,000 species of orchids (some of which bloom underground!), and people in every size and shape and color, **so God must value uniqueness.**
- Ever smelled a pine forest after a good rain? Have you seen the pictures NASA is taking of space? This world is not just physical, there is much that cannot be seen such as gravity and sound and smell, **so God does not work on just one plane or in only one dimension.**
- This world functions on physical laws that are almost inviolate, **so God must want order.**
- However; there are exceptions to every rule, **so God must be flexible.**
- This planet is not alone in the universe, **so God must love to create.**



The scriptures tell us that the Heavens declare the glory of God and there is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.⁵⁶ This encourages us to look around and learn, and give the credit where the credit is due - **God is amazing!**

⁵⁶ Psalm 19:1,3

“Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.”
- Martin Luther

~ *Through our Observations* ~

It is our observations of nature, our own lives, and the lives of others, that open our minds and hearts to what God may be trying to teach us. It is our processing of experiences, and lessons that begin to connect the dots in our minds and inspire us to think and ask questions and pray and look for answers. It is in that process that our picture of God becomes clearer and more personal, and more comprehensive. As John Piper observed:⁵⁷

“Ultimate reality is not impersonal, but is indeed a person. I simply find it impossible to believe that the human drama of the centuries, with its quest for meaning and beauty and truth, has no deeper root than molecular mutations. So when I consider where enduring happiness is to be found, I am driven to search for it in relation to God – the personal creator of all things.”

~ *Through the Scriptures* ~

Beyond our experience, **God has seen to it that His experience has been documented in the Scriptures.** They are full of Divine emotions, reactions, statements, plans, hopes, and concrete effort to communicate the vastness of and the intimacy with the Almighty. Scientists read Scripture and recognize hints at the new theories which they are only beginning to piece together. Historians read Scripture and explain practical reasons for God’s directives such as hygiene issues for circumcision and hand washing laws; and bacterial reasons (lacking refrigeration) for prohibitions on pork, and requirements to bleed out meat before eating it.

⁵⁷ In the 10th Anniversary Expanded Edition of *Desiring God*, Appendix 2

In the Scriptures God tells us point blank how He feels. Here are only a few examples:

God's emotions in Scriptures		
Emotion Shown	Scriptural text	Reference
Pride	God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.	Genesis 1:31
Satisfaction	Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made .	Genesis 2:3
Disappointment	What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.	Genesis 4:10
Anger	So the anger of the Lord burned against them and He departed.	Numbers 12:9
Regret	The Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.	Genesis 6:6
Frustration	How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions?	Exodus 16:28
Hate	I came to hate them there! Because of the wickedness of their deeds.	Hosea 9:15
Taxed	My spirit shall not strive with man forever.	Genesis 6:3
Love	You are precious and honored in my sight and I love you.	Isaiah 43:4
Joy	He brought forth His people with joy.	Psalms 105:43
Decisive	Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord took his life.	Genesis 38:7
Unappreciated	The Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land, because there is not faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land.	Hosea 4:1
Jealous	I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me.	Exodus 20:5
Generous	Showing loving-kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.	Exodus 20:6

Clearly, people touch God’s heart as much as God influences people! The Scriptures reveal that. The Scriptures represent so much more than just a historical record. The Scriptures present so much more than just stories to inspire and educate and correct. The Scriptures are so much more than Divine rules-for-living. **The Scriptures are also and perhaps primarily a Divine Love-Letter, revealing God’s heart, and soul, and emotions, and plans, and expectations, and hopes.**

“Gravity explains the motion of the planets, but it cannot explain who set the planets in motion. God governs all things and knows all that is or can be done.”
- Issac Newton

~Through Intellect ~

Scripture is usually the primary vehicle God uses to challenge our minds – if we will read it. As we read about God’s revelation of Divinity throughout history we compare it to our own experiences and those of others we have known. We analyze. Can this be true? How does this compare with the current understandings of science, psychology, and sociology? How can something I don’t see be real? How can I prove this question? There are tons of books processing God, and life, and religion, and the human condition. In fact I think it’s safe to say that most books address at least one of these issues – (Especially the fiction!! But that gets us back into the learning through experience and our humanity categories). **Our intellect is a brilliant part of what makes us human. It helps make sense of all the other information that we are constantly receiving. It needs to function in harmony with all our other capacities in order for us to feel balanced and whole.** Walt Whitman shares his experience in *Song of Myself*.

I hear and behold God in every object,
yet understand God not in the least...
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four,
and each moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see God,
and in my own face in the glass;
I find letters from God dropt in the street,
and every one is signed by God’s name,
And I leave them where they are,
for I know that whereso’er I go,
Others will punctually come forever and ever.

~ Through our Need ~

The most personal, the most frustrating, and the most common way God seems to reveal The Almighty to us, is through our need. It is only when we reach the end of ourselves and recognize that we can do no more, and the problem is not resolved; that we cannot “fix” it, and it will have to remain broken; that we cannot “save” it, and it is lost.

Bless the broken road

By Selah

I set out on a narrow way. Many years ago. Hoping I would find true love along the broken road. I got lost a time or two, wiped my brow, kept pushing through I couldn't see how every sign pointed straight to you.

Every long lost dream lead me to where you are, others who broke my heart they were just northern stars pointing me on my way into your lovin' arms. This much I know is true - God blest the broken road and led me straight to you.

I think about the years I spent, just passin' through. I'd like to take the time I lost and give it back to you. You just smile and take my hand, you been there you understand, it's all part of this grander plan that is coming true.

Every long lost dream lead me to where you are, others who broke my heart they were just northern stars pointing me on my way into your loving arms. This much I know is true - God blest the broken road and led me straight to you.

Now I'm just rollin' home into your lovin' arms, this much I know is true that God blest the broken road and let me straight to you.

These are the times that all the other confusion, frustration, questions, answers, and ideas are stripped away and we are left just with ourselves – and God.

Sometimes it is because our child is dying. Sometimes it is because we are adrift at sea and at the end of our strength to survive. Sometimes it is because we are dying inside and have nowhere left to turn. But usually it is because we are very sick, or we have lost something very important to us, or our financial security - isn't. **These are the times when we discover what has been sustaining us, because God has allowed it to be removed.** We are falling, or losing, or dying, and grasping for that prince on that white horse to save us. We are right where God wants us – needing Divinity; for substance, for sustenance, for direction, for comfort, for purpose, for hope.

A powerful story about God drawing someone to Himself through their experiences was Greg who was a very successful talk-radio personality who had no time whatsoever for God. He was living large and loving it. Then his child was diagnosed with cancer. As his world came crashing down, he began to talk a bit about it on the radio. Soon he was getting calls and cards from people sharing their struggles and encouraging him. His heart was softened by their concern and support. Amazingly quickly he began to change his attitude. He began expressing not his anguish over the radio, but his appreciation. **He was seeing that God uses all things for our good and His glory!**

~Through Example ~

Ever watched a soap-opera and said to yourself “now that was a stupid move, he should have ...”? Have you read a novel, or seen a movie and related to the character? Hopefully you don't cry every time like I do! That's us learning through the examples (both good & bad) of others. That's us feeling their pain, and sharing their joy, and deciding that we will or will not repeat that action in our own lives. It doesn't matter whether its fiction (imagined) or non-fiction (a true story), **we learn through the choices we are presented with.** (We don't always learn the *correct* thing, but we learn things.)

Early on God made a plan to get humanity's attention and He has stuck with it very consistently using one specific family which has developed into one specific nation which is now developing into one body. Chapter 12 *The Progressive Revelation*, reviews this history in more detail. Chapter 10 *What is God Going to Do?* reveals this developing body. For now, let's just summarize and say that **God chose to use one nation as an example for all other nations and people**, and put them on display for the world to learn from throughout history. That nation is Israel, which spawned Christianity which is playing a part in building The Body of Christ.

“For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and iniquity. In my faithfulness I will reward them and make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed.” - Isaiah 61:8,9

Here are some examples of God using the Jewish Nation, and Christianity:

- Many nations now have social structures based on the 10 Commandments and Jewish Law.
- “*Thou hast chosen us from amongst the peoples,*” Jews declare daily in their synagogues, even after multiple-millennia.
- Jewish atheist turned Christian, Richard Wurmbrand noted the influence Jews have had on Christianity, capitalism, communism, science, and industry “all out of proportion to their numbers,” in the preface to his book *Christ on the Jewish Road*.
- The good news of Jesus Christ has now circled the globe and spawned many new religions. Worship of the One True God now exists in every nation and people group around the world.
- We all still ponder the Holocaust and how from attempted annihilation rebloomed the nation of Israel.

There's a brain teaser floating around out there –
“**What's the only once-dead language now being spoken regularly on the streets?**”

– Hebrew is the answer!

- Christianity moved west and flourished in Europe, eventually founding the United States. Many scholars credit Christianity as being the root of western wealth and power and influence.
 - The declaration of independence is based on Biblical principles.
 - The judicial system is founded on the Ten Commandments.
 - Money heralds “In God we trust.”

- Many governments around the world persecute and even martyr Christians today for fear of the influence of this belief. A quick glance at Voice of The Martyrs webpage listed the heinous abuses of people in eight countries today – just on their first page.⁵⁸ They included:
 - “In the last three months, three Christians have died in Eritrean prisons.” And “100 more were arrested.”
 - “On Aug. 24, 2008, when Hindu radicals began violent attacks against Christians throughout Orissa (India), venomous threats by agitators forced the Digal family to leave their village. The brutality against Orissa Christians spawned by Hindu fundamentalists was unflinchingly complete. Homes were burned. Churches were destroyed. People were killed. The entire Digal family fled their small village in the Kandhalmal district to the slums of the state's capital. All eight members were forced to live in a one-room, wooden shack. Later, 18 men began to beat Pastor Digal. They tied his hands and legs. Witnesses watched as they stripped him of his clothes leaving nothing but a shirt. They burned his face and tortured him in unspeakable ways. Then they dumped this limp body in a creek where it floated for days.
 - “On Nov. 12, two sisters were killed and their mother wounded by a gang of Islamic extremists in the Al Qahira section of Mosul, Iraq, according to VOM contacts. The gunmen shot one of the sisters as she was waiting for a bus outside their home. They then stormed into the home, killed the other sister and injured their mother. A bomb placed by the assailants at the entrance of the house detonated as police arrived on the scene, injuring several officers. This incident is the latest in a series of attacks on Christians that have occurred in Mosul, in recent weeks. Since October, more than seven Christians have been killed and more than 200 families displaced. The Christian community in Iraq is estimated to be 3 percent of Iraq’s 26 million people, or about 800,000. Some Christians believe they are being targeted in an effort to wipe out the Christian community's economic activity and drive believers from the area. Since 2003, Christian leaders, churches and businesses in Iraq have been targeted by Islamic extremists. As a result, many believers have fled.”
 - “Before becoming a Christian, [Mohammad – name changed] wrote articles attempting to prove Islam was the only way to God. After they were written, however, Mohammad began to have doubts about Islam. He saw violence in Islam and heard his colleagues say that one day those who follow Islam will invade Europe and take their women. After hearing this, Mohammad was very disgusted. Later, Mohammad met a Christian who invited him to his house. "He gave [Mohammad] a Bible and asked him to read. When he opened the Bible, the first verse he read was 'And all who accepted Him, He gave them authority to be the sons of God,'" VOM contacts said. "Mohammad said it was like an electrical current went through his body when he read those words," VOM contacts added. "The word of God is powerful," Mohammad added. Following his conversion,

⁵⁸ See Voice of The Martyrs information at www.Persecution.com

Mohammad was arrested and imprisoned for two years. "He experienced miracles after miracles in jail," VOM contacts said. "The authorities told the extremists in prison that he was a convert so one of them would kill him. But the Lord protected him and kept him day after day. During his time in jail, his wife accepted the Lord, his daughter who is in university and his son who is a teenager." Since Mohammad's release from prison, many attempted to kill him. He has been receiving all kinds of threats from neighbor and his extended family since he was released. VOM contacts added, "No one wants to employ him because he has converted to Christianity. Somehow, Mohammad found a job and he was doing great. Before the end of the month, his employer fired him without reason and did not even give him a salary. When he got home he received a phone call from the national security [office] warning him if he ever tries to work he will be killed. They told him, 'You should be dead by now, be thankful that you're not.'"

"Behold I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live will see the working of the Lord, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you."
-Exodus 34:10-11

The example that is Israel and through it, Christianity, has been copied in every way, and against all odds, it shines even brighter today. There are no other people-groups on the planet that are so loved, and hated, and inspired, and judged. Evidently, all in God's plan!

In 2005 a Newsweek article stated "Eighty-one percent [of Americans] say they are Christians; they are part of what is now the world's largest faith, with two-billion believers, or roughly thirty-three percent of the earth's population."¹

"For if by now I had put forth My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, you would then have been cut off from the earth. But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth."
-Exodus 9:15

"Through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus."
- Ephesians 3:6

What is God's self-revelation in Scripture?

The Catholic Westminster Shorter Catechism defines: "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." They got all that from Scripture.

Christianity, like its mother – Judaism, recognizes the authority of Scriptures to define Truth. Following are Scriptural passages in which God is speaking directly to us, and revealing who Deity is. The text is in red where God is actually speaking.

- ***God is all-powerful.***

"See now that I myself am He! There is no God besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand. I lift my hand to heaven and declare: As surely as I live forever, when I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me."

Deuteronomy 32:39-41

- ***God created us, loves us, and will protect us.***

"But now, this is what the Lord says – He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Cush and Seba in your stead. Since you are precious and honored in my sight and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life. So be not afraid, for I am with you..."

You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He. Before me no God was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed- I, and not some foreign god among you, you are my witnesses, declares the Lord, "that I am God. Yes, and from ancient days I am He. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?"

Isaiah 43:1-5, 10-13

- ***God controls all things***

"The Lord of hosts has sworn saying, "surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand... For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for My stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?" "I am God, and there is no one like Me... My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure... I have planned it, surely I will do it."

Isaiah 14:24, 27: 46:9, 11

- ***God is Just.***

“The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness and truth; who keeps loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” Exodus 34:6, 7

- ***God punishes our sins, and then heals our wounds from that discipline.***

“I am with you and will save you,” declares the LORD. “Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished.”

This is what the LORD says: *“Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing. There is no one to plead your cause, no remedy for your sore, no healing for you. All your allies have forgotten you; they care nothing for you. I have struck you as an enemy would and punished you as would the cruel, because your guilt is so great and your sins so many. Why do you cry out over your wound, your pain that has no cure? Because of your great guilt and many sins I have done these things to you. But all who devour you will be devoured; all your enemies will go into exile. Those who plunder you will be plundered; all who make spoil of you I will despoil. But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds, declares the LORD.”* Jeremiah 30:11-17

- ***God knows all things.***

Jesus told us in Matthew 6:8

“Your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him”.

- ***God is our provider.***

Jesus’ disciple Paul elaborated in Philippians 4:19 “My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus”.

- ***Jesus had the full authority of God.***

In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus is speaking.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

- *Jesus represents the Father, and is our connection.*

In Mark 9:7: God affirms Jesus' place.
"This is my son, whom I love – listen to Him!"



In John 14:6,7,10,11; Jesus is telling us

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him." "Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing His work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."

- *God, the Holy Spirit, is the Spirit of Truth, and will be with us forever.*

In John 14:15-17; Jesus again shows us how intimately connected the Divinity is, saying,
"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Her, because it neither sees Her nor knows Her. But you know Her for She lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."

For Further Study –

- *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, is 1950's radio broadcasts, containing outstanding and easily understood theology with great English humor.
- *Evidence that demands a verdict*, By Josh McDowell, reports very thorough research into the Truths of God.

Thoughts while reading this Chapter ~

Date:

Activities ~

Try to Trust in God's revelations.

Trust is hard! We trusted our parents when we were young and they let us down when we were teenagers. We trusted our boss and they stole our idea and our credit. We trusted our spouse and they trusted someone else. We trusted our kids and they rejected us. Here we are talking about learning from our experiences, and so often they teach us not to trust!

This is where we have to process what we know – this world is currently run by a usurper, “the father of lies,” Satan, not God. We were supposed to run this planet and Adam & Eve gave away that title! Now we must look past the obvious lies, to the fundamental, to the original intent, to the Truth. Now we must see through the mirage cast by the gods, and look for the vision behind it created by God. Now we must look to a stronger power driving the squeaky wheel. Can we learn to trust that obscured vision?

1. ***Pick the new idea from the chapter that meant the most to you and act on it.*** If it's that God knows all things, stop telling God what *you* want. If it's God's ability to provide, give away your favorite tool, or last \$20.00 and see how God provides in the lacking.
2. ***Consider how Jesus Christ represented God while on this earth.*** Read some of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Bible) and ask yourself “What *did* Jesus do?”
3. ***Pick one of God's emotions revealed in scripture and respond to it.*** If it's His pride, do something you're really good at and dedicate it to God. If it's His anger, apologize for your part in that and do something positive to “make amends;” rest and read some scriptures to focus on God this Sabbath and show God you seriously care about His feelings.

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

Chapter 5

Who is Jesus Christ?

A teacher was teaching students about the resurrection of Jesus when one student asked, "What did Jesus say right after He came out of the grave?" The teacher explained that the Gospels do not tell us what He said. One enthusiastic child jumped up. "I know what He said; He said, 'Tah-dah!'"

***Kingpin of History ~
Physically ~
Awaited Messiah ~
Divine Nature ~
Subversive ~
Servant ~
Healer ~
Mover and Shaker ~
Revolutionary ~
Sacrifice ~
The Testimony of Others ~***

***Fully Human and Fully Divine ~
Socially ~
Alternatives ~
Fulfilled Prophecy ~
Emancipator ~
Prophet, Priest, and King ~
Grace and Truth ~
Political and Social Associations ~
Anointed for Obedience ~
The Readers Digest History ~***

Kingpin of History ~

Yeshua (in Hebrew), Isa-Al Masih (in Arabic), or Jesus (in English) lived in Israel during the Roman occupation. He was born approximately 1 A.D. He is the reason we count time as we do for He is the kingpin of history for western culture. Scythian Monk, Dionysius Exiguus was trying to date Easter correctly in 525 A.D. and determined that the years before the life of Jesus would be counted backwards from the year of His birth and be called B.C. (Before Christ. Now beginning to be referred to as B.C.E. = Before the Common Era). The year of His birth was established as 1 A.D. (Anno Domini = Year of our Lord, and is now being called C.E. = the Common Era).

Fun Fact : Today, based on historical evidence relating to Herod and astronomical evidence relating to eclipses and star novas, most scholars believe Jesus was actually born a few years earlier. Perhaps 5 B.C. See <http://www.biblelight.net/year.htm>

One Solitary Life ~

He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant. He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was 30. Then, for three years, he was an itinerant preacher.

He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family or owned a home. He didn't go to college. He never lived in a big city. He never traveled 200 miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for his garments, the only property he had on earth. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave, through the pity of a friend.

Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race. I am well within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned--put together--have not affected the life of man on this earth as much as that one, solitary life.

Attributed to James Allen Francis.

“Jesus has impacted history uniquely. He is recognized as the promised Messiah by Messianic Jews, Christians,⁵⁹ and Muslims.⁶⁰ Messiah means “anointed one” in Hebrew and Aramaic even today.”⁶¹

When Yeshua was a baby and His parents took him to the Temple to present Him to the Lord. Simeon, an old man waiting for the messiah, recognized Him and prophesied,⁶²

“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.”

In the Qur’an, Jesus is referred to as “the greatest above all in this world and in the world to come.”⁶³ One of the greatest theologians of the 20th Century Karl Barth was asked what he felt was the greatest insight he had ever thought or written. He replied, “Jesus Loves Me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” When historian H.G. Wells was asked to judge a person’s greatness by historical standards, and determine which historical personality has left the most indelible mark, he replied “By this test Jesus stands first.”

It is astounding to note the huge difference in tone between God being “set-apart”⁶⁴ and angry about it in the Bible’s Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures); and God being “incarnate” and coming to earth to restore relationship in the Bible’s New Testament (Injil). **What came in between these two drastically different attitudes? – Jesus Christ, and His thirty-three year experience in being a created human being.**

Fully Human and Fully Divine ~

Remember the concept of paradox I used to describe God in the first chapter? **God is many seemingly opposite things together at the same time – She’s the whole enchilada!** Nowhere is that more apparent than in Yeshua. God was “incarnate” and became a human male. A real flesh and blood infant who was born of a woman, and grew into a man, experiencing all that we all face as humans on this planet, and much more as God being directly attacked by Satan.

“In Him the whole fullness of Deity dwells bodily.
- Colossians 2:9

Wm. Paul Young describes it beautifully in *The Shack*:

“When we three spoke ourself into human existence as the Son of God, we became fully human. We also chose to embrace all the limitations that this entailed. Even though we have always been

⁵⁹ (John 1:41, 4:25-30, Acts 3:20, Ephesians 2:12,12)

⁶⁰ (Surah 3:45, 4:171-172).

⁶¹ Jesus in the Qur’an and Bible. www.MuslimEducationCenter.com

⁶² Luke 2:34,35

⁶³ Qur’an, (Al-Imran, V.45)

⁶⁴ Or distanced. Having had His relationship with His precious creation killed by sin through Adam & Eve.

present in this created universe, we now became flesh and blood. It would be like this bird, whose nature it is to fly, choosing only to walk and remain grounded. He doesn't stop being the bird, but it does alter his experience of life significantly. Mackenzie, I can fly, but humans can't. Jesus is fully human. Although he is also fully God, he has never drawn upon his nature as God to do anything. He has only lived out of his relationship with me, living in the very same manner that I desire to be in relationship with every human being. He is just the first to do it to the uttermost-the first to absolutely trust my life within him, the first to believe in my love and goodness without regard for appearance or consequence. Remember that choosing to stay on the ground is a choice to facilitate a relationship; to honor it. Mackenzie, you do this yourself. You don't play a game or color a picture with a child to show your superiority. Rather, you choose to limit yourself so as to facilitate and honor that relationship. You will even lose a competition to accomplish love. It is not about winning and losing, but about love and respect."

Physically ~

There were no cameras in first century Israel, but **a few physical descriptions of Jesus have survived.** According to a letter-report to the Roman Senate by Lentulus, the predecessor of Pontius Pilate; Christ possessed a tall and handsome figure, a countenance which inspired love and fear together, dark, shining, curling hair, parted in the center in Nazarene fashion and flowing over the shoulders, an open and serene forehead, a face without wrinkle or blemish and rendered more beautiful by its delicate ruddiness, a perfect nose and mouth, a full red beard of the same color as the hair and worn in two points, and piercing eyes of grayish-blue.⁶⁵ (Do you suppose a perfect nose by first century Roman standards was the common Jewish large nose or an uncommon small one?)



(c)1978 Barrie M. Schwartz

If the controversial Shroud of Turin is in fact Jesus' burial cloth, its extensive research shows Him to have been approximately 6 feet tall (plus or minus up to two-inches). The shrouds' negative image shows the shoulder length hair parted down the middle, the tall forehead, the beard, and a moustache. The blood on the shroud is from the AB negative group.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Taken from the New Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia volume VI p.170.

⁶⁶ www.Shroud.com – official site

Socially ~

Current Archeological research has broad analysis of His probable position in society. Here are two vastly different takes, chiming in with their Shroud of Turin face image analysis:

In *Rabbi Jesus* Bruce Chilton hypothesis' that Jesus was probably illiterate⁶⁷ and raised in the oral tradition where Scripture was memorized and the content and even intonations of its presentation were an art form.

“His disputes with literate experts in the law (the scribes of the New Testament) owe something to the difference of feeling between those who heard the words of Moses spoken and those for whom those words were consigned to writing. Written, a word loses the immediate proximity to action and the emotional resonance produced by the intonation, texture, vibration of the spoken voice. It may seem counterintuitive to us, but for Jesus it was the spoken word that was sacred. The word-spoken from person to person-was the whole thrust of prophecy.”⁶⁸

Conversely; In *The Secret Initiation of Jesus at Qumran*, Robert Feather has a completely different hypothesis.

“Prior to circa 63 C.E., when Joshua Ben Gamla was high priest in Jerusalem, Jesus would not have been required to attend school until he was sixteen or seventeen, and there would have been no hindrance for him to travel to Jerusalem with his parents at the age of twelve. It would also, therefore, seem likely that when Jesus reached the age of sixteen or seventeen, his parents were required by law to place him into a recognized school. And from the knowledge that Jesus and the Christian Scriptures subsequently exhibited, it seems certain that they opted for the intense learning center of Qumran. The Dead Sea Scroll called the Community Rule (also known as the Manuel of Discipline), sets out the requirement for a ten-year period of study, after which, at the age of twenty, students had to undergo a public examination before their peers to verify their integrity and their understanding of the Law. A year of probation followed, and then the student was again examined. If he passed this test, he served a further year of probation before a proposal for full membership in the Brotherhood was put to the vote. If accepted, he was required to swear an oath of loyalty. The minimum age to hold office in the Brotherhood was twenty-five, and the “fourth degree of holiness” (referred to by Josephus) could not be reached before the age of thirty. The most likely scenario is, therefore, that Jesus “graduated” at the age of

⁶⁷ His interpretation of illiterate would have meant “not a reader” as opposed to uneducated. His education would have been in memorizing and getting the precise intonations of the meanings of the entire body of Scripture. No small feat.

⁶⁸ *Rabbi Jesus* by Bruce Chilton published by Image Books, Doubleday. p140

thirty and then chose to become an “urban Essene,” taking his own path with his own cadre of followers. Basing himself in Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee, he set forth with several close disciples to preach the basic message of the Essenes and Torah, enriched by his own divine revelation.”

Remembering the paradox’s of God - is there a scenario where both hypothesis’ could somehow be true?

When talking about Religious differences between Judaism and Christianity, it must be pointed out that Jews started Christianity. Many religious Jews in Christ’s day acknowledged His deity and left the synagogues and (possibly Qumran) to start the home churches that developed into the Christianity we know today.

Christianity cannot be correctly understood outside of its Jewish roots.

Sholem Ash wrote:

“Jesus Christ is the outstanding personality of all time... No other teacher – Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Mohammedan – is still a teacher whose teaching is such a guidepost for the world we live in. Other teachers may have something basic for an Oriental, an Arab, or an Occidental; but every act and word of Jesus has value for all of us. He becomes the Light of the World. Why shouldn’t I, a Jew, be proud of that?”

Awaited Messiah ~

Here’s where Christianity and Judaism part company. Religious (as opposed to national) Jews believe that Jesus Christ was not divine, and did not rise from the dead. The cover-up story of Jesus’ resurrection is told in Matthew 28:11-15

“While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them “you are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.”

Alternatives ~

The issue is a crucial one. No one in history has argued the fact that Jesus was a phenomenal teacher, preacher, prophet, healer, and revolutionary; but was He Messiah and Lord? Was Yeshua Divine? Was He really here to reveal a new and expanded understanding of the Almighty? Was He really here taking care of some critical business about sin being between God and humanity⁶⁹ as He said?

Yeshua himself went way out of his way to leave us only two choices in the historical record. Either He was God incarnate in human flesh as He said; or, He was a lunatic (for He said He was God in many different ways and to many different people⁷⁰). The second, lunatic reason is one of the reasons why the religious leaders of His time had Him crucified⁷¹.

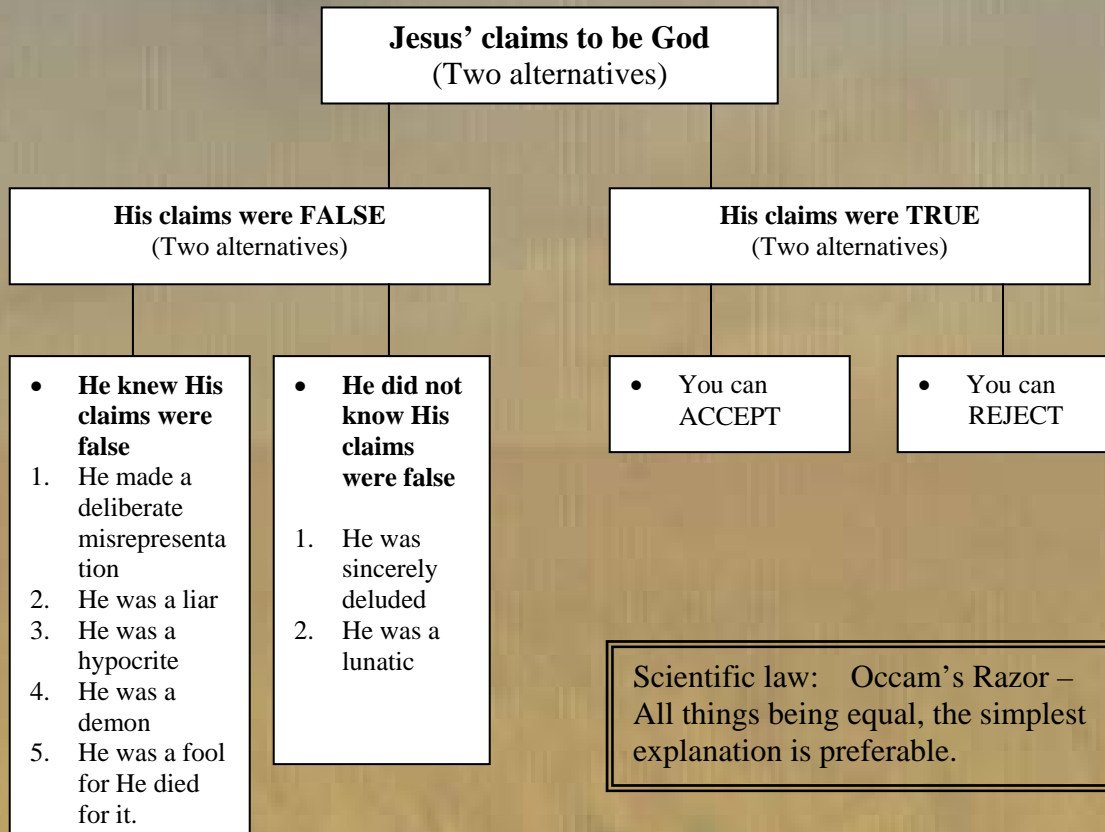


Chart created by Josh McDowell in *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*.

⁶⁹ “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.” Isaiah 59:2; and “*Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations.*” Luke 24:47.

⁷⁰ “We are not stoning you for any of these,” replied the Jews, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.” John 10:33

⁷¹ “The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” “*Yes, it is as you say,*” Jesus replied.” Matthew 26:63b, Luke 22:70.

C.S. Lewis, the Cambridge University Professor who was once an avowed agnostic, and became one of the great Christian apologetic's of the twentieth century said:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse." "You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us."

A Few of the people who acknowledged Yeshua/Jesus' Deity in Scripture.

Person	Scripture	Reference
Angel to Mary	"You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end."	Luke 1:31--33
Angel	"I am only a messenger from your Lord, (to announce) to you the gift of a righteous son."	Surah 19:19 Qur'an
Angel to Joseph	"She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."	Matthew 1:21
God	"And behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."	Matthew 3:17
Demons	"Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before Him and cried out, "You are the Son of God."	Mark 3:11
A man possessed by a demon	"Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God!"	Luke 4:34
Simeon	"For my eyes have seen Your salvation...A light of revelation to the gentiles."	Luke 2:30-32
Many Samaritans	"We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."	John 4:42
Martha a follower of Christ	"Yes, Lord," "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."	John 11:27
Possessed boy's Father	"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"	Mark 9:24
A very large crowd in Jerusalem	"The crowds that went ahead of Him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"	Matthew 21:9
Qur'an testimony of disciples of Jesus	"Our Lord! We believe in that which Thou hast revealed and we follow him (Jesus) whom Thou hast sent. Enroll us among those who witness to the truth."	Surah 3:53 Qur'an

Divine Nature ~

Christians go with the choice that Jesus is God, as He said. (Chapter 12 on the Progressive Revelation lays out how Christians come to this conclusion after reviewing the Scriptures.) Brilliant Jewish atheist-turned-Christian; Richard Wurmbrand, spoke 13 languages, was imprisoned in communist Romania for 14 years for his faith in Jesus Christ, and was voted “the fifth greatest Romanian” according to Mari Romani poll in 2006. He stated the case eloquently in his book *Christ on the Jewish Road*.

“There are 5 highly convincing arguments in favor of the divine nature of Jesus. First, He overcame death, which no other human being has done. Second, He overcame physical laws which man cannot overcome (raising the dead, healing lepers, multiplying loaves and fishes, and so on). Third, He overcame Judaism, which wanted Him to remain unknown. Fourth, He conquered the Roman Empire. The great persecutor of Christianity, Julian the Apostate, died with these words on his lips: ‘Thou has conquered, O Galilean.’ It is the strongest who conquers. If Jesus has concurred kings, He is the King of Kings. Fifth, by the madness of the Cross, He has overcome human wisdom.”

Fulfilled Prophecy ~

Jesus Christ fulfilled three hundred and thirty-two Old Testament prophecies which the awaited Messiah would have to do. His original disciples were all Jewish, which gives us the second reason why the Jewish religious leaders of the time crucified Him – too many people were beginning to follow Him and leave the “national religion.”⁷² Josh McDowell, in his book *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* says this:

“The Old Testament, written over a 1,000-year period, contains several hundred⁷³ references to the coming Messiah. All of these were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and they establish a solid confirmation of His credentials as the messiah.”

⁷² “If we let Him go on like this, everyone will believe in Him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” John 11:48

⁷³ “332 distinct predictions which were literally fulfilled in Christ” per Cannon Liddon in *The Basis of Christian Faith* by Floyd Hamilton.

Yeshua/Jesus Christ fulfilled Prophecy			
Prophecy	Scriptural Reference	Fulfilled	Scriptural Reference
Messiah will be known by His credentials		Yeshua fulfilled over 300 Old Testament prophecies	
"I declared the former things long ago and they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaim them. Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. Therefore I declared them to you long ago, before they took place I proclaimed them to you, lest you should say, 'My idol has done them, and my graven image and my molten image have commanded them.'"	Isaiah 48:3,5	"Which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, who was declared with power to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord."	Romans 1:2-4
Born of a virgin		Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit	
"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."	Isaiah 7:14	"She was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus."	Matthew 1:18,24,25
Presented with gifts from kings from afar		Arab astrologists (predecessors of astronomy) traveled far to bring gifts for the king announced by the stars.	
"Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts."	Psalms 72:10,12-15	"...Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem...and they fell down and worshiped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts..."	Matthew 2:1,11
Messiah shall be a prophet		Prophetic gifts acknowledged	
"I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command him."	Deuteronomy 18:18	"My teaching is not mine, but His who sent Me."	John 7:16
Filled with the Spirit of God		Acknowledged by people	
"The Messiah - as it is written, And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge of the fear of the Lord."	Babylonian Talmud, The Sanhedrin II	"But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men."	Matthew 9:8
Ministry of Miracles		Jesus healed all He came in contact with	
"Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy."	Isaiah 35:5,6a	"And Jesus was going about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness."	Matthew 9:35
Enter Jerusalem on a Donkey		Jesus' deity was acknowledged by the masses for one day on Palm Sunday	
"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in Triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey."	Zechariah 9:9	"And they brought it to Jesus and they threw their garments on the colt, and put Jesus on it. And as He was going, they were spreading their garments in the road."	Luke 19:35,36
Ascension		Ascended to God in front of a crowd	
"Thou hast ascended on high..."	Psalms 68:18a	"He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."	Acts 1:9
Light to all people		Healing all who stand in it	
"I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."	Isaiah 49:6	"Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."	Acts 26:23

Servant ~

Born in a barn, raised in a backward town, announced by a man “crying in the wilderness”, with no looks to attract us to him⁷⁴, with a very common name, and little money; **Jesus came to meet people where they were and not to put them off with good looks or great education, or wealth, or impressive parents.** In *The Jesus Style*, Gayle D. Erwin tells us:

“With this kind of approach to us, He could be sure that our response would be an honest one. None of the methods that would coerce us and get something less than genuine belief were used. This is indicative of true love. Being an others-oriented person, a servant to others, made Him want to free them to be as real and honest as possible. He wanted them to be able to make genuine decisions. God refuses to violate our personhood and our power to choose. That is love.”

Servant-hood was one of the most unique qualities of Yeshua, and the one that most threw the expectant Jewish leaders off. Jesus said “He who would be greatest among you must be servant of all,”⁷⁵ and He lived this example. The Jews had been waiting hundreds of years for a conquering Messiah. They wanted the military commander who would stomp on all the nations that had been treading over them. The leaders weren’t prepared for Messiah to conquer through love, self-sacrifice, and by meeting practical needs for food and healing and value. But Yeshua came to show people a more subversive way to conquer – one heart and mind at a time. He met real needs for food when people had traveled far and listened to Him long and there was no fast-food available. He created the first fast-food; making fish sandwiches for thousands at a prayer! He didn’t franchise the idea, He just filled their growling tummies; as He had already filled their aching heads and hearts. He healed all who asked Him to, whether it was personally or through another friends’ request. He covered social crisis’ making the crucial celebratory wine, when the provisions ran out at the wedding of his mom’s friend. He washed His disciples dirty feet (the job of a slave in dusty Israel), and made them meals to return to after a full day of fishing. He walked throughout Israel taking the time to talk to everyone, not just the “important people.” He went way out of His way to meet the social outcasts and give their lives meaning. He encouraged others to help Him; letting a strange lady draw Him water (a societal “no, no”), and borrowing the colt of someone from another town, and using their meeting room for His private last supper.

He appreciated the provision of His Father through others. His woman followers may have clothed Him in fine clothing. He was fed and housed with their best, by honored citizens in each town He visited. He even paid His disciples taxes with money upchucked by a fish! He was flamboyant and enjoyed parties with tax collectors when it was the best way to meet people; and He was quiet and retiring when that was the best method to meet the needs at hand. He ranted and raved, and prayed and paid. He was a whole person, able to function perfectly in every situation. His chosen priority was service to others, not of Himself. He was a man on a mission and His mission was to meet people and their needs. **Most striking in His teaching is the focal place given to love, and His strong emphasis on a role of suffering, rejection, and death.** Jesus chose humility rather than commanding a high status.

⁷⁴ This is a prophetic statement, not-withstanding Lentalus’ glowing report to the Roman Senate quoted earlier (sounded like an admirer to me!). Most of the earliest drawings and the Shroud of Turin are remarkably similar, and remarkably plain.

⁷⁵ Luke 22:26

Prophet, Priest, and King ~

Extending grace and reconnecting God to His precious creation, was Jesus' divine agenda.

GRACE - Messiah's Job's	
Job Description	How He did it
1) <i>To experience Humanity for God</i>	<i>Incarnated as Son of Man</i>
"I am coming, and I will live among you." declares the Lord. "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people." -Zechariah 2:10,11	<i>"I have brought You glory on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do."</i> - John 17:4
"It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to me?" - Zechariah 8:6	"We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him who is true-even in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life." - 1 John 5:20
2) <i>To overcome evil and Satan</i>	<i>Being sacrificed and then overcoming death</i>
"We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." - 1 John 5:18-19	To give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins. - Luke 1:77
"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the Devil's work." - 1 John 3:8	"They overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." - Revelation 12:11
3) <i>Restore the possibility of relationship between humanity and God</i>	<i>Showed us the Father</i>
"No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve Him. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads." - Revelation 22:3,4	<i>"Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father"</i> -John 14:9
"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." - Romans 4:25	<i>"For You granted [the Son] authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."</i> - John 17:2,3
4) <i>Restore Humanity</i>	<i>Showed us how, and enables us to live</i>
<i>"The son of man came to seek & save what was lost"</i> . - Luke 19:10	"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." - John 1:4
"Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. - Romans 6:4	"Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." - 2 Peter 1:3

Characteristically of only a limitless God- **Jesus at the same time provided real leadership and showed humanity the way to God** exemplifying all the characteristics of prophet, priest, and king. As a prophet He revealed God to humanity as He walked and talked among us. As a priest He ministered to our spiritual bankruptcy and healed

body, soul, and spirit; restoring hope and returning people's focus onto their Father in Heaven. As a king He directed people in the way that they should live, and provided for their spiritual and physical needs.

Healer ~

The “Good News” of Jesus Christ is that healing is available. Al Masih (Jesus) brought physical healing, emotional healing, and spiritual healing. Jesus spent a huge part of his very brief ministry on earth healing people of every conceivable disease and deformation. As Catholic Priest Francis McNutt shares in his teaching *Healing and the Mind of Christ*,

“The fact that Jesus healed on the Sabbath was a **huge** in-your-face statement of Jesus’ priorities, in that day. Jesus introduced himself at the synagogue reading Isaiah 61, proclaiming himself Messiah who is here to heal and bring good news to the oppressed. Healing on the Sabbath in front of the [religious leaders] was **risking His life.**” “Jesus spent his time with unimportant and poor people. He spent most of his time healing people, when He only had 3 years to change the world! **He didn’t** spend time with leaders, and important people, and religious people.” “The only people Jesus couldn’t stand were the [religious leaders] because they thought they were in great shape. “Jesus’ whole mission was to destroy evil and any law that stood in the way of that was an unjust law and Jesus confronted it so it would not continue.

Are you tired? Worn out?

Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a rest.

Walk with me and work with me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace.

– Jesus Christ.

Just a few examples:

- He healed a (sub-class) woman in a worship service in front of all the Rabbi’s who had a fit about it.
- He hung out at the bathing pools healing the “untouchables” with leprosy, and blindness, and physical disabilities.
- He healed a demon possessed man and sent all the demons into a heard of pigs who then did a cliff-dive.

Francis’ wife, psychologist Judith McNutt shares the story of a friend of hers who had been adopted. During a prayer service this friend had a vision of Jesus taking her as a newborn into her mother. He handed her to her mother and her mother cried for joy, saying “she’s so beautiful!” Then her crying turned to sorrow and she said “but I can’t keep her.” Jesus said “I know you can’t, but I’ll take good care of her.” Then Christ picked her up and carried her out. She reached out from the swaddling and held Christ’s

finger as He carried her. During the service as she reached up for Jesus' finger, she also reached out and took the finger of the man sitting next to her. At the end of the prayer she let go and he immediately got up and left. She was concerned about her neighbor so went out and found him smoking a cigarette. She asked if she could explain and he said "Lady, I wish you would." She told him her experience during the prayer. He then shared his experience. He was not a Christian and was at this seminar because of an ultimatum from his wife. As this lady had held his finger his only thought that kept reoccurring was "I know that lady was full-grown, why does her hand feel so small?" He went on to say "If God loves you that much, I want to know Him too." Judith shared that all of the witnessing by his wife, and all of the teaching by the speakers at the conference had not touched this man, **but he was moved to accept Christ's love, because He healed her friend.** Now they are both healed!

Grace and Truth ~

John 1:17 tells us that the law came by Moses; grace and Truth by Jesus Christ. **The grace of Jesus' substitutionary death for our failures fulfills the Divine requirements of the law.**

Grace is unasked-for and undeserved love. God is love; **Jesus Christ showed His Divinity by fleshing out grace, and revealing the limitless depths of love.**

Where the law demanded righteousness-grace delivered righteousness. What the law required - grace provided. The law was pressure - grace was relief. The law was bondage - grace was freedom⁷⁶. **Grace and Truth had to be seen, so Jesus came to earth to display the other-worldly attributes of love, grace, and Truth.** He expressed His priorities clearly to the religious leaders "*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law - justice, mercy and faithfulness.*"⁷⁷

The requirement of the law was one unblemished (perfect lamb) sacrificed for sin. Jesus being perfect even in His humanity acted as the perfect lamb offered for the sins of humanity.

Mover and Shaker ~

Jesus was a mover and shaker, directly attacking the "religious" of the day and constantly challenging their reasons for their laws. He went where He wanted when He wanted, and purposely challenged their controlling laws in public, always making a scene just by being there.

⁷⁶ Taken from the book *The Jesus Style* by Gayle D. Erwin

⁷⁷ Matthew 23:23

Richard Rohr shares this observation in *Jesus' Plan for a New World*:

"Self-criticism is an outstanding characteristic of the Jewish tradition. This unusual capacity for critical thinking becomes a hallmark of Jesus' own relationship with his tradition."

- He expressed His anger at profiteering in a marketplace in "His Father's House," by running around overturning tables of merchandise and spilling profits, and chasing the profiteers out – with a whip! (There were legions of soldiers around Jerusalem, yet He either alone or leading a small pack, was able to empty the place!)
- He chased the legal leaders away from the woman caught in adultery who they wanted Him to stone.
- He converted Tax collectors and got them to refund money!
- He redefined God's required sacrifice from shedding the blood of animals to meals shared among friends & strangers where His sacrifice of blood was remembered.

He was not a respecter of persons, and a follower of the "rules." Yet He followed the Divine Laws scrupulously. He was always in Jerusalem for the required feasts to worship even if disguised because there was a price on His head. **He astounded the religious leaders by not following the normal practice of quoting a revered Rabbi for His sources, and authoritatively being His own source.** They all marveled saying "No man ever spoke like this man."⁷⁸ In the Second Appendix of the 10th Anniversary Expanded Edition of *Desiring God*, John Piper puts it like this:

"The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, *something greater than Jonah is here*. The queen of the south will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, *something greater than Solomon is here*: (Matthew 12:42-43). This kind of veiled claim runs through all Jesus said and did. And he made the astonishing claim that "*everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 10:32-33)."

Political and Social Associations ~

Jesus may have had Essenic training, but **He went way out of His way not to have the historical record associate Him with any of the many groups of His day.** He embraced the best theology from each tradition and built on those with His own revelations. (Perhaps a better way to put it would be that the many groups of His day, had each chosen a piece of Divine Truth to focus on, and Jesus came to reveal the whole pie.

⁷⁸ John 7:46 & "He taught them as one who had authority, and not as their Scribes." Matthew 7:29

A Few Groups/Sects from Jesus' Day

Group/Sect	Belief Jesus supported	Other evidence
The common people	Work hard, enjoy life, and don't get caught up in the legalism.	Jesus hung out with this group.
Nazarenes	Long hair, simplicity of life, Self-determination (free - choice).	Jesus was raised in this area of Israel.
Essenes	Eternal life, Apocalyptic End times, expected Messiah(s), relationship to God, unique calendar.	Associated with John the Baptist who followed Essenic traditions. Rejection of the Temple, celibate.
Pharisees	The importance of Torah, life after death, looking for Messiah.	Jesus vehemently rejected the Pharisees as a group, but embraced individuals.
Sadducees	The importance of Torah,	Jesus argued with this group
Zealots	Radicals for Israeli independence	Disciples Simon and possibly Judas were said to be Zealots.

Jesus was upset at the legalistic load of laws people labored under during His time. He followed God's laws scrupulously, but challenged the religious leaders of the time with the meaning behind their laws. Upon His resurrection, His followers were directed to rejoice in the freedom His death afforded them to joyfully obey the *spirit of the law* and not get caught up in the legalistic *letter of the law*.

Revolutionary ~

Jesus introduced three revolutionary ideas about God:

- First, **He was God**. Saying things like "*I am the way the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by Me.*"⁷⁹
- Second, Jesus insisted that **we can approach the author of our existence** and address God as a small child would call to their loving parent – "**Daddy**".⁸⁰
- Thirdly, Jesus also insisted that **the Kingdom of God was at hand**, even within us and among us.⁸¹ (You'll find this explained further in Chapter 6.)

All three reasons attacked the ruling religious leaders, effectively carving them out of the equation, and **allowing the people to go straight to God without third party arbitration**. So they brought Him to Rome's attention for the revolutionary he was and the Romans killed Him.

⁷⁹ John 14:6

⁸⁰ "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." Romans 8:15

⁸¹ "The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Matthew 4:17 & "The Kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:21

Subversive ~

After looking at the facts, it's astounding to ponder Dallas Willard's frank and accurate introduction of Jesus Christ in *The Divine Conspiracy*.

"Very few people today find Jesus interesting as a person or of vital relevance to the course of their actual lives. He is not generally regarded as a real-life personality who deals with real-life issues but is thought to be concerned with some feathery realm other than the one we must deal with, and must deal with now. And frankly, he is not taken to be a person of much ability."

"Jesus and his words are essentially subversive of established arrangements and ways of thinking. That is clear from the way they first entered the world, their initial effects, and how they are preserved in the New Testament writings and live on in his people. He himself described his words as "spirit and life" (John 6:63). They invade our "real" world with a reality even more real than it is, which explains why human beings then and now have to protect themselves against them."

Gods Own Fool By Michael Card

Seems I've imagined Him all of my life
As the wisest of all of mankind
But if God's Holy wisdom is foolish to man
He must have seemed out of His mind
Even His family said He was mad
And the priest said a demon's to blame
But, God in the form of this angry young man
Could not have seemed perfectly sane

Chorus

We in our foolishness thought we were wise
He played the fool and He opened our eyes
We in our weakness believed we were strong
He became helpless to show we were wrong
So we follow God's own Fool
For only the foolish can tell
Believe the unbelievable, come be a fool as well

So come lose your life for a carpenter's son
For a madman who died for a dream
And You'll have the faith His first followers had
And you'll feel the weight of the beam
So surrender the hunger to say you must know
Find the courage to say I believe
For the power of paradox opens your eyes
And blinds those who say they can see

Jesus' methods were subversive or opposite of common social structures:

- He came to make a splash. Christ means "Messiah" or savior. **Jesus Christ came to set people free.** The poor people of His day understood this and followed Him in droves. On several recorded occasions He had to slip away from the crowds to get some time alone.

- **Jesus came to fulfill the Law and set people free from the burden of their broken relationship with God.** He set people free from the weight of that burden; enabling them to chose obedience from a grateful heart; effectively eliminating the possibility for people to feel they had to obey because a distant, dictating Deity demanded it.

- **Jesus was very vital.** He fed people physically as well as spiritually. He challenged the ruling elite class practically and spiritually; so much so that they sent a regiment of soldiers in the dead of night to arrest Him while He prayed in seclusion with his handful of unarmed associates.

Emancipator ~

Jesus Christ elevated women and the poor and disenfranchised to equal value with leaders and rulers in both His speaking and His actions.

- He had women deeply involved in His ministry when they were only allowed to stand outside in the “court of women” at the temple.
- The first announcement of baby Jesus was to shepherds by angels. Keepers-of-sheep were honored to be the first visitors to see the Christ-child; because, virtual outcasts, they were considered the lowest of the low in Israel.
- Jesus hung out and ate with tax collectors and prostitutes who were the despised people groups of the day; elevating them to associates and inspiring them to mend their ways and return money, and introduce Jesus to their friends as the guest of honor at dinner parties.
- He traveled through areas that were religiously avoided by the elite, just to meet the locals.
- He prevented a woman caught in adultery from being stoned, by chasing off all the men holding rocks, one at a time with His words.
- He talked directly to women (not common practice for men) shocking even them.

Anointed for Obedience ~

One of the defining characteristics of Jesus was His total obedience to God. Jesus said “*I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.*”⁸² **The secret that enabled Jesus to imitate the Father with such perfection even as a human being was the anointing of the Holy Spirit.** Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was able to heal the sick and possessed, turn from temptations, endure the most painful death imaginable, and rise again from the grave. Jesus was God made flesh, enabled by God’s Spirit to obey all that God the Father desired to do to restore His relationship with His precious creation. At the beginning of His ministry He announced it publicly in the synagogue by reading aloud from a well recognized prophecy of the coming Messiah –

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*⁸³

The word Messiah means “the anointed one.” Here again, we see the Trinity at work. **God said “Go, do it.” Jesus did it perfectly, with the Holy Spirit contributing the power to make a way where there was no way.**

⁸² John 5:19

⁸³ Isaiah 61:1-2

Sacrifice ~

Christ came to die for the sins of all humanity. The revelation of God's required sacrifice is covered in the Progressive Revelation - Chapter 12; there I review God's revelation of the value Divinity places on blood, and how God made the first sacrifice of blood to cover Adam & Eve's nakedness with the skin of an animal thereby teaching humanity that they needed to shed blood for their sins, for sin kills. That revelation builds throughout Israel's history from one animal for one person, to one perfect human for all of humanity through all of time.

Jesus came teaching the new revelation of Israel's available purity because of His presence, as He ate and drank His way through Israel physically and socio-economically. He was physically displaying **the new form of acceptable sacrifice; no longer would it be the shedding of blood for the sins of family's and nations, but the partaking in communal meals in gratitude for God's provision of an acceptable sacrifice.** Christ was the final sacrifice; His blood was God's blood, perfect and pure. He died as a sacrifice, descended to Hell, and overcame Satan in his own realm. Christ rose victoriously, and He taught His disciples to use the feasts of fellowship He had instituted, as a remembrance that He came and sacrificed His Divine blood, and His human body to restore the relationship and the possibility of the forgiveness and purity that humanity could not achieve on its own.

We had always been in God's heart; now She could finally be in ours! What better way to celebrate the coup of all time than to throw a celebration of restored communion!

The Readers Digest History ~

Yeshua, Isa-Al Masih, or Jesus Christ was **born supernaturally** (His mother was a virgin impregnated by the Holy Spirit)⁸⁴. He was born in a barn (O.K. it was a stable; it may have been on the first floor of an Inn or in the celebrated cave of critters) in Bethlehem, a small town in the area of the tribe of Judah, in Israel. His birth was supernaturally announced by Angels who sent the lowest of the low (shepherders on the hills around town) to see Him first.

Jesus and His parents were **Divinely provided for** by His second recorded visitors with priceless gifts from the Magi. Magi were brilliant scholars and astrologers from Persia who had read the signs of Messiah's birth in the stars and made the arduous journey for many months to see this momentous event announced to them in the stars. At some point during His first 2 years, his parents were **Divinely instructed to flee** with Him to Egypt to protect His life from King Herod who expected the Messiah, having studied the Scriptures out of fear of losing his throne. They lived in Egypt for four years⁸⁵ until again **Divinely directed to return** after Herod's death.

⁸⁴ "You will be with child and give birth to a son." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" Luke 1:31,34.

⁸⁵ Per Egyptian tradition

During Yeshua's youth, **they returned to extended family in Nazareth**, in the province of Galilee in northern Israel. There He grew and followed in His father's footsteps becoming a carpenter. At some point His earthly father Joseph died, possibly leaving Jesus to support His mother and half-siblings according to Jewish custom⁸⁶ until He launched His radical ministry at the age of 30 (possibly because it was then that he was considered an adult; or because his half-brothers had grown enough to take over the family business and support His family, freeing Him to devote Himself to His Heavenly Fathers' business; or because He had been away at Qumran being trained as an Essene – we just don't know).

As supernaturally as His life began, so His ministry began. He was baptized by His cousin, John the Baptist, and **God spoke from Heaven**, publicly identifying and applauding His son. Next Jesus was **transported into the desert for 40 days** where He built His spiritual strength to combat Satan's temptations through prayer and fasting. Upon passing the spiritual test that Adam and Eve had failed, **God supernaturally restored His physical strength** so Jesus could move on to combat their descendants' challenges. For three years He traveled around Israel and Samaria, preaching about God's love for His people, supernaturally healing people, feeding thousands, and performing amazing miracles.

During this **three year ministry**, He challenged the ruling religious and political elite and became a marked man. He increasingly told His disciples that He was going to die for the sins of the world; not only **predicting His death**, but also **predicting His resurrection**. He emphasized that His rising from the dead would be the "sign" proving His claims of being Messiah.⁸⁷

*"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem: and the Son of Man will be delivered up to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will deliver Him up to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up."*⁸⁸

Jesus celebrated Passover alone with His disciples a night early, **turning the tradition of breaking bread and drinking wine into a new remembrance of the sacrifice** He was about to make (which Christians now call Communion or Eucharist), as He announced His impending betrayal to His bewildered disciples.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Some scholars believe that Joseph had older children from a previous marriage, who could have shouldered this responsibility.

⁸⁷ Matthew 12:17-30, & John 2:13-19

⁸⁸ Matthew 20:18,19

⁸⁹ Matthew 26:19-32

After turning the much anticipated feast into a funeral dirge; **He orchestrated His own death**, being sacrificed as a perfect lamb for Passover in Jerusalem. On the third day after His timely death, **He arose from the grave on the feast of “First Fruits”**; becoming the “firstborn among many brothers [and sisters].” He then presented Himself to scores of people on twelve different recorded occasions.⁹⁰ **He was seen for 50 days before “ascending to heaven” in dramatic fashion** before His Disciples on the Mount of Olives, promising to return in roughly the same way.

The Testimony of Others ~

“I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him.”

– **Napoleon Bonaparte**

“If ever the Divine appeared on earth, it was in the person of Christ,” “The human mind, no matter how far it may advance in every other department, will never transcend the height and moral culture of Christianity as it shines and glows in the Gospels.” – **Goethe**

“Jesus is the most perfect of all men that have yet appeared.” - **Ralph Waldo Emerson.**

“Who has taught the evangelists the qualities of a perfectly heroic soul, that they paint it so perfectly in Jesus Christ?” – **Pascal**

My Everything –

By Scott Krippayne

When the moon shines bright
On a sleepless night
I call your name
When the sun’s first rays
Offer up their praise
I do the same ...

For your mercy is new every morning
And your presence will light up the dark
You’re the air that I breath
You’re the strength that I need
You’re my everything
You’re the hope that I find
Everywhere, All the time
You’re My Everything ...

When I’m reaching out
You break through the doubt
That clouds my heart
When I’m lost and confused
You carry me through
To where you are
Oh you offer life everlasting
And a love that is one of a kind

Chorus:

All the joy and the peace I have known
Oh it comes from your hands alone

⁹⁰ See Evidence that Demands a verdict by Josh McDowell Chapter 10 for the list and references.

“For me, Christianity was not a “leap into the dark,” but rather “a step into the light.” I took the evidence that I could gather and put it on the scales. The scales tipped the way of Christ being the Son of God and resurrected from the dead. It was so overwhelmingly leaning to Christ that when I became a Christian, it was a “step into the light” rather than a “leap into the darkness.” If I had exercised “blind faith,” I would have rejected Jesus Christ and turned my back on all the evidence. Be careful. I did not prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus was the son of God. What I did was investigate the evidence and weigh the pros and cons. The results showed that Christ must be who He claimed to be, and I had to make a decision, which I did. The immediate reaction of many is, “You found what you wanted to find.” That is not the case. I confirmed through investigation what I wanted to refute. I set out to disprove Christianity. I had biases and prejudices not for Christ but contrary to Him. – **Josh McDowell**

For further study ~

Read the Gospels in the New Testament of the Bible.

- Matthew – the most organized, teaching Gospel, written for Jews.
- Mark – the first-written, and most active Gospel, written by a youth (less than thirty).
- Luke – the most personal Gospel, written by a physician to the Gentiles.
- John – the most contemplative, written by Jesus’ closest disciple.

Thoughts while reading this Chapter ~

Date:

Chapter 6

Who is the Holy Spirit?

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.”

–Helen Keller

*God ~
Spirit ~
Holy ~
Female ~
Wisdom ~
Breath ~
Powerful ~
God Living in us ~
The Difference She makes ~
Baptism in the Spirit ~
The Holy Spirit’s Power available to us ~
~ The Fruits of the Spirit ~
~ The Natural gifts of the Spirit ~
~ The Supernatural gifts of the Spirit ~
The Struggle of Understanding ~
Experiencing the Holy Spirit ~
Comforter ~
Karen’s Comfort ~
Mature Spirit-filled Believers ~
Kingdom of Heaven ~*

God ~

The Holy Spirit is the least understood portion of God for She is the least obvious, and most ethereal [ghostly or airy]. Our spirits are just as ethereal, and just as little-understood. The mystery of our spiritual natures may be our inability to communicate such deepness and such centrality. It could also reflect a short in our connection with ourselves and with God. Yet, as we set aside time to consider ourselves and God, we grow in our knowing and in our ability to communicate deep truths, and we begin to understand the incomprehensible.

Wm. Paul Young in his run-away best seller *The Shack* describes the Holy Spirit this way:

“To walk behind such a being was like tracking a sunbeam. Light seemed to radiate through her and then reflect her presence in multiple places at once. Her nature was rather ethereal, full of dynamic shades and hues of color and motion. “no wonder so many people are a little unnerved at relating to her,” Mack thought. “She obviously is not a being who is predictable.”

Spirit ~

In *The Power of Intention* (which is essentially a book about the Holy Spirit), Dr. Wayne Dyer says:

“Spirit eludes our attempts to explain and define it because it’s a dimension beyond beginnings and ends, beyond boundaries, beyond symbols, and beyond form itself. Consequently, written and spoken word, our symbols for communicating our experiences in this world, can’t really explain Spirit the way they do the physical world.”

In much of his book where he is calling “spirit,” “intention,” he defines Her as “energy of a higher and faster caliber than we can measure.”

Spirit is felt and not seen, more often than seen and felt! Perhaps the older title of “ghost” brings more of a mental picture to hold on to, for we have all seen movies where there are ghosts fading in and out of perception. Both words bring meaning to the name for Webster’s dictionary defines **ghost** as “the seat of life or intelligence,” and **spirit** as “an animating or vital principle held to give life to physical organisms, and a supernatural being or essence.”

Holy ~

“Holy” means set-apart. God is set-apart from humanity and functions on a different plain or dimension, or reality. Putting all the definitions together, I propose that the Holy Spirit is the original seat of all life and intelligence, *The Source*, who animates us and gives us vitality, as we emulate Her, connect to Her, and hold onto Her power. This connects us to Her, and lets Her set us apart from minimal human existence and add a whole new dimension, or plane, or reality to our experience. Perhaps Her supernatural-ness is our essence, and why we can’t explain any of it?

Female ~

In Jewish tradition, the image of God is both female as well as male. In both Hebrew and Aramaic **The Holy Spirit or ruach, meaning breath or wind, is a feminine noun.** She is understood to have participated in creation with God and to be the first consort on the divine throne.

Wisdom ~

She also goes by the name Wisdom in the book of Proverbs. The Scriptures tell us to “get Wisdom”⁹¹. In *Rabbi Jesus*, Bruce Chilton elaborates:

“Wisdom was a crucial aspect of Jesus’ vision of God, as poetic as Carl Jung’s anima or world-soul, as organic as the veneration of Gaia among New Age practitioners, but also as powerful as the God who liberated Israel from Egypt. When He spoke of a woman baking as an

⁹¹ “Buy the Truth and do not sell it; get Wisdom, discipline, and understanding.” Proverbs 23:23

instance of Divine Kingdom (Luke 13:21) or referred to Himself as a mother bird gathering her young (Matthew 23:37), Jesus was not just inventing arresting images. The lush fecundity of Wisdom was as basic to God as sexuality was to the people who were created in God's image. On one occasion Rabbi Jesus even spoke in Wisdom's name (Luke 11:49)."⁹²

Jesus' disciple James tells us that "*if any of you lacks Wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and [she] will be given to him.*"⁹³

Breath ~

The Holy Spirit is the breath of Divinity, of *abundant life*, (not just existence). The word for "spirit" means *breath*. One cannot be alive without "breath." The Bible tells us that God breathed life (existence) into us, and Jesus said that He came to give us *abundant* life. **The Holy Spirit is the source of all abundant life, and the proof of it;** for "*All those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.*"⁹⁴

We are born into existence. We breathe, eat, sleep, and relieve ourselves. We think, feel, and accomplish things, but there is an even higher dimension of living available – abundant life, more life, supernatural-ness! We are born with the imprint and capabilities of Divinity, but they are latent. The Holy Spirit comes into us as gift from Jesus Christ. She enables or turns-on the latent Divinity that produces greater enhancement of our human existence. And as we allow Her influence, we grow in Her image and power and might. We begin to experience the indescribable: abundant life, and supernatural-ness.

Powerful ~

Pat Robertson teaches that we're in a whole new environment, and we begin to breathe a whole new rarefied air in *The Holy Spirit in Your life*. He describes the Holy Spirit and Jesus as transformers "stepping down" the power of God into useable, non-fatal, increments and making that power available to us. Acts 1:8 tells us "*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.*" The word for "power" is *Dunamis* the word from which we get "dynamite" – **yes, the Holy Spirit will blow you away!**

The premiere example of this in Scriptures is the story of the Holy Spirit indwelling the disciples at Pentecost. Here She came for the first time to stay and was seen by those in attendance as wind and tongues of fire above the heads of the disciples who were uneducated fishermen suddenly speaking eloquently in languages foreign to them; so that the many foreign visitors in Jerusalem at that time were hearing about Jesus clearly in their native tongues. "*And that day about 3,000 people believed in Jesus Christ,*"⁹⁵ now that's a powerful response. Notice that She came with a "powerful wind", reflecting Her breath or unseen life and movement, and also with fire, representing the refining,

⁹² P 146

⁹³ James 1:5

⁹⁴ Romans 8:14

⁹⁵ Acts 2:41

perfecting power to produce holiness. **She, being so difficult to describe, is called “wisdom,” “power,” “living water,” “breath,” “fire,” a “dove,” and “counselor” throughout Scripture.**

“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious.”
- Albert Einstein

Let me be really clear here. **The Holy Spirit is God. She is the expression of the Holy One that is the source of a life fuller, and richer than the basic existence that every human being is born into.** God the Father envisioned creation which God the Son created by His word, and lived and died to restore, while the Holy Spirit animates that creation to righteousness and the power to positively affect the world around us. The Scriptures close with the Spirit’s invitation to drink the water without cost.⁹⁶ Even as She is gift, we must learn how to connect with and integrate into her power; we must effort to drink. We must chose to let Her ‘lead us into all Truth,’⁹⁷ “convict us of sin,”⁹⁸ “remind us of what Jesus taught and tell us what is yet to come,”⁹⁹ and animate us to righteousness¹⁰⁰ (or the harder, less selfish choice). This is a process called Sanctification and I elaborate on it in Chapter 10.

God living in us ~

Christianity interprets Scripture to tell us that all humans are born with the Spirit of God in them. Many world religions agree that we have a capacity to reflect God. But Christians part company with all other religions believing that this capacity is distorted. It is latent (waiting to be turned on) at best, and grossly distorted at worst, leaving us dead in our sin as Saint Paul described humanity.¹⁰¹ Unless and until we acknowledge God’s chosen revelation of Himself in the body of Jesus Christ and request that Christ’s Spirit animate us to righteousness and holiness, we will not experience this “fuller”, “richer”, “enabled”, life that God desires for us. We will not reflect God as fully as He designed us to. We cannot live this level of experience unless we allow the Holy Spirit to live it in us and through us. **It is God living in us, (not us living in God), that accomplishes this higher state of living,** or heightened state of consciousness that *IS* the Holy Spirit in us. “*All those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.*”¹⁰²

⁹⁶ “The Spirit and the bride say, “*Come!*” *And let him who hears say, “Come!*” *Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.*” Revelation 22:17

⁹⁷ John 16:13

⁹⁸ John 16:8

⁹⁹ John 16:13

¹⁰⁰ John 16:10

¹⁰¹ “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” - Ephesians 2:1-3

¹⁰² Romans 8:14

This is how we touch God – through the Holy Spirit which we cannot access without the gifting from Jesus Christ. See how interconnected they are! Do you see how much so they are separate identities of the same Divine Person? They are unified and work together; and they want to expand to include us- working in us and through us!

The Difference She makes ~

A Wonderful Example of the transition from mere existence to *abundant life* is Sally's story. She was a young single mom who was still living at home. Her family was dysfunctional at best. Sally's mom was the sole provider, Dad was a drug addict, her older brother was in jail, and her bright younger sister was rebelling and skipping school. In this environment Sally was working and going to the local Jr. College. When she got pregnant, her mom tried to encourage her, and kicked Dad out of the house because he was becoming violent. Sally thought having Dad gone would feel safer, but mom was allowing her sister to experiment with drugs and boys in the home. She felt anything but safe, and concern for her baby etched her face.

During all this chaos a loving Christian family had been telling Sally about the love God had for her and His desire to be a part of her life and help her. When the baby was several months old Sally was finally ready to ask God into her heart. She confessed her sins and acknowledged the ruler-ship of Jesus. He came into her life, bringing the Holy Spirit, and immediately she began to see things dramatically differently. "I can't believe I didn't see these things before" she said, "It was so obvious." She had only been staying at home to help with the living expenses, but mom was now becoming abusive and it was time to go. At home there was little to eat, and deepening discontent. She and her baby jumped at a chance to move in with a loving supportive Christian family. She spent her first Christmas knowing God, (and the reason for the season), literally baking cookies and drinking milk!

Baptism in the Spirit ~

Many Christian denominations call this experience of having the Holy Spirit come to live inside of us "Baptism in the Spirit." In his teaching in *The Holy Spirit in Your Life*, Pat Robertson gives two excellent examples of having the Holy Spirit animated in our lives. **Pat describes the Holy Spirit first as a feast that is laid out for us.** The feast is bought and paid for and lavishly displayed in front of us, but we have to walk up and partake. The powers or enablement's of the Holy Spirit are like the various dishes set out for us to enjoy so we can refresh ourselves and others with the feast. As we eat the lamb and mint jelly, we are strengthened to serve others. As we consume the bright carrots, we are made aware of ourselves and our capabilities in new ways. As we crunch on the crisp salad we are strengthened to persevere through trials. As we slowly savor the chocolate mousse, we are energized to spread the joy of the feast. As we drink the champagne we are intoxicated with the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the second example **Pat compares the Holy Spirit to the electrical power in a house.** The house takes the power from the electrical plant through transformers that step it down to provide the correct level of power for your toaster and tools. From the house, the rooms break it off in different ways, and the power is sitting there waiting for us to use in the outlets on the various walls. **Yet we still have to go up and plug ourselves into the outlets.** Are you plugged into the ultimate power source? Are you wondering why you're pushing the vacuum but it's not picking up dirt? Are you trying to drill a hole, but the drill bit isn't spinning? Accept the invitations of Divinity and plug into *Abundant Life!*

Invitations in Scripture	
Invitation	Passage location
"Come and see the works of God, who is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men.	Psalms 66:5
"Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord."	Psalms 34:11
"Come now, and let us reason together, though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword."	Isaiah 1:18
"Come my beloved, let us go out into the country, let us spend the night in the villages; Let us rise early and go to the vineyards; let us see whether the vine has budded and its blossoms have opened, and whether the pomegranates have bloomed. There I will give you my love.	Song of Solomon 7:11-13
"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."	Matthew 11:28
"Come, eat of my food and drink of the wine I have mixed; Forsake your folly and live, and proceed in the way of understanding."	Proverbs 9:1-5
" O Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord, let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God.	Psalms 95:1-3
"All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God."	Deuteronomy 28:2
"Come with us, and we will do you good, for the Lord has promised good concerning Israel."	Numbers 10:29
"Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand."	Psalms 95:6
"Come let us return to the Lord. For He has torn us, but will heal us."	Hosea 6:1
"Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.	Matthew 25:34
"Come into my house and abide there."	Acts 16:15

The Holy Spirit's Power available to us ~

The expressions of the Holy Spirit's power available to us are many:

~ The Fruits of the Spirit ¹⁰³~

These are the attributes of God that the Holy Spirit wants to *develop* in us – they do not usually come automatically or easily. We can chart our Divine growth as we watch these characteristics become more and more a part of us and our natural reaction to the challenges in life.

- **Love** – the choice to extend thoughtful and other-valuing efforts, as we develop an attitude of valuing others as God does. Love is made up of the other fruits of the spirit below:
- **Joy** – the feeling of contentment and fulfillment in spite of circumstances.
- **Peace** – the attitude of contentment and quiet within yourself and with others.
- **Patience** – the ability to wait with a positive attitude, and delay the gratification.
- **Faith** – the choice to trust in the unseen and invisible world. Faith comes from hearing and matures in depth, into hope and Christian virtues (see Romans 10:17).
- **Kindness** – the heart attitude that expresses concern for others in thoughtful acts.
- **Gentleness** – the physical and emotional expression of tenderness.
- **Self-Control** – the maturity and capability of using all of our human capacities appropriately at will.

~ The Natural Gifts of the Spirit ¹⁰⁴~

These are gifts of exceptional actions that exceed normal human responses. They often tend to be mixed together in peoples actions. As people mature and develop, (through the gift of the Spirit's strength), more and more of these gifts develop, and so people begin to display multiple gifts, and gifts that were not previously imagined.

- **Speaking** – verbal abilities to communicate.
- **Serving others** – doing things to bless others such as medical, hospitality, janitorial, mechanical, ect... actions purposely done to bless others.
- **Showing mercy** – coming alongside someone who is struggling and helping to lighten their load. (Not judging and adding emotional weight to their burden.)
- **Teaching** – abilities to help others learn and understand difficult concepts and develop talents.
- **Encouraging** – building people up so that they grow and mature in a positive, Godly direction.
- **Generosity** – extending gifts of finances and resources to help meet people's needs.
- **Leadership** – gifts of vision and direction and motivation, assisting people to accomplish tasks and goals

¹⁰³ Galatians 5:22

¹⁰⁴ Romans 12:6-8

~ **The Supernatural Gifts of the Spirit** ¹⁰⁵ ~

These are gifts which most people recognize that a “normal” human does not possess naturally.

- **Word of Wisdom** – an understanding about a specific event or concept that is supernaturally inspired.
- **Word of Knowledge** – a specific piece of information about a specific person(s), that is not knowable by someone else except supernaturally.
- **Speaking in Tongues** – speaking in a language which you have no previous training to speak.
- **Interpretation of Tongues** – the ability to translate the speaking in tongues of someone else.
- **Discerning Spirits** – the supernatural understanding of the motives and spiritual alignment of humans and spirits, and/or visual sight of invisible spirits. The gifting to determine the source of power between God, the world, the flesh, and the Devil.
- **Prophecy** – the direct revelation of God to an individual, usually in words and often words directly from Scripture.
- **Supernatural Faith** – the belief that God can and will reach through the invisible and do the visible.
- **Miracles** – anything not explained through normal means.
- **Healing** – the supernatural ability to restore physical and emotional damage to wholeness.

Scriptures tells us that “God is Spirit and those who worship Her must worship in Spirit and Truth.” ¹⁰⁶ **We must allow the Holy Spirit to worship God - in us** (and we get to listen in on the party-line!). We are along for the ride of our lives! We must consciously and purposely surrender our will and our right to decide our own future and give that to God, in order to experience the Holy Spirit’s enabling. Dr. Wayne Dyer describes it as silencing our ego, and connecting to our Source. This is how we can be in Heaven or (with God) even when we are still on this earth!

Live each short hour with God and the long years will take care of themselves.
– Amish Proverb

¹⁰⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

¹⁰⁶ John 4:24

The Struggle of Understanding ~

I know it's hard to comprehend. I've struggled with all this for 40 years, and I still don't totally understand it! But I have experienced it, and **I highly recommend the struggle.**

Perhaps the struggle is the point! The first time I spoke in tongues it scared me. I didn't understand the gifts of the Spirit and I thought I was losing my mind. For a few years I struggled with this gift (contemplating my commitment – to an institution!). But I

Newsboy's song

Spirit Thing

It's not a family trait
It's nothing that I ate
And it didn't come from skating
With holy rollers
It's an early warning sign
It keeps my life in line
But it's so hard to define
Never mind

It's just a spirit thing
It's just a holy nudge
It's like a circuit judge in the brain
It's just a spirit thing
It's here to guard my heart
It's just a little hard to explain

It pushes when I quit
It smells a counterfeit
Sometimes it works a bit
Like a teleprompter

When it's teleprompting you
I pray you'll let it through
And I'll help you with the how
But for now

It's just a spirit thing
It's just a holy nudge
It's like a circuit judge in the brain
It's just a spirit thing
It's here to guard my heart
It's just a little hard to explain.

did not study and learn about its value. I continued to grieve the Holy Spirit by rejecting this odd experience that no one around me discussed and so I knew nothing about. After several years it went away all together – due to my dedicated efforts not to go there. Now that I understand what was happening, I too am grieved with the Holy Spirit that I rejected so great a spiritual gift. Had I let go of my control issues and explored the experience what might I have gained? Why do I have to understand every word I utter? How refreshing it could be to just listen to the lyrical quality of a speech that doesn't engage my brain and let God minister to my spirit - spiritually! Now that I understand the gifts of the Spirit and the power of God to protect me; believe me, I *value* the rare gift of an unintelligible utterance in my personal prayer time. **I'm growing, I'm learning, and I'm letting go – That, I believe is the point.** Not my stupidity many years ago, and the long road around the issue that I've taken to get the gift back. On that long road, I've learned that the struggle brings both the gifts and the appreciation of them (even if not at the same time!)

The Holy Spirit is hard to talk about for she is not about words. **She is about experience.** The Scriptures tell us that it is the Holy Spirit that animates our ability to understand spiritual things.¹⁰⁷ “The Holy Spirit is the energy of God that shines forth and shows you the way. You can see things deeply, understand deeply, and love deeply,” says the Christian, Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh in his book *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. He continues on saying:

¹⁰⁷ “The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” John 14:26

“It is safer to approach God through the Holy Spirit than through theology,” and “discussing God is not the best use of our energy, if we touch the Holy Spirit, we touch God not as a concept but as a living reality.” “When the energy of the Holy Spirit is in us, we are truly alive, capable of understanding the suffering of others and motivated by the desire to help transform the situation. When the energy of the Holy Spirit is present, God the Father and God the Son are there.”

Jesus Christ told His disciples in Acts 1:8

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Holy Spirit’s Work	Scriptural Promise	Scriptural Reference
The Holy Spirit gives us power; the power to withstand our predisposition to sin, and convicts us of it when we “miss the mark” and sin against God and others.	“And She, when She comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”	John 16:8
The Holy Spirit gives us the power to move on and not get mired in our sinfulness, but to continually choose faith and positive action in spite of our failings.	“The law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death... The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.”	Romans 8:2,6
The Holy Spirit gives us the power to choose trust in God and not listen to the lies from Satan	“When the Counselor comes... She will guide you into all Truth.”	John 16:13
The Holy Spirit guides us in our lives and directs us to grow in grace and love and peace within ourselves, which allows us to reflect Her “fruits” when relating to others.	“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.	Galatians 5:22
The Holy Spirit makes us children of God, giving life to our mortal bodies.	“Those who are lead by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” “And if the Spirit of Her who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, She who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through Her Spirit who lives in you.”	Romans 8:14,11
The Holy Spirit guides our words and gives us the strength and courage to stand up for Jesus in the face of questions, arguments, persecution, and torment.	“When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”	Luke 12:12
The Holy Spirit comforts us when we are scared, lost, confused, or alone.	“For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”	Romans 14:17
The Holy Spirit teaches us to function in the Spiritual realm (and fight Satan), strengthening us to increasingly unite with God in all we think, say, and do.	“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the Devil’s schemes.”	Ephesians 6:10-18
The Holy Spirit prays for us and enables our prayers to God.	“The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”	Romans 8:26-27
The Holy Spirit assures us that we are God’s children.	“And by Her we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”	Romans 8:15-17

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” is the famous puritan ethic that most of us have been told. But how can you do “love” if you have never seen it or experienced it? (You cannot pour milk from an empty cup.) **The Holy Spirit lavishes God’s love on us so we can begin lavishing it on others.** More and more so over time, as our cup of love from God gets full, it spills over onto everyone around us. As we become full of the Holy Spirit, we become loving –like God, for *God is love.*¹⁰⁸ We get inoculated in God’s love by the Holy Spirit, and as we let the antibodies grow, we become more and more like God in our love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, and self-control. (See Chapter 10, under Sanctify Christ’s Body)

Comforter ~

Here is another verse from Scripture which again confirms Jesus’ desires and the unity of the Triune God:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”¹⁰⁹

One of the major roles of the Holy Spirit and one of her names is “Comforter,” as was discussed briefly earlier. It is important to revisit this aspect of the Holy Spirit for it is so central to Her ministry to us, and we want to embrace it correctly. To do so we need to define “comfort,” for that word in our present day understanding is not balanced. The current meaning of comfort has become soft, hedonistic, self-indulgent, and sentimental. The historical meaning of the word included some of that, but was primarily one of strengthening and encouraging. Again, let’s look at Webster’s Dictionary.

“Comfort as a noun 1: strengthening aid, assistance, support, consolation. 2: a feeling of relief or encouragement, contented well-being. 3: a satisfying or enjoyable experience. 4: one that gives or brings comfort. As a verb 1: to give strength and hope to: cheer, 2: to ease the grief or trouble of: console.”

¹⁰⁸ 1 John 4:8b “God is love”; & 1John 4:19 “We love because He first loved us.”

¹⁰⁹ 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

May I suggest that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate verb! From my experience, she is, as God, both perpetual being and perpetual doing, but the perpetual-ness is her most striking impression. She is verb. The noun portion is our experience of her. We are strengthened, we are consoled, we are satisfied. But we must not miss the point of the actions – to spur us on to love and good works;¹¹⁰ to sanctify us,¹¹¹ to give us the strength to persevere through our trials,¹¹² and to overcome¹¹³ *in God's strength*. **We are to be *Victors* not *victims* through the Holy Spirits power.**

Karen's Comfort ~

The most precious story I know of the comfort of the Holy Spirit is my friend Karen's story. She is a truly lovely Christian lady. She works tirelessly for the Lord and His precious Body organizing many of the activities of her particular church. Not that long ago, her son rebelled, completely rejecting his parents and their love. She was devastated. She continued to serve other people and carry on with the demands of her life, but she was broken; an empty shell of her former self, feeling only the void inside. She found herself one weekend at a woman's retreat surrounded by loving women all of whom knew her and valued her, and yet she felt truly alone in a crowd. "They all know my name, Lord; but do You?" her heart cried out. Having drug herself through the entire weekend, the concluding evening arrived. The group was in a celebratory mood and it was time to give away the raffle prizes of coffee mugs, and notepads, and little incidentals to remind the women of their lovely retreat from their normal harsh realities. Karen sat at her table surrounded by loving smiling faces, and felt more alone than she had ever before. "I never win these things" she recalled. "Lord please just call out my name" her heart ached barely audibly. They had given away the pretty tote bags, the notepads and Bibles, the box of chocolates, and finally the announcer said "and the coffee mugs and bags of flavored coffee go to our favorite leader, and my precious friend – Karen." Karen floated up to the front and claimed her priceless gift. When she got back to her table she shocked her table-mates by giving away her mugs and flavored coffees to each one of them. She didn't need them, she had received the comfort from the Holy Spirit that she had needed. God had called her name.

¹¹⁰ "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works." Ephesians 2:10

¹¹¹ "God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the Truth." 2 Thessalonians 2:13

¹¹² "Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Hebrew 12:1c

¹¹³ "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. Philippians. 2:12,13



Mature Spirit-filled Believers ~

Remember the children’s story of the *Velveteen Rabbit*? He was a stuffed rabbit whose fur is rubbed off from petting, and whose stuffing is crushed from being hugged so tight. A rabbit that has lived a long and full life and it showed. He was a rabbit who was fulfilled in his purpose, and content in life. Those are the people I love to hang out with – **Velveteen Rabbits; ones who have been thoroughly loved by God.** They tend to be quiet people who are too busy caring for others to blow their own horn. They often have little to say, but when they speak – others listen. They have usually suffered more than you and I can imagine, and they are grateful to God for the lessons they learned through the pain. They are rarely upset, because they know the author of events, and the end of the story. They love solitude for it is when they can connect most easily with Divinity, and so they retreat from groups and society at every possible opportunity. **They KNOW God, not just as a concept but as a moment-by-moment, integral aspect of themselves.** They hear the wee small voice of the Holy Spirit,¹¹⁴ for She is their constant companion. Having persevered through suffering and struggle, battle and celebration, Divine isolation and internal integration; they live quiet lives of struggle and joy, of battle (in prayer while in action) and of peace. They have had full-spectrum lives, and little in life is a stranger to them. **This is what the Holy Spirit does as She builds strength and character and Divinity into those who allow Her reign.**

Kingdom of God ~

There is yet one more aspect of the Holy Spirit’s revelation. That is the concept of the Kingdom of Heaven [or of God]. Jesus first talked about it when He walked this earth, saying “*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.*”¹¹⁵ Jesus was saying “I am here,” “I am showing you the Kingdom of God,” and people recognized that God was working

¹¹⁴ “but the Lord was not in the [wind, earthquake, and fire]...came a gentle whisper” 1 Kings 19:12

¹¹⁵ Matthew 4:17

in their midst in Jesus. Upon Jesus' exit, **the Kingdom of God was left on earth in the form of the Spirit of God** available to invade the hearts and minds of those who embrace Jesus today. If we allow His gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell us and conform us into Christ's image – we will develop into loving people and bring God's grace into our areas of influence. The Kingdom of God will be even-more-so on earth for our willingness to let God pour Herself out through us.

We need to be reminded today about the closeness and availability of the Kingdom of God, for we have gotten so isolated in our lives and our thinking that we have incorrectly applied the concept of distance to our theology and so see God as 'out-there, somewhere, seemingly an eternity away,' when in reality God is right here – God among us - in fact, *in us*, if we will let Her; in the form, or energy, or light, or breath of the Holy Spirit.

Richard Rohr introduces this premise in the first chapter of his book *Jesus' Plan for a New World* saying:

"Jesus announced, lived and inaugurated for history a new social order which He called the Reign or Kingdom of God. This now and not-yet Reign of God is the foundation for our personal hope and our cosmic optimism, but it is also the source of our deepest alienation from the world as it is. Our task is to learn to live in both worlds until they become one world – at least in us." "Jesus' teaching is that this new world order has already begun, and he clearly seems to see himself as its herald, its inauguration, and its personal assurance. What is now in Him, is both now and not-yet in us. Here is the source of almost all our problems with faith, trials and opposition. When Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, He was talking about an utterly different way of relating with one another than human society as we know it." "Relational living - rejecting power, and traditional social exclusionary constructs."

Here Richard Rohr is talking about rejecting the world's competitive power trip, and embracing the Holy Spirit's hidden power to change people's hearts and minds, not just forcing their actions. It was the power of the Holy Spirit which indwelt Jesus at His baptism enabling him to heal and do miracles. The Holy Spirit's power welling up in Jesus, raised Him from the dead.¹¹⁶ Jesus was the first human to be constantly indwelt (as opposed to temporarily filled as many Old Testament prophets, kings, and fathers of the faith were) by the Holy Spirit.

¹¹⁶ "And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you." Romans 8:26

This power to change our actions by changing our attitudes and values, is now available to all believers through the Holy Spirit, because of Jesus Christ. We can be the next human to join Jesus in the next truly-evolutionary step – divinely indwelt humans functioning in enhanced dimensions because God is in us! This is why the Gospels tell us that Jesus was the first born among many brothers.¹¹⁷ The Holy Spirit enables us to begin to think and act as God wants us to, as we become Children of God - promised all the inheritance our elder brother has earned for us.¹¹⁸ **We are in God's heart – now She wants to be in ours!**

For further Study –

- *A Testament of Devotion* by Thomas Kelly
Thomas does the best job I've seen of describing the deep internal things of God.

Thoughts while reading this Chapter ~

Date:

¹¹⁷ Romans 8:29

¹¹⁸ “He who did not spare His own son, but gave Him up for us all-how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?” Romans 8:32

Activities ~

Contemplation is beginning to enter into the spiritual side of life. It is really learning to **“be” spiritual** so that you can then **“do” physically**. We are getting here into territory which begins to defy description. Thomas Kelly does the best job I know of in *A Testament of Devotion* where he says:

“A practicing Christian must above all be one who practices the perpetual return of the soul into the inner sanctuary, who brings the world into its lights and rejudges it, who brings the Light into the world with all its turmoil and its fitfulness and recreates it.”

Here are three ways to begin to make that kind of a focused internal reorientation:

- 1. Sit quietly for 10 minutes each day with no television or radio, or people around, and practice just being comfortable with only yourself, your own thoughts, and God.**
- 2. Meditate on a Scripture or affirmation**, by repeating it in your mind. Put printed post-it notes on the bathroom mirror, refrigerator door, car dashboard, and read them each time you see them, until their message is a part of you. I recommend starting with God’s message in Isaiah 43:4 *“You are precious and honored in my sight and I love you.”*
- 3. Sing praises to God;** at religious services, or alone in the solitude of your car or home. Let the Holy Spirit guide you to praise “in the Spirit” by speaking in tongues. If you don’t have that gift, ask God for it!

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

Chapter 7

Where is God?

*“If God hath made this world so fair where sin and death abound,
How beautiful beyond compare will paradise be found.”
- James Montgomery*

*In Heaven ~
Putting it all together ~
Within Us ~
Upon Earth ~*

In Heaven ~

Heaven is “with God,” so it’s where God calls home. God is a spiritual being and not fundamentally physical; so heaven could be a different dimension or an alternate reality. But it must also be a physical place, for we are told that Christ is there in His perfect body!¹¹⁹ We also have the reoccurring presence of Angels in human (physical) form¹²⁰ to take into account; for we are told that Angels are in Heaven with God.¹²¹ Therefore, Heaven must be somewhere or something very much like our universe that can contain both spiritual and physical. (Or else Jesus and the Angels can shape-shift into and out of their physical bodies at will! – But that doesn’t make logical sense outside of Star Trek. The concept of dimensional shifts seems easier to comprehend – but then, I’m not a scientist!)

The words for “heaven” and “firmament” are interchangeable. Both are present in Genesis 1: 8, 14, 17, & 20. Genesis 1:20 says “and let the birds fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.” And 1:14 says “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens.” **God is noted as speaking and acting from heaven in many places.** Yet, the entire Scriptures refuse to box Him into heaven alone. Deuteronomy 4:39 tells us “*He is God in heaven above and on the earth below.*”

¹¹⁹ “He entered Heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence.” Hebrews 9:24.

¹²⁰ “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” Hebrews 13:2

¹²¹ “Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels... They encircled the throne.” Revelation 5:11

Webster's Dictionary defines:

Heaven 1: the expanse of space that seems to be over the earth like a dome :
FIRMAMENT 2 a: The dwelling place of the Deity and the joyful abode of the
blessed dead 2b: a spiritual state of everlasting communion with God.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance defines:

Firmament as Hebrew *raqiya* (7549) meaning "expanse", "or visible arch of
the sky"; and Heaven as *shameh* (8064) or "arch in which the clouds move,
as well as the higher ether where the celestial bodies revolve."

It is interesting to note that 'heavens' is translated from Hebrew words meaning
"belly" or "conception," tying back to the watery stuff the Holy Spirit prepared for
creation!

Historical research teaches us:

"The term "**firmament**" designates the first shell in the King James version
of Genesis 1:6-8, where "heaven" is described, so people commonly think of
it as being airy. But the "firmament" is literally firm and watertight in
Hebrew, It is a *raqia*, a hammered-out metallic shell. It protects the earth,
which was seen by the ancient Hebrews as a fragile, disk-shaped bubble
surrounded on all sides by an infinite sea." –from Rabbi Jesus

Putting it all Together ~

Firmament in the original Hebrew and our English implies substance, visibility –
physical-ness. Heaven seems to imply space – spirituality. Noting these two word
appearances together in Scripture, and then recalling God's paradoxical character –
cannot both be true? Again we come to Heaven being a spiritual place of great substance
(physically)! **As Jesus Christ is an incarnation of God, cannot Earth be an
incarnation of Heaven?** Just as a postcard is a picture, a representation of a real place.
Cannot Earth be a picture or suggestion of Heaven? As Earth is a physical place with
profoundly spiritual capacities; doesn't it seem likely that Heaven could be a spiritual
place with profound physical capacities? Yet another dimension - more real than the one
we call "reality?"

"Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool."

- Isaiah 66:1

Within Us ~

Beginning to understand “heaven” as God’s “firmament” or home in a larger picture than just the sky above, or ‘out there somewhere,’ really begins to make the Scriptures clearer. **As we think of a spiritual God being other-dimensionally with us, it helps us understand how so many people can testify that God feels “nearer than their next breath.”** This spiritual understanding also helps us comprehend how we can be “*raised up with Christ and seated in the heavenly realms [spiritually and not physically] in Christ Jesus*” upon conversion as the New Testament tells us.¹²² Not only is God spiritually available and near everyone; but many people on this earth are indwelt by God! This reality has been experienced and written about by converts for millennia as feeling God within, or feeling carried by God as described in the beloved poem “footprints.”¹²³

Having **God functioning within us** has countless benefits:

- It is this enlightening that helps people begin to understand God and see the world, and our lives in it, from the Holy Ones’ completely bizarre (as in other-worldly) perspective.
- It is this Divine indwelling that convinces people so completely in the reality of God that they would die for the Truth.
- It is this Divine indwelling of the Holy Spirit that empowers people to stand strong and be cruelly tortured and martyred for their faith.
- It is this Divine power of love and grace within that opens our hearts and helps us get out of ourselves. We can now reach out and love others, and understand their pain, and care for their hurts; because ours have been revealed, understood, touched, and healed by the Holy Spirit’s comfort.
- It is the power of the Holy Spirit that begins to reflect in us creating the “Fruits of the Spirit” listed in Chapter 6 on the Holy Spirit.
- It is this Divine enabling power working in us that opens our minds to understand things we never have before, and do things we would not have been capable of before (like write a book on God!).

¹²² Ephesians 2:6

¹²³ www.llerrah.com/footprints.htm

Footprints

By, Carolyn Joyce Carty

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed
he was walking along the beach with the LORD.

Across the sky flashed scenes from his life.
For each scene he noticed two sets of
footprints in the sand: one belonging
to him, and the other to the LORD.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him,
he looked back at the footprints in the sand.

He noticed that many times along the path of
his life there was only **one** set of footprints.

He also noticed that it happened at the very
lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he
questioned the LORD about it:

"LORD, you said that once I decided to follow
you, you'd walk with me all the way.
But I have noticed that during the most
troublesome times in my life,
there is only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why when
I needed you most you would leave me."

The LORD replied:

"My son, my precious child,
I love you and I would never leave you.
During your times of trial and suffering,
when you see only one set of footprints,
it was then that I carried you."

The Best is Yet to Come

by Scott Krippayne
& Steve Siler

The race is long,
sometimes I stumble.
He helps me up
each time I fall.
When I lose hope,
He gives me courage.
So I'll press on
and give my all.
I know I'll never have
to run alone,
and I can hardly wait
to make it home.

Chorus:

The best is yet to come,
the promise of
Heaven awaits.
I'll finally see my
Lord and Savior,
face to face.

For He has set me free,
for all eternity;
When my life on
earth is done,
the best is yet to come.

In every joy,
in every trial.
I need to keep my
eyes on Him.
He is the way,
my soul provider,
no matter how
the road may bend.
When earthly treasures
cloud my point of view,
He reminds me that
I'm only passing through.

Chorus:

Nothing can compare
to what's in store,
when we will join
the angels singing
Holy is the Lord.
Chorus:

Two Saints whose wisdom time has proven, have expressed the inexpressible:

Brother Lawrence, a seventeenth-century French monk, shared this testimony about the presence of God within him:

"I make it my business only to persevere in His holy presence, wherein I keep myself by a simple attention, and a general fond regard to God; or, to speak better, an habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God, which often causes me joys and raptures inwardly, and sometimes also outwardly, so great that I am forced to use means to moderate them and prevent their appearance to others."

He talks throughout his book *The Practice of the Presence of God* about **the simplicity of being with God and conversing with God in every moment and action of every day**. Brother Lawrence was not an "important" monk, but rather a man who served his brothers in the kitchen. His prayer was "Lord of all pots and pans and things... make me a saint by getting meals and washing up the plates!" His simplicity and connection to God was so deep that "the time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."

Thomas R. Kelly, the early twentieth century Quaker missionary, educator, and scholar shared it this way beginning *A Testament of Devotion*:

"Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our heart, pressing upon our time-worn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself. Yielding to these persuasions, gladly committing ourselves in body and soul, utterly and completely, to the Light Within, is the beginning of true life. It is a dynamic center, a creative Life that presses to birth within us. It is a Light Within which illumines the face of God and casts new shadows and new glories upon the face of men. It is a seed stirring to life if we do not choke it. It is the Shekinah of the

soul, the Presence in the midst. Here is the Slumbering Christ, stirring to be awakened, to become the soul we clothe in earthly form and action. And He is within us all."



- Picture circulated on Internet, Photographer unknown

Upon Earth ~

We are told that God's eternal home will eventually be on earth. After God has destroyed the corrupted earth and remade it perfectly again; He will make His home with humanity on His perfect earth, in the home which He has lovingly prepared and calls "The New Jerusalem." We are told much about it which I discuss in Chapter 10 ~ What is God going to do?

For Further Study -

- *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn, A very thorough book discussing all aspects of Heaven.

Thoughts while reading this chapter

Date:

Activities ~

Delve deeply into your soul and meet God there. Begin practicing His presence as Brother Lawrence so inspiringly testified. Here are two ways to start:

1. Go out into the deepest dark night you can get to, and **consider the vastness of the universe**. In the darkness try to apply that vastness to your understanding of God. Is He “out there”? Or is He “right here”?
2. Review your own life. **Look for the times God carried you**. Write them down. Thank God for them, one by one, as you treasure those footprints in your soul.
3. If you haven't already, **Begin a relationship with the Almighty**, and ask God to indwell you. Confess your sins and disappointments to God and acknowledge His revelation of Himself as Jesus Christ. Ask Him to come live in you!

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com.

~ About Us ~

*“God does not love us because we are valuable.
We are valuable because God loves us.”
- Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen*

Chapter 8

How does God see us?

*“There is nothing that we can see on earth which does not either show
the wretchedness of man or the mercy of God.
One either sees the powerlessness of man without God,
or the strength of man with God.”
- Blaise Pascal*

*Very Good ~
Sinful ~
As Children ~
Potentially God’s Children ~
Dog-meat for Satan ~
Divine Potential ~
Needy ~
Stiff-necked ~
Unfaithful ~
Beloved ~
Parables ~*

God sees all – There is nothing about us that escapes God’s notice. **God made us – He knows everything about us.** I was particularly struck by this fact watching a History Channel program on science. They were exploring the feasibility of Star Trek’s ‘beam us up -Scotty.’ The program said that doing so was primarily a memory problem. They said that to beam even one person up would require memory stored on computers on every floor in fifty-some Empire State Buildings! That’s a lot of details, -And God knows them all about every one of us. Divinity has no memory problem!

But maybe knowing that He is aware of our details isn’t enough? Maybe we need to know we are known and loved for who we are – for every ugly wart and stupid move and disgusting thought? Does God see all of us and still love us? Let’s explore God’s appraisal of all that She knows about us.

Very Good ~

The first comments in Scripture come at creation where God made humanity and found His creation “**very good.**”¹²⁴ **Initially God was very pleased.** From the very beginning Divinity was working with Adam and Eve and forming a partnership – a co-creative enterprise! ‘*I’ll make it and you take care of it*’ seemed to be His plan. He created the animals and brought them to Adam to name¹²⁵ then placed Adam and Eve in Eden to “take care of it.”¹²⁶

Sinful ~

“Every inclination of [humanities] heart is evil from childhood.”

- Genesis 8:21

God knows our hearts and knows they are full of confusion and corruption. God understands the depth of this problem and has been working on it for at least 6,000 years! **God has a plan and has put it into place.** Now He is just waiting for us to get on board. (I cover God’s plan in Chapter 12 *The Progressive Revelation.*)

As Children ~

When Eve & Adam disobeyed God, He did not scream and yell and zap them off the face of the earth, **He taught them – consequences.** He met their new need, covering them with custom-made outfits of animal skins. He was far from rejecting them as they had rejected Him. He was still present, wanting to reason with them and relate to them and teach them.

In Genesis 4 God is challenging Adam and Eve’s sons “*If you do what is right will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.*” Again – failure; Cain kills his brother Able. And again, God doesn’t respond in kind, but tries to reason with him and get him to confess and ask for a restored relationship. When Cain still doesn’t repent, God gives him his consequences and Cain complains. Yet God still cares (even after the major failures!) and still encourages him with His promise of protection! **God’s attitude is extremely patient, and His consequences are for growth not punishment.**

¹²⁴ Genesis 1:31

¹²⁵ “He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.” Genesis 2:19

¹²⁶ Genesis 2:15



Potentially God's Children ~

As God continued to reveal the Divine Plan (spelled out in Chapter 12), Humanity's potential was elevated from "creation," to "children of Israel," to "God's children." **With Christ's atonement, the door for adoption into the family of God was opened** and Romans 8:16 assures us "*the Spirit herself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*"

Dog-meat for Satan ~

Conversely; if we do not chose to join God's family and chose God's protection, we are told that "Satan is a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."¹²⁷ **Without Divine protection we are fair game for Satan's lies and destruction.** One glance around any busy metropolitan city shows more than enough evidence of this – homeless and hopeless cast-offs; successful executives whose families no longer know them or care to; people absorbed in the pursuit of money; and people destroyed for lack of it and other basic essentials.

¹²⁷ 1 Peter 5:8

Divine Potential ~

As Divine creations, **God knows our ultimate potential** – She gave it to us! That is precisely what God is trying to develop within us. This is why God allows so much suffering and struggle and challenge into our lives – **to show us how much more than we can imagine, we are capable of handling; and with God’s help, handling well.** We don’t have to give into our programming from Madison Avenue, Wall Street, Hollywood, The Evening News, our Parents, or our Educational System. We are Divinely mandated to make our own decisions. Will we choose growth in God or will we choose to reject our Divine destiny? God is waiting.

Needy ~

Conversely; God also knows that we are “dust,”¹²⁸ limited by time and space, and in need! God wants to supply those needs.¹²⁹ We are told that we “do not have, because you do not ask God,”¹³⁰ and that we “have all you need for life and Godliness through our knowledge of Him.”¹³¹ Putting these verses together - means that if we want something, we have to ask for it; and if we don’t want something we currently have, we must trust that God is/will use it for our blessing and His glory.

Chris is a friend who came to know the Lord in his late 20’s. He is exceptionally handsome and talented. He seemed to have the world on a string. Yet he was driven and discontented and unhappy. Now, in his forties, he loves the Lord with all his heart, mind and soul. A semi-pro basketball player who still competes with twenty-year-olds on the court; Chris loves the Lord because “He meets my deepest needs.” “Although I live at near poverty all the time because I choose to pursue my music and sports, The Lord provides for me incredibly – I have my own recording studio! Everything I have has been given to me by the Lord through the generosity of others. Sometimes when I am worshipping God with my music, I come to tears as the Lord reminds me of some memory of His great love and provision.” “God is so good. I wish we all could come to know how deeply God loves us and wants to meet our needs.”

Stiff-necked ~

After freeing His people from Egypt; again and again they refused to obey God’s covenant, and keep their end of the deal. Exodus 33:5 tells us of God’s frustration:

“The Lord said to Moses, “tell the Israelites, ‘you are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.’”

¹²⁸ “for He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust.” Psalm 103:14

¹²⁹ “And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Philipians 4:19

¹³⁰ James 4:2

¹³¹ 2 Peter 1:3

Yet again, God relented and went with Moses, and did not destroy Israel *“I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”*¹³² It would appear from this story that one individual who is truly faithful, has the power to counterbalance many sinful people. **God wants to bless His faithful** that badly.

Unfaithful ~

As time goes on and humanity utterly fails God (for at least the fourth time), caring neither for each other, nor God, nor creation; Hosea 4 gives God’s position:

“The Lord has a charge against you who live in the land [notice that He is not including those to whom He has not revealed Himself, but only to His “chosen” people!];

“There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.

But let no man bring a charge let no man accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest.

You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you.

So I will destroy your mother- my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.

Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.

The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their glory for something disgraceful.

They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness.

And it will be: like people, like priests. I will punish both of them for their ways and repay them for their deeds.

They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not increase, because they have deserted the Lord to give themselves to prostitution, to old wine and new, which take away the understanding of my people.

They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood.

A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God.

The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer.

How then can the Lord pasture them like lambs in a meadow?

Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone!

Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution; their rulers dearly love shameful ways.

A whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame.”

¹³² Exodus 33:17

Beloved ~

Even in all this chaos God is still calling out to humanity:

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. I give Egypt for your ransom, and Cush and Seba in your stead. Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you.”¹³³

God is still doing all the giving and still waiting for a returned response. Finally, toward the end of the northern kingdom of Israel, God asks Hosea to live out God’s perspective on Israel. He directs Hosea to marry a prostitute:

“Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.”¹³⁴ I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals [other gods]; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but Me she forgot.”¹³⁵

God instructed Hosea: *“Go show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites.”¹³⁶*

Even in all the anger and frustration, God is still working for Divine ends and committed to the relationship – with us!

“I will betroth you to me forever’ I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord.”¹³⁷

I’m not Cool
By Scott Krippayne

Some people tell me that I look kind of funny, My nose is red and the braces didn’t work at all. They say the clothes I wear are all out of fashion, I don’t fit in and should be shopping at a different mall. I studied classical piano when I could’ve been playing guitar. I used to drive and El Camino, and I’m not even sure it’s a car.

Chorus:
I’m not cool but that’s okay, My God loves me anyway.
I’m not cool but that’s alright, I’m still precious in His sight.
I’m not cool but I don’t care, how I’m supposed to do my hair.
I’m not cool but that’s okay, My God loves me anyway.

It doesn’t matter if I know all the lingo, He doesn’t mind if I’m not hanging with a certain crowd. Some people still believe in building an image, but I am finding that’s a worry I can do without. I used to wish I was athletic, but football was never my game. I made some friends in mathematics, but no one could spell my last name.

Chrous
He says that I am a one of a kind, and I don’t have to try to be somebody else.
He believes in me and says I’m free to be myself.
I can be myself

¹³³ Isaiah 43:

¹³⁴ Hosea 1:2

¹³⁵ Hosea, 2:13

¹³⁶ Hoses 3:1

¹³⁷ Hosea 2:19-20

Parables ~

Since the straightforward tact hadn't succeeded in ancient days; when Jesus came, He elaborated on how God sees us, by telling parables designed to get people thinking about other people's experiences and then see themselves in a new light. **Parables are stories that illustrate spiritual truths.** The parables were designed to get around peoples' intellectual defenses and connect to them emotionally, causing them to rethink the issue and see things in a less self-centered way.

Using children, and slaves, and sheep, and all the underdogs of first-century society as His topic's; Jesus wove stories with deep lessons about throwing off societal burdens,¹³⁸ and being true to our simple, serene, childlike, underdog spirits!

Before God we are all equally wise - and equally foolish.
- Albert Einstein

~ Lost Sheep ~

The most frequent example Jesus used was that of sheep. **They are notoriously stupid, and unable to care for themselves.** Some breeds cannot even right themselves if they fall over onto their sides! In John 10:1-18 Jesus described Himself as the "good shepherd" who knows His sheep by name and when He calls, they recognize His voice. He collects them into safe sheep pens at night. He leads them to good pasture. He protects them from the wolves even "**Laying down His life for the sheep.**" **God clearly sees us as lost and confused and deeply dependent upon His provision, protection, and appraisal.**

For Further Study –

- *A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23*, by Phillip Keller is a lovely reflection on this psalm by a shepherd who brings great meaning to our sheepliness.

¹³⁸ Such as: Keeping up with the Jones'; He who has the most toys wins; Perception is everything; You are as together as you look; Those in power are good; Models are the definition of beauty; ect...

~ A source of Joy ~

Sheep are also very cute and sweet and valuable. In Matthew 18:10-14, Jesus explains how valuable by reminding people of how thrilled a sheep-owner is to find one lost sheep. We are all born sheep that are lost; but God clearly reaches out with great care, and collects a flock which She watches over tenderly and with great joy. If we are in that flock we are now a source of great joy! **We can now live in the safety and joy of being a part of God's family; not in the fear and frustration of being lost and in great need.**

~ Land owners ~

Jesus also talked frequently about landowners. He understood the challenges of being wealthy and having great responsibility.

- In the Sower in the Field¹³⁹ parable, **Jesus compared this world to a field** in which He was planting seeds and gave possible scenarios of the growth of those seeds.
- In the Vineyard¹⁴⁰ parable, **Jesus is telling His own story.** God created this earth and then rented it out. He sent His son to collect the rent and the tenants killed Him. He ended the story with the question “**what then will the owner of the vineyard do?**” Then He answered it: “**kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.**”
- In the hidden treasures parables,¹⁴¹ **Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a treasure hidden in a field and a valuable pearl.** In both cases He recommends that we sell everything we have and buy the treasure.

The seed of the Truth is planted in us. Will we nurture its growth?
We are but tenants on this planet. Will we give our landlord His due?
We are in God's heart – will we embrace this hidden reality and reject all the lies?
Will we believe God and buy His heart? Do we want the love and freedom owning ourselves and belonging to God brings to us?

For further Study –

- Read *The Shack*, a wonderful novel by Wm. Paul Young about a man struggling to comprehend God and life.
- Watch the Movie *Contact* with Jodie Foster. It is a movie that examines faith.

¹³⁹ Luke 5-15; Matthew 13:3-23; and Mark 4:3-25

¹⁴⁰ Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-6; and Luke 20:9-18

¹⁴¹ Matthew 13:44-45

Activities ~

A crucial part of God's revelation is that we make mistakes and disappoint God.

The Holy One has made it plain in the Scriptures that we all fall short of the Divine design and have injured God requiring restitution.

A high-tech company called 37 Signals put it this way in their book *Getting Real*:

"Get bad news out there and out of the way. If something goes wrong, tell people. Even if they never saw it in the first place. Be as open, honest, and transparent as possible. Don't keep secrets or hide behind spin."

I realize that we all hate to admit when we're wrong. But **personally I have found an unbelievable freedom to relax and be myself when I can easily admit my most recent mistake.** Admitting my failures gives me energy to move on and get beyond it. When I don't admit my sin, I get stuck – just standing there, pretending to be unmoved by the obvious effects of my actions. Yet when I volunteer the fact that I blew it, others feel less compelled to point out my failures - I'd much rather beat them to the punch! For when I admit my humanness others can relate and come alongside me affectionately as opposed to feeling inferior, or annoyed and distant from me. Others like it! God likes it! Confession is win-win!!

Here are some ways to begin processing our failures:

1. As we are learning to come to grips with this difficult position, it is often very helpful to **write in a journal and process with yourself about your weaknesses and sins.** Consider how much they have cost you and those around you. Write, think, cry and put yourself in others shoes. Your heart will soften, and you will see yourself more clearly on many levels.
2. If journaling is overwhelming for you, just **list your transgressions against God and others and when you are finished, burn it.** Watch your sins be completely obliterated and consider the fact that this is how God sees them through Jesus Christ's substitutionary sacrifice – gone!
3. **Go to Catholic Confession.** This is a very meaningful tradition in the Catholic Church where a person goes to the Church and "confesses" to the priest out loud what they are disappointed in themselves for doing. The Priest listens and gives some task to perform to act on the contrite heart, and then prays a prayer to God on the "confessors" behalf claiming the forgiveness that is promised in the Scriptures.

4. Protestant traditions feel that this can be done independently of the priest or clergy and will simply **pray to God listing or “confessing” the ways they are aware that they have disappointed God, and then claim a scripture that promises forgiveness** due to Christ’s substitutionary death on the cross and subsequent resurrection. Two good anchors are:
 - a. Romans 10:9,10:
“If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”
 - b. 1 John 1:8,9
“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”
5. Apologize to those you have wronged, and look for ways to make amends to them. If they are unavailable, or you are not ready for that step, pray for those you have wronged and ask God to bless them for you.

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

Chapter 9

What does God require of me?

*Watch your thoughts, they become words.
Watch your words, they become actions.
Watch your actions, they become habits.
Watch your habits, they become character.
Watch your character, they become destiny.*
By Mufti Saiful Islam

Paradoxically - Nothing and Everything ~

- ~ Nothing ~*
- ~ Everything ~*

Biblical Directives ~

- ~ Choose Joy ~*
- ~ Belief and Faith ~*
- ~ Relationship ~*
 - ~ With God*
 - ~ With humanity*
- ~ Growth ~*
- ~ Gratitude ~*
- ~ Worship ~*
 - ~ Made for This*
 - ~ Practical Examples*
- ~ Love ~*
- ~ Fear God ~*
- ~ Obedience ~*
 - ~ Working out our Salvation*
 - ~ Being and Doing (Faith & Works)*
 - ~ Witnesses*
- ~ Suffering ~*
 - ~ Short Cuts*
 - ~ Tribulations/Struggles*
- ~ To Give God Glory ~*
- ~ Baptism ~*
- ~ Fruits of the Spirit ~*
- ~ To Remember ~*
 - ~ Eucharist / Communion*
 - ~ Sabbath / Shabbat*
 - ~ Passover*
 - ~ Sukkoth/Booths*
- ~ To look forward ~*
 - ~ To our Homecoming*
 - ~ To Christ's Return*

The beloved Christmas carol “Away in the Manger” is well loved for good reason – it is full of Truth. The last line communicates our purpose here:

“Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care, and fit us for Heaven to live with Thee there.”

We are being “fitted for Heaven.” Heaven, like any other place requires certain things. Just as living on this planet requires that we breathe air, have gravity, and stay within certain temperatures; Heaven has some requirements too. They many have to do with maturity and strength, but **Heaven absolutely requires God’s love returned back to Him.** All of the topic’s I cover in this chapter relate directly to learning to return God’s love in kind, and so being “fitted for Heaven” to live with the love-of-our-lives there.

Paradoxically - Nothing and Everything ~

“For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” ~ Matthew 5:45

~ Nothing ~

God does not “need” our relationship, obedience, or love. Those who refuse to acknowledge and obey God are not zapped off the face of the earth. They still get a new day every morning and provision from God. God “requires” nothing from people. History has shown that most people have lived their lives without God, and done little or nothing for their fellow man.

~ Everything ~

Yet, God “requests” much from us, which can be summed up as His Divine love returned in kind. **God has given us everything, and asks us to return the favor.** The Scriptures are bulging with guidance on how to be loving, kind, and obedient, but most are not demands. They are usually stated in request form and are often followed up with a promise. **God knows that we are motivated by blessings; after all She made us that way!** (Take a look at all the promises that surround all the “thou shalt” in the Ten Commandments!¹⁴²)

Involved in the process of returning God’s love, and subsequently becoming more like God, is our struggle to incorporate the Divine paradoxical nature into our human frame. Here is where we run into a great deal of confusion as we struggle with the Holy Spirit’s help and hounding to “work out our salvation,”¹⁴³ and become more reflective of God’s character. Matthew 10:40 is an example: **“He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it.”**

¹⁴² Deuteronomy 5

¹⁴³ See the expanded discussion of this mandate in Working out our Salvation, later in this Chapter.

So does that make suicide bombers righteous? **No**. God is asking for so much more than a onetime offer of everything. **God is asking for a daily denial of what we think we want, in favor of what we know God wants us to do or become.** Occasionally, when we would rather go golfing, we must choose to mow the lawn for our in-laws, or attend our son's concert. When we would rather deck the co-worker who just treated us rudely, we must bite our tongue, unclench our fist, and return to our desk, un-justified. When we would rather publicly host the fundraising dinner, we must stay home and secretly stuff bears for orphans, or make our family a great meal. When we feel it's best for our child to attend college, we must allow them to choose military service instead. **We must give God everything, all of our possessions, all of our time, talents and hopes, all of our attention and affections – all of us!** This is dying to self moment by moment, in season and out – without ceasing. This is losing our life for His sake. This is what God is asking of us.

WARNING: The failures come when we attempt such sacrifice out of compulsion instead of gratitude. We have to respond from that place of awe-struck gratitude to know such a being, let alone be desired by such Wholeness. *Attitude is everything.*

Biblical Directives ~

~ Choose Joy ~

“God asks no man whether he will accept life.
This is not the choice.
You must take it.
The only question is how.”
- Henry Ward Beecher

“Choose this day who you will serve.”
~ Joshua 24:15

The most human part of us is our will, and that will – will be exercised. **We must choose** moment by moment to survive. (Even choosing not to make a decision is a choice!) That is the fundamental aspect of our humanity – we cannot escape it, and God will not let us out of it. We have to choose to get up in the morning. We can choose to die. **We can choose to get to know God and give the Almighty glory in our thoughts and actions.**

It has long been a burden of my soul to see how few people choose to find happiness in God (and I have been chief among them); so let me challenge you (as I have myself) with Abraham's Lincoln's famous observation “People are just as happy as they make up their minds to be.” Contemporarily, Dr. Wayne Dyer has written a whole book on this premise. In *The Power of Intention* he says:

“Free will means you have the choice to connect to Spirit or not”.

Even indwelt by the Holy Spirit, God will not override our free will. We must choose. That is our first and eternal mandate. Some subsequent directives are:

- Rejoice in the Lord always!¹⁴⁴
- Whatever is good, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, **dwell on these things.**¹⁴⁵
- Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart.¹⁴⁶
- The joy of the Lord is my strength.¹⁴⁷

In other words, choose joy, choose grateful relationship with God. From there praise and worship will follow as you begin to ascend the divine cycle of blessing and obedience. If you have to start with a half-hearted “God – you’re great.” Then start there. Asking yourself ‘why have people for all of time shouted that at the top of their voices?’ If you’ve lost your connection to God, and forgotten why you made it in the first place; get back in touch with your heart, and ask God to give you Her’s. It’s a guarantee that worship will follow and that brings joy.

In *Desiring God*, John Piper shares his difficult experience with this process:

“Praising God, the highest calling of humanity and our eternal vocation, did not involve the renunciation [giving up] but rather the consummation [completion] of the joy I so desired. My old effort to achieve worship with no self-interest in it proved to be a contradiction in terms. Worship is basically adoration, and we adore only what delights us. There is no such thing as sad adoration or unhappy praise. We have a name for those who try to praise when they have no pleasure in the object. We call them hypocrites. This fact – that praise means consummate pleasure and that the highest end of man is to drink deeply of this pleasure – was perhaps the most liberating discovery I ever made. “Delight yourself in the Lord; and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Ps. 37:4). I found that the goodness of God, the very foundation of worship, is not a thing you pay your respects to out of some kind of disinterested reverence. No, it is something to be enjoyed: “O taste and see that the Lord is good (Ps 34:8).

“As CS Lewis says, God in the Psalms is the “all-satisfying Object.” His people adore him unashamedly for the “exceeding joy” they find in him (Ps 43:4). He is the source of complete and unending pleasure: “In thy presence is fullness of joy, in thy right hand there are pleasures forever” (Ps 16:11).”

¹⁴⁴ Philippians 4:4

¹⁴⁵ Philippians 4:8

¹⁴⁶ Psalm 37:4

¹⁴⁷ Nehemiah 8:10

WARNING: Be careful not to confuse happiness and denial with joy. Joy is deeper than happiness. Happiness is usually dependant on circumstances, while joy has peace as a huge component and that peace pervades circumstances. Joy can be had in the face of trial and struggle. Anyone who is perpetually “happy” when this world is so full of pain – is living in denial. But having a profound and unshakable faith that God will work through the pain is what allows the joy to abide. That’s where the choice comes in – in the face of pain, I can choose belief and that allows the joy of my salvation to abide.

“I am still determined to be cheerful and happy in whatever situation I may be, for I have also learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our dispositions and not on our circumstances.

- Martha Washington

~ *Relationship* ~

~ *With God*

*“You shall love the Lord with all your heart,
and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*

~ *Matthew 22:37*

Jesus told us that this was the greatest commandment. Choosing relationship with God ministers to God. We are fallen and do not have the choice Adam and Eve had to obey God or not. We all know we disobey – all the time. ***Our choice is whether we will accept God’s offer of forgiveness?*** When we run to God in our sinful failures, we minister to the divine psychic wound Adam & Eve gave God by hiding from Him in the Garden of Eden. We are undoing their failure. God created us because She loves us. He has now proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that She is not upset about the sin, He just wants us to run into Her arms and accept Divine forgiveness. He wants our attention and affections. **When we unite with Divinity we expand it – God’s original design is restored!**

Jacqueline had a son who was a high school senior. He was struggling to make the transition to adulthood and blaming mom for all his struggles and failures. He was treating her cruelly and with disdain. As she considered the pain this caused her, she had a revelation. Even though he was unloving and preventing her from helping him with his challenges, which was resulting in his failing to achieve his dreams; she still loved him dearly and wanted the best for him. She had much she desired to give him, and was just waiting for him to become open to her love and assistance. His agonizing rejection in no way reduced her love for him, it just created a barrier to love’s expression. She could now do nothing but wait. With this awareness, she realized that this must be how God felt about her. She saw her own rejection of God, and now comprehended how she was the stumbling block to many of her own desires. With this newfound awareness, she felt

a renewed closeness to God and a much deeper appreciation of both her own purposeful pain and God's.

Richard Rohr explains how this relationship plays out in his book *Jesus' Plan for a New World*:

“The call to the gospel life is not really a call to be moral, law-abiding and “good”, although many seem to think so. It is, rather, *to follow Jesus* – who keeps us on the path of letting go and rediscovering, which is very different from just “being good”. The quality Jesus is looking for is risk-takers over security freaks. **It seems to me that Jesus is saying relationship reality is above ritual reality.** People are more important than ideology. Thus we are to go where we're needed. We are to go where we're invited. We are to go where life is wanted and where it is received.”

~ *With Humanity*

“You shall love your neighbor as Yourself.” ~ Matthew 22:39

Jesus told us that this was the second greatest commandment. As God the Father sent His son to represent Him here on earth; to love others for Him, and tell them about Her love for them; likewise, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into us to re-present Him to us; to continually love us, and remind us, and teach us about Divinity. Now, we are sent into the world. **We have become God's representatives in our world.** We are here to love others for God, and tell them about our experience of God's love. We are to keep building on the foundation of God's love which Jesus began and the Holy Spirit perpetuates in us. **God is allowing us to be the conduit of Divine love pouring into the lives of others through relational interactions.** As this Divine love pours through us, we experience it. We are blest and healed, and enabled by it, even as God “uses” us to bless others.

Godly political activities, teaching and preaching, serving your family, helping your neighbors, reaching out to a stranger, supporting widows and orphans, visiting the sick and imprisoned, doing your job well so others are blest; these are all empowered, relational actions that God is wanting to work in us. These are the “fruits” of our faith, **the visible actions that prove the internal combustion of God's power at work in us and through us.**

“God does not make clones. Each person is different, a tribute to God's creativity. If we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, we must accept people as they are and not demand that they conform to our own image.”
- Henry Fehren

~ *Belief and Faith* ~

*Faith makes it wholly possible
To quietly endure
The violent world around us-
For in God we are secure.
-Helen Steiner Rice*

Faith and belief are tied together like two sides of a coin. One side is our contribution to the problem and the other side is God's. The first side is belief – our response. There is no path to relationship with God based on anything but belief initially, because God is too big to understand and “know” completely - ever. **So we must begin with “*listen to me and acknowledge my power.*”¹⁴⁸** We must initially choose to accept God's revelation of Divinity as creator of all things, and loving Father who chose to reveal Himself personally, and connect to Her created humanity through Jesus Christ. Belief is a conscious choice of the will - to choose God, and choose the best possible scenario about God. Many people think this is faith, but it is not; **it is our choice – to believe.**

That's What Faith Must Be
By Michael Card

To hear with my heart
To see with my soul
To be guided by a hand I cannot hold
To trust in a way that I cannot see
That's what faith must be

When the universe fell from His fingertips
He decided He wanted some fellowship
But the man and the woman would not submit
So He made a better way
When the moment was right He sent His own Son
And He opened the way so that everyone
Could have hope and believe that when time was done
He'd be able to make us one

To hear with my heart
To see with my soul
To be guided by a hand I cannot hold
To trust in a way that I cannot see
That's what faith must be

Now I understand that there is a key
Its Jesus in me, a reality
That God is in Christ and that Christ's in me
That with faith I see what is unseen

To hear with my heart
To see with my soul
To be guided by a hand I cannot hold
To trust in a way that I cannot see
That's what faith must be
That's what faith must be

The other side of that coin is faith – God's contribution. **Faith is a gift from the Holy Spirit that comes after our choice to believe.** Faith is the growing conviction that Christ is supremely desirable and dependable. It becomes confidence that God's promises are True and can be trusted in the face of all evidence to the contrary. St. Augustine of Hippo said “I believe in order that I may understand”. And Elton Trueblood expanded “Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservations.” Faith is Divinely gifted power to make the conscious choice to trust in God's ability to make Herself known in spite of astronomical questions, and care for us in spite of our profound failures. “*Without faith it is impossible to please God.*”¹⁴⁹ God wants us always growing (strengthening the faith muscles) we were given after choosing to believe God's Word.

¹⁴⁸ Isaiah 33:13

¹⁴⁹ Hebrews 11:6

~ *Growth* ~

The Scriptures are very consistent in always charging us to strive to improve and learn and grow. The format the Scriptures are presented in is not simple and straightforward; it requires study and comparison and deep contemplation to begin to comprehend. This points to the value Divinity places on effort extended in understanding and relating to God. **God does not want wimps.** This is why the writers of Scripture charge us to “Run the good race,”¹⁵⁰ and to continue to “stand.”¹⁵¹ As we “grow in grace,”¹⁵² we are fulfilling more of our design destiny which thrills the heart of God. We are becoming more “useable” as we allow the Holy Spirit more and more access to bless others through our growth in wisdom and grace and capability.

Our growth comes through our “practice.” As councilors, doctors, and attorneys have a “practice,” and we all recognize “practice makes perfect;” **we must do the things daily which increase our growth and expand our maturity.** Those would include: worship, study of Scriptures, prayer, meditation, service, and celebration.

“Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep riding.”
- Albert Einstein

~ *Gratitude* ~

If you’ve made it this far in this book – you are interested in God and so you are blessed beyond measure for that “prevenient grace,” that working of the Holy Spirit which endlessly calls you further-up and further-in to knowledge and desire of God – even when you have yet to acknowledge it!

Jesus stated:

“The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables”¹⁵³

This is a hard saying and one that leads toward the doctrine of predestination which I will not touch upon except to say – **God is the Creator and as such has the right to choose whom She will choose.**¹⁵⁴ It’s like an artist who creates – all their creations are not

¹⁵⁰ Galatians 5:7 and Hebrews 12:1

¹⁵¹ Isaiah 7:9 and Galatians 5:1

¹⁵² 2 Peter 3:18

¹⁵³ Matthew 13:11-13

¹⁵⁴ “The man He chooses He will cause to come near Him.” Numbers 16:5

masterpieces. Many are just a practice work that is sold or tossed or given away as the artist works to perfect their craft. (Please note that if the work of art has some say in this process and thereby the final result; and refuses to participate – it can't turn out to be a masterpiece!) But every once in a while an artist creates what they know is a masterpiece. That work of art will be displayed with pride, protected fiercely, and parted with only at great cost. Those God calls God predestines,¹⁵⁵ those are Divine masterpieces. You are one or you would not have made it this far into this book, for you would not have been interested. ***Being called by God is proof you are a masterpiece and cause for profound gratitude!***

For further Study of daily disciplines I can recommend Richard Foster's

- *Celebration of Discipline*. In it he has a chapter on each of the "practices" I have mentioned.

~ *Worship* ~

Worship is engaging God, connecting on the spiritual level. It is exercising our spirits by focusing our minds and hearts on their maker. **It is prioritizing God above all other thoughts, actions, people, and distractions.** Worship does not just happen in a vacuum of total silence and meditation. Nor is worship only singing and dancing. Worship is bringing God as the priority into everything we do.

Worship is being mindful about what we are doing all the time, and giving it our very best effort to the glory and honor and obedience of God. Worship is choosing joy because you want to draw nearer to God! Worship is connection, participation, interrelating *with God*. It is not talking or singing or thinking *about God*. Worship can happen as we rejoice in God's blessing of indoor plumbing as we clean the toilet! Worship happens as we give our work to Her and perform it to the best of our ability, blessing others because we did our particular job well. Worship happens spontaneously as we take in our environment and appreciate all the beauty, challenge, and abundance that surrounds us. Worship happens as we effort to sing, praise, dance, or listen to others glorify God, with our heart open and active – feeling its hurts, joys, and confusion, with no pretense.

~ *Made for This*

God is so serious about the need for worship that it was the first Commandment ~ "You shall have no other god's before Me,"¹⁵⁶ (prioritize nothing else higher than Me!). Jesus stated it positively ~ "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all

¹⁵⁵ Romans 8:30

¹⁵⁶ Exodus 20:3

your soul, and with all your mind.¹⁵⁷ At first glance, these requirements may seem like self-serving demands, like we are God’s slaves. But when you consider John Piper’s observation that our True pleasure and fulfillment is in God Himself,¹⁵⁸ coupled with the observable fact that the people who exude joy – genuinely love God, and the people who are genuinely miserable, truly avoid God; we see another hidden principle: **We were made to worship and glorify God.** God knows this. God knows that worship, and relationship, and praise of God is what will ultimately fulfill US! God is giving us the directives to achieve the happiness we seek. Divinity is putting us first in Her affections, and asking us only to reciprocate.

Worship is praising and valuing God above all else. (In our attitudes not just our actions.) To paraphrase John Piper again: Praising God, is the highest and purest calling of humanity and our eternal vocation. It does not involve turning from my personal joy, but fulfilling it by learning to delight in God. Worship is basically adoration, and we adore only what delights us. Our praise should be motivated solely by the happiness we find in God. **Without the engagement of the heart, we do not really worship.**

*“All the works of God culminate in the praises of His redeemed people. The climax of His happiness is the delight He takes in the echoes of His excellence in the praises of the saints. This praise is the consummation of our own joy in God. **Therefore God’s pursuit of praise from us and our pursuit of pleasure in Him are the same pursuit.** This is the great gospel!”*

~ Practical Examples

Here’s a practical example of worship: As I write this, I am alone in the house. My husband is out of town on business, and my daughter is away at college. It’s getting late and I just had the habitual thought that I needed to stop writing and go make dinner. Then I remembered that no one’s here but me – I don’t have to stop and make anything! I felt joy; not because I don’t like my family around, but because right now I am free to keep writing. Writing is my act of worship. I am doing this for God in grateful obedience as my motivation and with the Holy Spirit as my strength, and it brings me joy! I am happier acting in this obedience than I have been in decades. I feel God’s indwelling presence as I read the things I write and have the thought – *I didn’t know I knew that!* God and I are acting in concert in my “work,” and I feel a peace that passes understanding. **Worship is obeying God’s command to “Delight yourself in the Lord!”**¹⁵⁹

A great example of our spirits bond with God in worship, was the experience of a precious friend of mine, Ruth. Her mother was dying and had lost her ability to speak. She communicated in slurred words occasionally at best. A few days before Ruth’s mother graduated to Glory [died], Ruth was with her doing her favorite activity – reading

¹⁵⁷ Matthew 22:37

¹⁵⁸ “In thy presence is fullness of joy.” Psalm 16:11

¹⁵⁹ Psalm 37:4

Scripture to her. It was one of her favorite Psalms. As Ruth was reading aloud, she heard her mother join in and recite the passage in a clear voice that sounded like an angel to Ruth for it had been so long silent. That was when Ruth realized that though our bodies may fail us, **our spirits are alive and vital and powerful; and truly come to life when connecting with our Maker.**

WARNING: Worship must be real. It must come from the heart *and* the head – not one without the other. True worship engages emotions and thoughts together. Jesus revealed that with His gift of the Holy Spirit we could now “worship in Spirit and in Truth.”¹⁶⁰ The Spirit is the how, and the Truth is the who. Worshipping in Spirit is the opposite of worshipping only externally with empty ritual – with your heart not really in it! Donald Miller shared an excellent insight into Satan’s efforts to keep people from worship in his book *Blue like Jazz*:

“I believe that the greatest trick of the devil is not to get us into some sort of evil but rather have us wasting time. This is why the devil tries so hard to get Christians to be religious. If he can sink a man’s mind into habit, he will prevent his heart from engaging God. I was into habit. I grew up going to church, so I got used to hearing about God. He was like Uncle Harry or Aunt Sally except we didn’t have pictures.”

~ Love ~

“God is love.” ~ 1 John 4:18

Divinity really only wants Divine-love to be returned. Like a reflection off a mirror, or an echo returning from a canyon; God wants His character reflected back off of us. And - God, like us, wants to be loved. Not because you have to, but because you want to! Then, as an expression of that love and gratitude; all loving, kind, obedient, actions *will* follow. The first commandment is to Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, mind, and soul. The Holy One doesn’t just want a little of you, God want *all* of you!

How do we give all of ourselves to God?

- By appreciating God and what little we may understand about Divinity.
- By looking for God everywhere, in everything, and everyone.
- By prioritizing knowing God the personality; not just the rules and regulations.
- By prioritizing spending time with God alone, not just in fellowship with wiser people.
- By talking to God, and sharing what’s really on your heart, not just what *should* be there! (Simultaneously trusting that God is accepting you for who you *are*.)
- By letting God direct our decisions, and how our time and money and energies are spent.

¹⁶⁰ “[The] hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.” John 4:23

“And this is love; that we walk according to His commandments.” ~ 2 John 6

Love is truly reflected in actions, but the actions are not the love. **For love to count, it has to come from genuine emotions of God’s warmth and tenderness and joy overflowing into our attitudes and actions.** 1 Corinthians 13 tells us that:

- Education - (“speaking in the tongues of men and angels”) without love is but “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal”
- Wisdom - “having the gift of prophecy, and knowing all mysteries and all knowledge,” and even “faith to remove mountains” amounts to “nothing”
- Actions - “if I give my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, it profits me nothing”

- without *Love.*

And what does the Bible tell us love is?

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

So now that you know what love is, how do our great love stories stack up?

Did Romeo and Juliet - seek their own?

How about Gone with the Wind – was there arrogance in Scarlett’s love?

Or Top Gun – was their love kind and unprovoked?

“Love can be demanding, in fact more demanding than law. It has its own imperatives – think of a mother sitting by the bedside of a sick child through the night, impelled only by love. Nothing is too much trouble for love.”
- Desmond Tutu

~ Fear God ~

*“What does the Lord your God require from you?
to fear the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and love Him,
and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,
and to keep the Lord’s commandments and His statutes.”
~ Deuteronomy 10:12-13*

Remember the paradoxes in God’s character? Here’s another example! In Genesis 26:24 God says “**Fear not, for I am with you**” (and He or others say it a whole bunch of times throughout Scripture!), then He turns around and says to “**fear your God**” in Leviticus 25:17 (Scriptures say that quite a lot too). Reading these opposing directives, many people like to excuse themselves from reading Scripture, because it “contradicts itself.” Until we can get the astronomical size and mystery of Divinity under our belts, it does look that way. But as soon as we understand the concept of paradox, and how much-so The Holy One’s scope contains both ends of the spectrum and everything in-between; we can begin to understand what is being said. Think of a soccer game - when we’re playing offense the instructions are to run forward. When its defense time, we are to do the exact opposite and hang back to guard the goal. Paradoxes aren’t that unfamiliar, we just have to put them into perspective.

This particular paradox isn’t about God – it’s about us. Being made in God’s image, we are big enough to deal with both Realities at the same time, just like a soccer game. The word fear is translated from the Hebrew word *yare* and means fear and reverence. Just as we “fear the ocean”- we love it, think about it, take pictures of it, wade, swim, and surf in it. But we are always careful in it, knowing it can kill us as well as give us some of our best times! **As we worship God remaining mindful of Her awesome power, we are protected from idolatry for we are keeping God’s “greater than us” aspects front and center in our thinking.** This fear is realistic worship, and so means valuing and worshiping God - because you should be afraid –there is some serious power here.

~ Obedience ~

Those who love Me will do as I say . . . ~ John 14:15

What does God say? (Just a few of the things -)		
Directive:	Verse or elaboration:	Location:
Prioritize God FIRST!	Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and soul.	Matthew 22:37
Love your neighbor <u>as yourself</u> .	If you don't love yourself, you can't love anyone else! But don't get stuck there. <i>Your fulfillment comes in loving others.</i> Learning to love yourself is the foundation. It's the building that's built on it that is functional.	Matthew 22:39
Be Thankful!	Give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.	1Thess 5:18
Rejoice!	Rejoice in all circumstances	Philippians 4:4
Follow the Scriptures and Ten Commandments out of gratitude not servitude:	Be careful to keep the commandments: to love the Lord your God. (Servants obey, but they don't love.)	Joshua 22:5
Hear O Israel – Have no other God's. Make no idols. Do not misuse my name. Keep the Sabbath holy. Honor your father and mother.	Listen to me! Prioritize Me #1. Value nothing above me. Use my name with love & respect. Care for yourself God's way. Care for your family God's way.	Deuteronomy 5:1-21
You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not testify falsely against your neighbor. You shall not desire your neighbors' possessions.	Care for your neighbors God's way.	
Believe!	Repent and believe the good news.	Mark 1:15

Remember the ascending Divine cycle mentioned earlier – each of these responses, leads to the next one, in constantly renewing cycles which are bringing strength, growth, peace, joy, and fulfillment to us. By prioritizing God first we learn what God is like – love. That makes us feel loved. Feeling loved makes us thankful. As we are thankful, that positive energy wells up in joy which pours out in positive energy with which to obey. As we chose obedience we are acting on our belief, we are prioritizing God! And around we go again ...

Obedience is a direct reflection of our faith and trust in God. It reflects the priority that we have made God in our lives. As we choose to do what God says, whether we understand it or not, it shows that we realize that God understands us and the world around us better than we do. It shows that we honor God and want Her intimately active in our current moment. It shows our wisdom in recognizing that we are but the creation and not able to run the universe, let alone our own lives. We are choosing to involve God and build the relationship while persevering in the challenges that face our moments.

~ *Working out our Salvation*

***“Therefore my dear friends, as you have always obeyed,
continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”
~ Philippians 2:12***

Obedience is not about “*earning* our salvation,” it is about “*working-out* our salvation” or working from or within the salvation that we now have through the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives. For the Philippians verse quoted above continues “*for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.*” **Working out our salvation is more about us letting God do it through us than it is about us doing it for God.** It is about maintaining a bless-able posture so we are growing in God’s strength and wisdom to be able to receive and carry and use the ever increasing blessings that The Holy One desires to give us. If we are not obeying, we stop or reverse this divinely ascending cycle of growth and blessings, and put a stumbling block in front of our feet and between us and God. We get caught up in the vicious cycle - cycling away from God not toward Her. We have not lost our salvation, but God is blocked from continuing to build the positive, blessing, growing relationship He desires. And we are highly likely to end up in a face-plant as we trip over our own stumbling block of disobedience.

The Law required obedience because God knew that the laws He had given were what was best for the human creation. They are the owners’ manual that spells out the required maintenance and operation of the human frame. Our current sciences have proven the reason for every one of those laws:

- If we love God and other people we are functioning from the higher energy levels and experience more fulfillment, and happiness;
- If we do not covet our neighbors “stuff” we learn to live in satisfaction and experience peace;
- If we don’t kill or steal, we don’t make enemies, and we don’t injure our psyche’s;
- If we keep our marriage bed holy, we have no exposure to sexually transmitted diseases that damage the union;
- And the list goes on and on. . .

The Prophets called people to this obedience in grateful relationship to God for the inside information on how to be human – well!

~ *Being & Doing (Faith & Works)*

*“For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,
and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.”*

~ **Hosea 6:6**

Since New Testament times there has been this long-running argument: ‘which is more important “doing” or “being”? Faith or Works? Remember the paradox’s in God’s character! **Both are important, and both prove the reality of the Holy Spirit working in and through you.** James 2:22 tells us this:

“You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.”

The works show the faith. The faith produces the works. The “being” comfortable alone with yourself and God [which isn’t easy or immediate and takes work in and of itself!] is what imbues you with the positive energy to do all the work! We are called to work in gratitude for our faith and salvation (which are only gifts from God and no amount of sacrifice or work can earn them).

- **“Doing” for God is sin.** It is a slap across the face of God – for it is saying that God’s sacrifice in the form of His son was not enough to earn your salvation.
- **“Doing” with God,** (or more precisely just “being” and letting God “do” in us and through us) **is obedience.** That does not mean just sitting around and waiting for God to do it – although it may mean that, but it usually means us turning constantly to God for guidance and instruction and doing what is before us by walking through the doors that open; in faith that God will make it work out for our good and Her glory.

What does the Lord require of you?

“To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

~ **Micah 6:8**

~ *Witnesses*

*“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;
and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem,
and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”*

~ **Acts 1:8**

This challenge to testify about the love we are experiencing to our neighbors (Judea), our enemies (Samaria), and to the ends of the earth - has scared many people throughout history. No one likes to be rejected and standing up for Christ risks feeling His rejection

very personally if the person you are talking to spits in your face with their disbelief. This is no easy task. But let me suggest that the historical evangelistic interpretation that witnessing is talking, is shallow and not at all the full picture. Talk is cheap.

I have been particularly encouraged and challenged by David Witt's interpretation in *Fearless Love in the Midst of Terror*, talking about Acts 1:8:

"Christ says MY WITNESSES. The word here for witnesses in the Greek is "martus." It is where we get our modern English word "martyr." Jesus is literally saying you shall be "My Martyrs." Christ wants His martyrs to be lovers who sacrifice and risk for others. The spirit of martyrdom is Christ's Holy Spirit of love indwelling in His children. It is a love so great that fear dissipates and joy abounds in doing the right thing, even when the cost is great."

Did you catch his *doing* emphasis and not just *talking*? Along with David Witt and his organization *Spirit of Martyrdom*; The Christian youth outreach *Young Life* has the loving motto: Live your life in front of and with the youth and earn the right to tell them about Christ. **In other words lay your life down for others, by helping them, and loving them.** Then you can talk. For Actions ultimately speak louder than words.

For Further Study ~

Do you want your fear to dissipate and your joy to abound?

I can highly recommend David Witt's book *Fearless Love in the midst of Terror*. It contains the stories of living martyrs, and teaches us how to love others well – especially Muslims, who live in great violence and have no assurance of salvation. See www.SpiritofMartyrdom.com.

~ *Suffering* ~

"Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

~ Acts 14:22

Suffering was not God's first choice but it is now a means to an end that Divinity has fully embraced. We are commanded in James 1:2-4 "*to count it all joy when you suffer various trials*" for good reasons... "*knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*" We all desperately want to be "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." We don't usually want to suffer for it, but since God created us so well, we have to assume that He knows what She's doing. That's faith being acted out in our belief - choosing to trust God because The Holy One is worthy of our trust - regardless of our level of understanding.

In his book *Pain, the Gift Nobody Wants*, Dr. Paul Brand, a doctor who worked with leprosy patients summarized his discoveries:

“My work with pain deprived patients has proved to me that pain protects us from destroying ourselves.” And “Chronic pain management succeeds when the patient accepts the possibility of living a useful life in the presence of pain.”

The system works, and God is so committed to it that He Himself experienced it. “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.”¹⁶¹ Since God did not spare Himself - He will not let us out of the discipline that produces righteousness! We all hate to suffer. I hear so much discussion about it – as if we have a choice! EVERYONE SUFFERS – whether they have a relationship with God or not! A relationship with God simply adds some hope of comfort, direction, help, and meaning in the suffering. As Billy Graham observed “You're born. You suffer. You die. Fortunately, there's a loophole.” The loophole involves the agony and purpose in the death, not escaping the suffering.

It comes back to the classic parental question – ‘Do you want to do this the hard way or the easy way?’ The hard way is fighting the system and resenting God and God’s proven system of human perfection -suffering. The easy way is Scott Peck’s classic observation in *A Road Less Traveled*:

“Life is difficult... Once we truly know that life is difficult – once we truly understand and accept it – then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.”

Our choice is our attitude about the suffering, and our attempts to escape it. Again in *Pain the Gift Nobody Wants*, Dr Paul Brand quotes Dr. Hans Selye, “The true pioneer in discovering the impact of emotions on health.” Dr. Selye:

“named vengeance and bitterness as the emotional responses most likely to produce high stress levels in human beings. Conversely, he concluded, *gratitude* is the single response most nourishing to health.”

¹⁶¹ Hebrews 5:8,9

~Short Cuts

“For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”
~ *Philippians 1:29*

Have you ever noticed that the “short cuts” are always the long way around? The student who doesn’t want to study, ends up repeating the class. If you don’t learn your times-tables you end up adding things up with your fingers for the rest of your life (I can testify to this!). Not fighting for your troubled marriage often means you have to relearn the same lessons with yet another person and a lot more baggage (lots of people can testify to that!). Stopping to ask for directions gets you there quicker and with less argument (right – men?). Buckling down and surrendering to God’s system of suffering and growing *IS* the more direct way to work out your salvation. It gets you there quicker, and with less pain and suffering!

WARNING: There is no way out of it. **We just get to pick our poison.** Do we want to suffer for righteousness sake, and patiently endure our sufferings looking for God’s good to come out of it, or do we want to suffer the worlds destruction being dog-meat for Satan who is “a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour?”¹⁶²

~ Tribulations/Struggles

“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”
~ *Acts 14:22*

God uses all things for His glory and our grace. Whether we are suffering because of our faithfulness or our stupidity; because others persecute us, or because we have been stricken by ‘fate’ with ill-health, or crippled feet; God can (and will if we so allow) use it for “good”.¹⁶³

*“For the joy set before Him Christ endured the cross.”*¹⁶⁴ Christ was able to obey God and endure suffering beyond our imaginations because He chose to hold onto the hope of knowing you – in the future. He wanted to get you out of His heart, and into His arms, and so He was able to accomplish His mission – with you in mind. Scriptures promise us *“Whoever hopes in Him will not be disappointed.”*¹⁶⁵ Can we ‘keep our eye on the prize’ (our hope of eternity in God arms) and endure our sufferings with patient endurance?

Unpacking Colossians 1:24 where the Apostle Paul says *“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions”* John Piper explains¹⁶⁶:

¹⁶² 1 Peter 5:8

¹⁶³ “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.” Romans 8:28

¹⁶⁴ Hebrews 12:2

¹⁶⁵ Isaiah 28:14

¹⁶⁶ John Piper’s *Desiring God* has an excellent chapter on Suffering.

“God intends for the affliction of Christ to be presented to the world through the afflictions of His people. God really means for the body of Christ, the church, to experience some of the suffering he experienced so that when we proclaim the cross as the way to life, people will see the marks of the cross in us and feel the love of the cross from us. Our calling is to make the afflictions of Christ real for people by the afflictions we experience in bringing them the message of salvation. Since Christ is no longer on the earth, he wants his body, the church, to reveal His suffering in its suffering. We complete Christ’s afflictions by providing what they do not have, namely, a personal, vivid presentation to those who did not see Christ suffer in person. We magnify His grace in the gladness of faith.”

Oswald Chambers gives God’s reasons:

“The natural can be turned into the spiritual only through sacrifice. Without this a person will lead a divided life. Why did God demand that the natural must be sacrificed? God did not demand it. It is not God’s perfect will, but His permissive will. God’s perfect will was for the natural to be changed into the spiritual through obedience. Sin is what made it necessary for the natural to be sacrificed... Sanctification means more than being freed from sin. It means the deliberate commitment of myself to the God of my salvation, and being willing to pay whatever it may cost.”¹⁶⁷

~To Give God Glory ~

**“Give Glory to the Lord.”
–Joshua 7:19**

The Westminster Shorter Catechism directs:

The Chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Two points have always bothered me about that fundamental Christian directive:

1. How can you glorify let alone enjoy someone you don’t know? Shouldn’t our major challenge (chief end) in life be getting to know God???
2. Why do so few Christians genuinely enjoy God? - I suggest it’s because they don’t really know Him!!!

I have always thought this directive should be:

The chief end of humanity is to get to know God and thereby be able to glorify Him and enjoy Her forever.

[OK – you’re right, I’m an idealist. I want things done right, and honestly!]

This theological cramp highlights why I love this discipline so much – if you are willing to look, and discuss, and ask God – the Holy Spirit eventually leads to the answer. Discussing this with my brother, he directed me to John Piper, a pastor for almost thirty years, who has resolved my frustration with this summation:

God is most glorified in me when I am most satisfied in Him.

¹⁶⁷ *My Utmost for His Highest*, December 10 entry, by Oswald Chambers

So yes! we do have to focus on relationship with God and find our joy, contentment, and significance there. That prioritization of God-and-me will produce my satisfaction and motivation. And my actions and attitudes will then give the God-I-love glory! Perhaps it's the loving-God that brings the glory?! Prioritizing Her, valuing Him, enjoying The Holy One are all the things that lead to, and express love, and satisfy me – spiritually. It's that spiritual satisfaction, that reveling in Divine love that produces the perfect peace we all crave. **It's in this relationship that we find our identity, security, provision, and satisfaction.**

Piper's book *Desiring God* aims to persuade us that:

The chief end of man is to glorify God **by** enjoying him forever.

He goes on to explain that our True pleasure and fulfillment is in God Himself. He is the end of the search, not the means to some further end. **Our goal then should be to find our deepest pleasure in the one and only God.** Somehow, in our fulfillment of the highest and best we can be – people who revel in God and act out of that resident joy – we bring glory to God. We are fulfilling the Divine design – bringing God and Her good agenda to this fallen earth in all (okay, *most*) of our attitudes and actions.

Piper shares his testimony:

“God commands that we find joy in loving people.¹⁶⁸ I find in the Bible a divine command to be a pleasure-seeker – that is, to forsake the two-bit, low-yield, short-term, never-satisfying, person-destroying, God-belittling pleasures of the world and to sell everything “with joy,”¹⁶⁹ in order to have the kingdom of heaven, and thus “enter into the joy of your Master.”¹⁷⁰ The upshot is piercing and radically life-changing; the pursuit of the true virtue includes the pursuit of the joy, because joy is an essential component of true virtue.”

Jesus prayed to His father at the end of His life, “*I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which you gave me to do.*”¹⁷¹ As our elder brother, and Divine revelation of God, we are to let the Holy Spirit make us more like Jesus. (That goes way beyond just doing what we think Jesus would do!) Scripture tells us that we give God glory in our obedience, and the Apostle Paul left us that specific directive in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “*So whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*” **Doing the thing(s) that God individually created us to do,** (and personally enables us through the Holy Spirit using our specific talents, and passions, and gifts,) **somehow brings God glory!** Building up the positive interpretation of God's reputation, in profound gratitude, and awe-inspired Truth, is our job here among our fellow humans who have believed the two-bit, low-yield, short-term, never-satisfying, person-destroying, God-belittling Lies :

- God is not good
- God does not love them
- None of this matters

¹⁶⁸ Romans 12:8

¹⁶⁹ Matthew 13:44

¹⁷⁰ Matthew 25:21,23

¹⁷¹ John 17:4

Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou fount of life, Thou light of men
From the best bliss that earth imparts
We turn unfilled to Thee again.
- Bernard of Clairvaux

I agree with John Piper and suggest that *our work is:*

- **Cherishing our joy and nurturing it in time spent with God.** (Getting to know God, and reveling in that mind-blowing adventure.)
- **Focusing on your blessings and giving God the praise and gratitude** Divinity is due for them. (Choosing an attitude of gratitude.)
- **Sharing the hope and joy of Christ's love whole-heartedly.** (Being a witness for and distributor of Christ's love wherever possible.)
- **Practically meeting the realistic needs of others as the Holy Spirit directs, and in the Holy Spirit's power.** (Acting on the overflow of love that is pouring into your life through interactions with people.)
- **Following your heart** (the Holy Spirit's Temple) **and walking by faith through the doors that amazingly open.** (Trusting that God is even big enough to fix our inevitable mistakes.)



Picture circulated on Internet – Photographer unknown

*So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do,
do all to the glory of God. - 1 Corinthians 10:31*

WARNING: The quickest way to not give God glory is to fall into the trap Moses warned the Israelites against in Deuteronomy 8:17-18 of claiming the gratitude and glory we owe God; “saying in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’ But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth.”

~ *Baptism* ~

“Repent and be baptized” was the message John the Baptist preached preparing the way for Messiah.¹⁷² **Baptism is an outward sign of an inward grace.** It is us acting on the movement occurring within our hearts. It is a symbolic “death” of our old selves with their myopic [very small] self-focus, and a “rising” out of the waters in newness of life,¹⁷³ with our new focus on God and that blossoming relationship. Baptism is usually a truly significant experience to those who understand its meaning and choose the sacrament. Baptism has historically been a huge doctrinal issue. However, the reality is that Jesus did not talk about it much, and baptized no one. That deeply significant symbolic act was called for by His predecessor. **Christ asked John the Baptist to baptize Him,** and that is when Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit.

During His lifetime however, Christ’s focus was on the feast of communion and not on baptism. (See ~Sacrifice in Chapter 5 for more information.) Yet His last words to His disciples were instructions to “go and baptize.”¹⁷⁴ **By Christ’s words and deeds, He instituted Baptism calling His followers to use every avenue and opportunity to remember, and to follow, and to obey Him.**

~ *Fruits of the Spirit* ~

The Holy Spirit at work in our spirits is producing Her fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. In our public schools there is a program called "Character Counts;" ultimately that's exactly what God is looking for - what's in your heart is what really makes you - You. Have you developed the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5? Do you exude: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self control? These are the aspects of Gods' character that He desires to develop in us all.

Unfortunately, **the major vehicle God uses in our lives to produce these fruits is suffering.** For God, the end does justify the means. Our predecessors chose to learn about evil, and our suffering is that course. But because God is so big He helps us “work out our salvation” and produce good from evil, patience from frustration, peace amidst

¹⁷² “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” Acts 19:3

¹⁷³ “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Romans 6:3,4

¹⁷⁴ “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19

turmoil, love from hate, joy from agony, kindness from cruelty, and self-control from sheer perseverance. Romans 5:1-5 tells us:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulation, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

“The only way to learn strong faith is to endure great trials.

– George Muller

So, as James encourages:

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.¹⁷⁵

Character Counts! *It's not at all* “He who has the most toys wins!”¹⁷⁶ As we allow the Holy Spirit to reproduce Herself in us, creating the fruits of the Spirit in us through suffering; Our actions change from self-serving ones, into loving ones which: – do justice, - give mercy, - produce self-sacrifice, and eventually - the obedience which closely resembles God’s law. That’s the plan – God doing it in us, not us doing it for God.

~ To Remember ~

God knows how easily we forget! So **the Scriptures are full of calls to remember.** Worship is basically remembering our priorities, and acknowledging our creature-ship. We are challenged to worship God.¹⁷⁷ In order to help us do that God instituted many feasts and occasions which constantly remind us to return to our attitude of gratitude, and worship God.

¹⁷⁵ James 1:2-4

¹⁷⁶ “*For one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.*” Luke 12:15

¹⁷⁷ Psalm 95:6

~ Eucharist / Communion

Eucharist, Communion, and The Lord's Supper are all titles for the same thing – **remembering Christ's sacrificial death and atonement for the sins of humanity**. We are not called to become cannibals as history has often accused. We are called to remember. The script of remembrance is simply to drink and eat together in the name of Jesus Christ, accepting God's provision for our needs with gratitude in our hearts. This is the reason for the title "supper" in the "Lord's Supper". This is the eating and drinking that Jesus did with all Israel during His lifetime, that earned Him the title "wine-bibber and glutton."¹⁷⁸ He came to eat with everyone – not just the holy and ceremonially clean. He came to eat with the sin-sick, lost, and the hurting. He came to eat and inspire celebration, for the Kingdom of God is at hand! I [God] am here! I am eating with you – proving that I see you as clean, and restored to relationship with Me! Come enter into your Master's happiness!

Jesus initiated this tradition during his Last Supper meal with His disciples as He partook of Passover traditions. It was as Jesus and his disciples broke the bread and drank the wine sanctified by the Kiddush prayer celebrating God's provision, that Jesus commanded "Do this in remembrance of Me."¹⁷⁹ **–Remember Me, celebrating God's provision!**

Jesus was saying many things that His disciples understood later:

- I am now God's provision for your sin.¹⁸⁰
- The possibility of relationship is now restored.¹⁸¹
- The Kingdom of God is now here.¹⁸²
- Do this to remember:
 - To remind yourself of what I have done, in dying and conquering sin.¹⁸³
 - And of what I am now asking you to do –
 - to allow Me to further the Kingdom in and through you.¹⁸⁴
 - to co-create with Me, according to My plan,¹⁸⁵
 - And to look forward to My return when I will complete my Kingdom on earth.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁸ Luke 7:34

¹⁷⁹ Luke 22:19

¹⁸⁰ "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Matthew 26:28

¹⁸¹ "That God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them." 2 Corinthians 5:19

¹⁸² "declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus." Acts 28:23

¹⁸³ "Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Matthew 26:27,28

¹⁸⁴ "Therefore go and make disciples...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:19,20

¹⁸⁵ "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:17

¹⁸⁶ "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in My Father's kingdom." Matthew 26:29

~ *Sabbath/Shabbat*

Foremost among the commanded celebrations of worship and remembrance is Sabbath; **the weekly joyous Holy day designed to rest and remember.** God never asks us to do anything that Divinity hasn't done first - immediately after creation God rested. God knows we get tired and wants us to guard our health and that is assuredly a part of that commandment. But I doubt that God was really tired or out of energy or resources after creation. I think it's more of a "let's focus on enjoying this great thing we just finished!" – kind of thing.

Shabbat begins at nightfall on Friday night with prayer and the lighting of candles. Many families attend Shabbat services at the Synagogue where the Torah is read and the services are concluded with Kiddush prayer or "sanctification" said over the Kiddush cup of wine, and Challot [symbolic woven bread which each person tears rather than cuts to remember God's provision.] Saturday is spent in rest and reflection. It is customary to clean up yourself and the house and dress festively and enjoy simple festive meals. Talk is to be pleasant and topics of business and money are specifically avoided.

I elaborate more on Sabbath's many meanings in the Progressive Revelation Chapter 12, but for now let's look at **the other required remembrances which are all feasts, or celebrations!** (What does that tell you about God?!)

~ *Passover*

Passover is a week-long celebration begun by the Seder feast. This feast lasts for hours. It involves specific foods for specific reasons, and specific processes for handling and eating those foods. All **designed to remind us about God's sacrifices for us.** The feast is a family affair and involves all ages in discussion and the retelling of the Exodus story, as foods that reinforce that story are eaten. Families relax together and bond with themselves and God. The celebration ends with the Kiddush prayer of sanctification over the wine and the matzo (bread without yeast), which Christ turned into Communion.

Our family has used the instructions in a wonderful book by Martha Zimmerman to integrate these celebrations into our calendar.

- *Celebrate the Feasts* gives simple instructions so you too can remember God's great works throughout history and in your own lives.

~ Sukkoth/Booths

This festival lasts for a full week as commanded in Leviticus 23:39-43:

“On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the Lord for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day. Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt.”

During this festival, families’ live in simple huts they have built as temporary shelter to remember the “huts” Israel lived in during their time in the desert awaiting their promised land. **It is now a celebration of our faith in God’s promise to guide us to our promised land in Heaven.**

“Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.”¹⁸⁷

It was this commanded remembrance that motivated the pilgrims to celebrate the first Thanksgiving at Plymouth.

~ To look forward ~

God has given us hope without measure and we are to use it as Christ did to motivate us on to love and good works. For Scriptures tell us that it was the joy set before Him (of the restored relationship with His precious creation) that strengthened Christ to endure the agonies of the cross.¹⁸⁸ We are challenged to hold onto that same hope to “*run the race set before you.*”¹⁸⁹ Jesus told us to be prepared and looking forward to His return with several parables and much feeling. (See ~Parables in Chapter 8 for more information.)

¹⁸⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:1,2

¹⁸⁸ “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

¹⁸⁹ “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Hebrews 12:1

*"Faith never knows where it is being led,
but it loves and knows the One who is leading."
- Oswald Chambers*

~ To our Homecoming

As a pregnant woman looks forward to the miraculous baby on the other side of the 'labor' – so **we are to look forward to the miracle of our perfection on the other side of our suffering and physical death.** We will be restored to God and to ourselves; perfected into God's original design for us as unique individuals with potentials beyond our wildest imaginations.

~ To Christ's Return

In God's perfect time *all will be well.* We pray and hope, work and wait with anticipation for that day. Christ's return to this earth to claim His inheritance is the beginning of the perfection. But do we wait for the perfection or for the Savior? **We need to fall in love with Christ so much so that we wait, not for the perfection, but for the person.** He is the means and the end.

His return has many levels of meaning:

1. He will judge the earth; and **justice, love, and mutual blessings will be restored.** Our patience in waiting through all this injustice, and inequity, and hate, will be rewarded. We will see the author of love.
2. God created humanity to have dominion over the earth. Right now it is our challenge to learn lordship and be able to relate to God, through our servanthood, **so that when He returns we are ready to take up the assistant leadership God will assign.** This preparation requires exercising our spiritual muscles to gain spiritual strength. This requires us to overcome our fears by focusing on God's perfect love. This brings us into closer relationship with the Master. We are on that ever ascending cycle of Divinity. We are exploring His heart.

For further Study –

Since I've quoted him so extensively in this chapter I have to refer you to:

- *Desiring God, 10th Anniversary Expanded Edition*, by John Piper. It's a big book, but the first three chapters give the gist of the whole book, and the appendix' are awesome.

Thoughts while reading this Chapter ~

Date:

Activities ~

As all adults quickly learn - listening can be the most difficult part of any relationship! And so it can also become the greatest gift we can give someone. Genuine interest in what someone has to say shows genuine interest in that person, and desire to know them better. Many of these practical “things I can do” items involve ways to value and honor God and show genuine interest. None is more central than truly listening to God.

When I first started meditating and quieting my own thoughts with the specific intent of hearing God's; I eventually heard the simplest messages. “I love you”; “you are safe”. They seemed too simple and self construed. But they continued “I love you”. OK Lord, I know you love me but what else? “I **LOVE** you”.

I have found many others who have started out hearing these same extremely simple messages. God knows we are just starting and She meets us at the beginning. So do not fear this process, dive-in placing your trust in the Holy Spirit to bring you success.

1. Say a prayer asking God to talk to you, and sit quietly and try to silence your own thoughts; acknowledging them but promising to act on them later - they will rest. **As your mind quiets, God can speak.** (People work on this for lifetimes, so don't rush it.)

2. **Pay attention** to what is happening around you. **God often speaks through any and all avenues available.** That usually includes uncannily similar Bible passages, and teaching messages, and comments from friends. When God is speaking to me, I've come to expect to hear it in 3 or more places! I've often heard the perfect song play on the radio, after a friend shares the same thought, when I heard it last week in a teaching or from a Bible study.

3. **Read the Scriptures.** God has already given us a huge portion of Divine thoughts and directions within this sacred book.

4. Here is where a Spiritual Director or Clergy can be of great help as we attempt to connect the dots, or follow the Holy Spirit's breadcrumbs to a completely new place and perhaps dimension. Check out Spiritual Directors International at www.sdiworld.org and **find someone to walk with you through this challenging journey.**

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

~ The Future Holds ~

“If I find in myself a desire which no experience in his world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.” - C.S. Lewis

Chapter 10

What is God going to do?

“Truth, like surgery, may hurt but it cures.”

- Han Suyin

*All will be well~
Bring Himself Glory ~
Sanctify Christ’s Body ~
Sanctify Me ~
Build Christ’s Body ~
Tribulation ~
The Church Age ~
Two of everything! ~
The Rapture ~*

*The Final days of the Tribulation ~
Christ’s Second Coming ~
Christ’s Millennial Rule on Earth ~
Armageddon ~
Judge Humanity ~
Awarded earned Treasure in Heaven ~
The New Earth and Jerusalem ~
Eternity with God ~
Restore All Creation ~*

In the end *all will be well*, and **God will achieve the cure**. We’ve already seen the cure begun – God said ‘let’s fix this;’ so Jesus Christ came as an atonement for sin¹⁹⁰ leaving the Holy Spirit within His Body of believers to experience the process of perfection (sanctification)¹⁹¹ until His return when we will all be perfect. Peace on earth will finally arrive. We will live in harmony together – unified, even as the Trinity is now unified in perfect relationship. We will be living together in “union”¹⁹² with God in the New Jerusalem.¹⁹³ That’s the Good News.

¹⁹⁰ “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45, “We also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” Romans 5:11

¹⁹¹ “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it.” 1Thessalonians. 5:23,24

¹⁹² See Chapter 16 Some Terms Defined.

¹⁹³ “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them.” Revelations. 21:3

Bring Himself Glory ~

God exists as a perfected whole. He is the source of all energy, love, and *Everything!*

As such He is complete, lacking nothing, a perfect paradox of existence, contentment, creativity, joy, energy, and love. Glory is the result of Divine existence. It is a reflection of Reality so much clearer than we can currently tolerate. God's creation reflects this perfect brilliance in beauty, as we are told in Psalm 19, "*The heavens declare the glory of God.*"

Another component in God's glory is his name or reputation. Scriptures chronicle Divine efforts to communicate God's character and help us comprehend His Glory - correctly, or positively; and see through Satan's barrage of lie's - that God's character is negative! This story is of miracle and revelation, after miracle and revelation, as **God used the nation of Israel to show the world His love and concern, and illuminate His glory** (since humanity doesn't seem to catch it just in creation). God's ultimate motive is given in 1Kings 8:43 "*in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to hear You, as do Your people Israel.*" I attempted to cover this revelation in Chapter 4. John Piper gives this concept beautifully in his book *Desiring God* (in appendix 1) where he highlights the revelations on God's value of Her glory in Scriptures:

"My conclusion there is that God's own glory is uppermost in his own affections. In everything he does, his purpose is to preserve and display that glory. To say his glory is uppermost in his own affections means that he puts a greater value on it than on anything else. He delights in his glory above all things." "God's ultimate goal therefore is to preserve and display his infinite and awesome greatness and worth, that is, his glory."

The Concert of the Age
By Phillips Craig and Dean

The stars become as lasers
And all the worlds align
Horizon to horizon
A rainbow begins to rise

Sudden sounds like thunder
Come from everywhere
As the angel Michael
Kicks a countdown on the snare

Across the sea of faces
Shouts of praise begin to roll
As we see the silhouette
Of the King of heart and soul

At the concert of the age
The great I Am takes center stage
The generations stand amazed
At the concert of the age

Then a voice like a trumpet
Blows through me like the wind
Gabriel cries "Welcome home
We're ready to begin"

We know you heard Beethoven
And the king of rock-n-roll
But on behalf of the Father
We give you the King of heart and soul

We cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord
God Almighty"
with every note He plays

I could not agree with John Piper more, and yet I want to add my elaboration: This concept as we try to embrace it, is not limited to a position, feeling, or response from God; it is a continuous cycle, or law (as in the ‘Law of the Nature of God’) - to emanate glory. Defining it in human terms, **God’s glory equals God’s worth - and both are priceless beyond valuing.** Both exist as God does, as part of the equation; inseparable, and undeniable. Both are forever expanding as an emanation of God’s nature to do so, presumably without effort (just as you and I breathe– somewhat automatically, and essentially without effort). I have long suspected that the magnitude of this glory is realistically why we are as yet unable to see God with our human eyes, and why Moses had to turn his back and be sheltered by God’s hand, as God revealed Divinity to him personally.¹⁹⁴ **God’s glory is literally so great that it would kill us** (like a nuclear reaction) were we to get too close. After Moses talked to God he literally glowed (not just in the dark!) for an extended time afterward.

“The Holy Ones splendor covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise. His radiance is like the sunlight; He has rays flashing from His hand, and there is the hiding of His power.”¹⁹⁵

God’s glory is most often envisioned as light – most readily related to in the concept of the halo. This concept comes from several things, but the one I’m focusing on here is the revelation in Scripture that upon the return of God to dwell on earth in the New Jerusalem, there will be no need for sun or moon, for God and The Lamb [Christ] will be the source of light. This concept is also supported scientifically in the consistent report of people “heading into the light” in near-death experiences as they approach God. I love John Piper’s summation “God the Father and God the Son are the light in which Christians will live their eternity. This is the consummation of God’s goal in all of history – to display his glory for all to see and praise.”

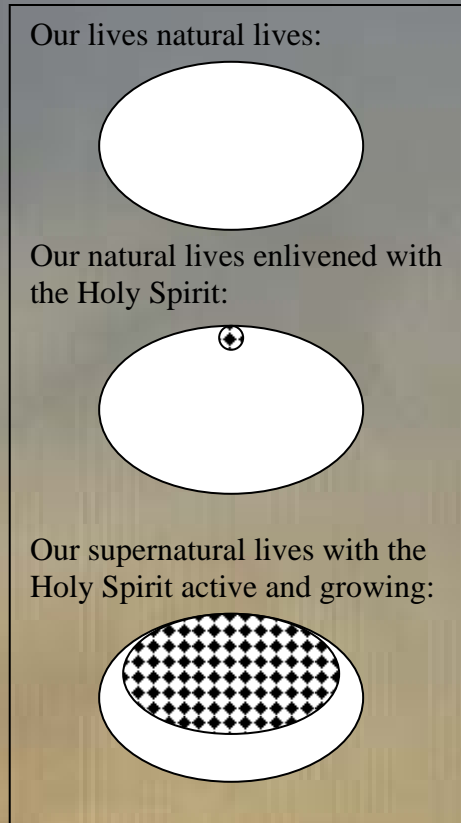
Does this hint at the paradox that God’s worth is: His highest value, but *not* something that She is in any way, shape, or form, consumed with; as our fallen ego is consumed with our worth? Yes, God has lovingly fought for correct understanding of His reputation throughout history, but She has more often let sin and misunderstandings lie (in every sense of the word!). Divinity knows that in the fullness of time ALL TRUTH will be manifest. Humanity chose to learn the hard way, so **for now, glory must be veiled, and we must keep our distance.** But in the future...*we will see God clearly!*

¹⁹⁴ Exodus 33:18-12 & 34:30

¹⁹⁵ Habakkuk 3:3-4

Sanctify Christ's Body ~Now we're into the hard news – a process called Sanctification. When Christ ascended to the Father, He left the powerful Holy Spirit inoculating those people who choose to acknowledge His Divinity - with a portion of that Divinity. Without the Holy Spirit our lives are just like an egg filled only with the egg-whites portion – unable to produce abundant, supernatural life. When Jesus Christ deposits the Holy Spirit within us, it is like a small dot of yolk that can produce abundant life gets deposited within us. **As we allow the Holy Spirit to grow within us, She is able to produce ever-increasing abundant life inside us.**

Saints are people who are functioning supernaturally. They've tuned into the Holy Spirit in thought and actions out of gratitude for the gift of salvation - now and forever. The Holy Spirit is hard at work in these lives: teaching them, stretching them, challenging them, ministering to them, showing them how to love, and helping them understand God's mysteries (eternal secrets and promises).



This process has its exhilarating moments, but often it seems to be a difficult and painful one. Perhaps the biggest challenge of the process is learning faith, and choosing to trust the Holy Spirit when we don't see the growth, or meaning, or reason for the season of pain and suffering. **We are learning to trust that what God says is written, not in the stone of the two tablets, but in rock etched in eternity that can be counted on to happen exactly as He says it will – FOREVER.** Regardless of our current observations, understandings, and feelings – our names are written in the “Book of Life”!

How serious is God about sanctifying His body? Listen to Him tell us through His prophet Zechariah:

“It will come about in all the land,” declares the Lord, “that two parts in it will be cut off and perish; but the third will be left in it. And I will bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are My people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Zechariah 13:8,9

Sanctify Me ~

What is it like to be refined through the fire, as silver and gold? I can share with you my unique and not-so unique process. I *was* a type-A motivated career-woman with a successful and challenging commercial interior design career for nine years until I got pregnant with our daughter. Just before she was born I was in a major car accident and lost my ability to function energetically in life. During the ten years of chronic unrelenting pain that followed, I was reduced to barely surviving with a healthy demanding infant, and little ability to do anything else. When I wasn't doing something that absolutely had to be done, I was resting and crying out to God. "Why me?" "What about all those productive things I used to be able to do?" "Don't you want me contributing to people's lives anymore?" God and I did battle on my deck and in my bed every moment that wasn't spent struggling just to stand. After ten years of doing everything I could find to do to heal, I was released from the relentless part of the chronic pain. My daughter was now settled in school and I was finding myself with some extra time and energy. It was then that I found the ancient practice of Spiritual Direction. I studied through Azusa Pacific University under Catherine & Doug Gregg, and Richard Foster, and got my graduate certificate in Spiritual Direction. I found it amusing that I had graduated from designing the interior of people's offices to helping design the interior of their spirits! What I also got during this education was personal spiritual healing. **I learned that God wants astronomically more for us and of us in the way of relationship with Him**, and that requires slowing us down and getting our attention off of this world and onto its maker. I was 'set-apart' and found God nearer-than-my-next-breath, in all the pain and struggle. Am I perfect? – heavens no; but am I better than I used to be? Am I more like Christ? Yes - I'm no longer so concerned about this world and its demands on me, and I'm very concerned about the people in it. That attitude-shift came from God and His sanctifying fire.

Build Christ's Body ~

The Holy Spirit is building "The Body of Christ" by integrating and weaving the lives of believers together, making them stronger and wiser and more capable. Much like boot camp builds a strong corps of soldiers into a solid military unit. I've heard many an old corpsman wistfully reminisce about his/or her particular unit and the exploits they accomplished together. This body the Holy Spirit is building is the "Body of Christ," the group of people that Christ is in love with and has pledged His eternal life and love to. They are God's gift to Jesus, a perfected group of humanity to join and support Him forever.¹⁹⁷ This is why Jesus took a vow of chastity – saving Himself for this *perfect union!*

¹⁹⁷ "Because we are members of His body." Ephesians 5:30

There are ninety-five metaphors for the Body of Christ throughout
Scripture!

A fun example of how the Holy Spirit weaves our lives together is the story of my friend and neighbor Amy. The story started when I was in High School and my brother Rob, had a pal – Jerry. They ended up going away to college together in Los Angeles. There, Rob introduced Jerry to a classmate – Amy, whom Jerry began dating and later married. Three years after that they moved to northern California and showed up in the house across the street from mine! Amy and I were playing cards at her house one day soon after, and talking about how much our parents also loved to play cards. “It must be in the genes” we laughed. A few minutes later, after more details about where our parents lived, we discovered that our parents knew each other and were playing bridge together regularly. “We’re destined to be friends,” we decided. We proceeded to walk together regularly and support each other as we laughed through our struggles and solved the worlds’ problems in our lively discussions. We were a genuine help and support to each other, almost overnight, because we had so many people in common -and most of all the Holy Spirit! We were there to strengthen each other through our trials and tribulations. This memory always reminds me of our need for other brothers and sisters-in-Christ in **our military unit to help us accomplish our mission – now; practicing for forever.**

Tribulation ~

Tribulation means “Struggle.” Like labor-pains, God is
struggling to birth His perfected world.

John, Jesus’ closest disciple is believed to have written Revelation. At the very beginning of his book he clearly communicates that “the tribulation” has already begun.¹⁹⁸ That was 2000 years ago! All this time God has been teaching and strengthening and multiplying Her people through these “End Days” because:

*“When Your judgments come upon the earth the people of the world
learn righteousness.”¹⁹⁹*

¹⁹⁸ “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus.” Revelation 1:9

¹⁹⁹ Isaiah 26:9

One interpretation is that these judgments come in the form of three sets of seven warnings, each with increasing severity:

- The first set of warnings are **the seals**. These are generally considered to be our times or “The Church Age.”
- The second set of judgments are **the trumpets**, which will be blown for the 144,000 “bond-servants of the Lord.” They are celibate, male, Messianic Jews who will witness to the remaining survivors, which may be as little as one-half of the world’s population.
- The third set of judgments are **the bowls of wrath**, probably the final “*Day of the Lord*.” This is the time of the Anti-Christ, False Prophet, and plagues, “such as has never been seen before or will be seen again.”²⁰⁰

The Church Age ~

It is generally understood that we are probably in a period called the Church age where the Holy Spirit is forming the Body of Christ by maturing believers and unifying them in Christ. Both in the Church and without, believers are growing in strength to stand for Christ and bring God’s agenda to earth. One interpretation called “Pre-millennial” is that this age will end with the rapture of Christians and the mysterious disappearance of believers in Christ as God begins to pour out His wrath on to the earth in one huge last-ditch effort to process His astronomical frustration, and to get the attention of those hard heads-and-hearts who have continued to reject His revelation of Himself as Jesus Christ.

The end of the “Church age” appears to be the beginning of the **Great Tribulation – a seven year period where God will pour out His wrath**, while giving humanity one last opportunity to embrace God and Truth. **The Anti-Christ** will attain power and persecute any believers, mercilessly martyring many of God’s faithful. **He will have the power to deceive all who do not have the protection of the Holy Spirit’s power to discern Truth.**

Two of everything! ~

This is the one place in this book where I will share my thoughts and diverge from generally accepted theology. This in my contribution to the discussion around the collected wisdom of the ages. Please consider it as such. **No one really knows how the final days of this earth as we know it will play out;** but there is great agreement that they are playing out, and Scriptures state it categorically.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Matthew 24:21

²⁰¹ “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away.”
Revelation 21:1.

After several years of studying the book of Revelation and all the connected Scriptures I have come to see things surprisingly differently than the collected wisdom I've heard over my lifetime. – **I see two or more of everything!**

- Christ's second coming
- Three sets of God's seven warnings to "GIVE ME YOUR ATTENTION",²⁰²
- Two wars (the Armageddon blood-bath,²⁰³ and Satan's final stand [which ends in fire]²⁰⁴)
- Two to three raptures (the believers rapture,²⁰⁵ and the 144,000 rapture,²⁰⁶ the final rapture²⁰⁷)
- Two judgments/resurrections (the millennial reign judgment/resurrection,²⁰⁸ and the White Throne judgment/resurrection²⁰⁹)
- Two Godly reigns (1 millennial [1,000 years];²¹⁰ and 1 eternal²¹¹)
- Two end results (the redeemed earth,²¹² or the Lake of Fire²¹³)

Now don't panic that I'm very far off of 'standard theology,' for **my deviation is mostly in the emphasis of the dual fulfillments**, and not really in interpretation of the events beyond their duplicate occurrences. See what you think of my train of thought:

The Rapture ~

The word "Rapture" is not in the Scriptures, **it is a term developed to describe many diverse passages** from Daniel to Revelation **which seem to describe a gathering, or disappearance, or collection of Christ's followers off of the earth.**

Jesus tells us about the Rapture in Matthew 24:36:

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left."

²⁰² Revelation 6:19

²⁰³ Revelation 14:20; 16:14-16,19;17:14

²⁰⁴ Revelation 20:7-9

²⁰⁵ Revelation 7:9

²⁰⁶ Revelation 14:1-4

²⁰⁷ Matthew 24:30

²⁰⁸ Revelation 20:4

²⁰⁹ Revelation 20:11-15

²¹⁰ Revelation 20:4

²¹¹ Revelation 22:5

²¹² Revelation 21:7

²¹³ Revelation 21:8

These passages coupled with Isaiah 57:1, “*The righteous are taken away to be spared from evil,*” seem to imply that God does not want His faithful to suffer beyond what we need to grow and achieve our maximum sanctification available on this earth, in preparation for eternity. **God clearly does not want His saints to suffer His wrath.**

The big theological debates over the rapture are really about *when* this puzzling disappearing act occurs, not *whether* it occurs. At some point, God will remove all His followers but 144,000 witnesses for Him. This is called the “Rapture.” What I find interesting is the possibility I see in the scriptures that there are at least two raptures – and possibly three! One for believers at the end of the Church age, (the seventh seal for those of you trying to follow God’s warnings); and possibly one of the 144,000 witnesses before the final bowls of God’s wrath are poured out onto the earth (at the seventh trumpet); finally there is the meeting of Christ in the clouds (at His second coming).

The rapture is profoundly portrayed in the excellent book series:
Left Behind by Tim LaHaye, and Jerry Jenkins,
and the movie portrayal with Kirk Cameron.

I see this rapturous hope in Scriptures in many places, primarily:

- “*Seek the Lord and perhaps you’ll be hidden in the day of anger.*” - Zephaniah 2:3
- “*The Lord has taken away His judgments against you.*” – Zephaniah 3:15
- “*but the Lord is a refuge for His people and a stronghold to the sons of Israel.* – Joel 3:16
- “*For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through Jesus Christ.* - 1 Thessalonians 5:9

I also see this hope in the omission of God’s righteous when Scriptures talk about God’s Judgment:

- Both Zephaniah 1 and Isaiah 13:11 only list sinners involved during the day of the Lord’s judgment.
- “*the day of judgment the heavens and earth are reserved for fire for destruction of ungodly men.*” - 2 Peter 3:7

~ Rapture of believers ~

I see the first rapture of believers suggested at the breaking of the seventh seal by the sealing and numbering of the 144,000 bond-servants from Israel.²¹⁴ **Why would God number only one set of believers if they're all still there?** Only a few verses later we hear about a multitude from every tribe, tongue and nation standing before the throne of God.²¹⁵ Revelation seven tells us that the 144,000 celibate Jewish males will be protected from the destructive trumpets which are about to blast while they warn the surviving humans that God's wrath is almost here.

~ Rapture of 144,000 Jewish bond-servants ~

At the seventh trumpet (probably only three-and-a-half years later) we find God preparing to pour out the bowls of His wrath, while the 144,000 are standing with Jesus collected on Mount Zion.²¹⁶ Whether they too were "raptured" and taken out of this world or just told to report there and are physically standing in the safety of Christ's presence is not the point. The point is that they are now out of the fury of the last three-and-a-half years of God's crushing wrath.

It appears that they do leave behind converts whom are probably somewhat protected too, but must endure the bowls (or plagues) being poured around them and must now refuse the mark of the Beast at all costs.²¹⁷ **After these final three-and-a-half years of unmitigated hell, they will have the hope of Glory, and the promise of Christ's physical return to begin His millennial reign (the second coming), of which they will be a part - to hold out for.**

~ The Second Coming Rapture ~

Upon Christ's return all remaining believers will meet Him in the air. (I wonder if that won't be the final converts of the 144,000 who persevered and did not take the mark of the beast?)²¹⁸

The Final days of the Tribulation ~

After the "Church age" comes the bad news - **The "Great Tribulation," a seven year period of God pouring out His wrath, which culminates in a war between God and Satan.** The order of the final events of this world as we know it is hotly debated. The

²¹⁴ Revelation 7:4

²¹⁵ Revelation 7:9,14

²¹⁶ Revelation 14:1; and Daniel 12:1

²¹⁷ "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." Revelation 14:9,10

²¹⁸ "Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we shall always be with the Lord." 1 Thessalonians 4:17

“Revelation,” “Apocalypse” [or revealing], of the end times is purposely obscured in Scriptures. But **the sequence is somewhat inconsequential to the purpose - that of Christ reclaiming His birthright: humanity and this earth, perfected and rid of evil.**

It is generally agreed upon that this seven-year “Great Tribulation” is when God will process out His millennia of pent-up emotions of anger and vengeance. **This great tribulation is broken up into two, three-and-a-half year periods.**

~ *The Trumpets* ~

The first possibly being the trumpets where God will blow out His warnings upon those who, despite every opportunity possible, still choose to reject Divinity. It is pretty clear from Scripture that God’s people are gone by this point, and Divinity in His astounding mercy, will give pagans (or enemies of God), a group of **144,000 sealed “servants of our God;”** (12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel) who have understood that their Messiah was Yeshua, and are motivated to witness to His sacrifice.²¹⁹ They will be protected from God’s ensuing catastrophes by a mark from God, yet Satan will be wreaking havoc too and many may be martyred. They will witness to the remaining pagans and give them a final opportunity to submit to Divinity as a last-ditch-effort; even while God is beginning to work out His wrath, and end Satan’s reign on this celestial ball. **The good news in this bad news is that God is faithful and watching over and caring for His servants throughout the ordeal.**

~ *The Bowls or the Day of the Lord* ~

The second three-and-a-half year period of the Great Tribulation appears to be the final processing of God’s wrath in plagues. **God has planned 7 bowls of wrath that seem to be His final “Day of the Lord.”**²²⁰ The Eleven plagues God meted out on the Egyptians in the Exodus²²¹ will look like child’s-play by comparison. Jesus tells us in Matthew 24:21

“There will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”

It’ll be that bad. In Matthew 24:29 Jesus warns us about the Tribulation:

“The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn.”

²¹⁹ Revelation 7:4

²²⁰ Many scholars see this term as a time of God’s judgments on humanity and see several possible fulfillments in the past; and yet most agree that there is a final fulfillment at the end of this time.

²²¹ See Chapter 12, The Progressive Revelation for more information on the Exodus

Armageddon ~

At the end of this outpouring of God's wrath, God will dry up the Euphrates river inviting the Anti-Christ's collected armies across onto the plain of Har-Magedon in Israel. This is where the battle of Armageddon as we hear it today will take place. **This will be the war to end all wars.** This could result in Jerusalem being attacked and half of its population being pillaged and exiled.²²² Then Christ will return as the military conquering hero Israel has been awaiting for millennia. He will arrive "with a sharp sword coming from His mouth."²²³ Satan will be bound and thrown into a pit. The Beast [Anti-Christ] and False Prophet will be thrown into the Lake of Fire,²²⁴ and a blood bath will follow as "*the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.*"²²⁵

Christ's Second Coming ~

Christ will arrive riding a white horse with the armies of heaven following Him dressed in white. (Not exactly battle-attire! It appears they don't fight and are dressed as conquerors.) Jesus continued His prophecy in Matthew 24:30-31 telling us about His coming:



"They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

This is the third rapture scenario possibility that I see in Scriptures. Are the previous guesses wrong? Or is Christ collecting the converts who were able to stand until the end to observe the final vindication and capture of the earth? Either way, **Christ's great glory will finally be unveiled, and He will be marveled at by all who have believed.**²²⁶

²²² Zechariah 14:1-3

²²³ Revelation 19:15

²²⁴ Revelation 19:20

²²⁵ Revelation 19:21; "And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles." Revelation 14:20

²²⁶ 2 Thessalonians 1:10

Christ's Millennial Rule on Earth ~

Christ will be the supreme victor, and He will proceed to rule the nations for 1,000 years with an iron rod.²²⁷ No longer will justice be delayed as it has been previously. No more Mr. Nice Guy? I don't think that is what is being said; the example Zechariah gives in 14:7 is "*And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them.*" Times have changed; it is the time of immediate justice for ignoring the Lord of All who is now physically present.

The first resurrection will be of the believers who will arise to reign here on earth with Christ for this millennial rule.²²⁸ During this 1,000 years Satan will be banished from the earth. At the end, he will briefly be released to stir up trouble again and make his last stand. At which time God will cull the last of those who chose to reject God even after experiencing His earthly physical reign.

Satan's Last Stand ~

Satan will once again deceive the nations and set up a war against Christ.²²⁹ This final war will take place with armies surrounding Jerusalem and Judea. **Those who in the clarity of Jesus' reign chose to believe Satan's lies will be the last of the evil in humanity to be weeded out.** They will rally around Satan as an army encircling Jerusalem. In the end God will rain down fire from heaven and devour the assembled armies of the great deceiver. God will win, and the earth will be destroyed by fire and recreated as God's chosen dwelling place.

Judge Humanity ~

Next, is *Judgment!* Jesus told us in John 5:22 "*The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son,*" WHY? He tells us that too – "*That all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.*"

While the earth is being recreated **all living creatures will be judged at the "White Throne Judgment."** Here the rejecters of God will be sent to the Lake of Fire to join Satan, The Beast, and the False Prophet; while all lovers of God will be given an eternal destiny in this heaven-now-on/or united-with, earth.

At this final Judgment, Jesus will judge our actions because they reflect our hearts. When Jesus was speaking to the Jews that were persecuting Him, He said "*These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*"²³⁰ Speaking to the same

²²⁷ Revelation 15:19

²²⁸ Revelation 20:4-6

²²⁹ Revelation 20:7-10;

²³⁰ Matthew 15:8

group, Jesus said He sees the heart and is ultimately concerned with the heart. *“You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.”*²³¹ Every single knee will bow in worship to this God either out of joyful reverence, or terrified obedience.²³² Jesus Christ will judge the living and the dead (every single living soul who has ever breathed this air) to determine who will get to live with Him in that perfect city (The New Jerusalem) of relationship, beauty, and joy for all of eternity. Jesus tells us this in Matthew 25:31:

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory, All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”

Those who know God will joyfully run into His eternal arms; and those who rejected God will race pell-mell to their eternal destination in the Lake of Fire totally cut off from the God who terrifies them by their habit to choose fear. **Christ may or may not have to say much during the judgment!**

The Pearly Gates ~

One of the most precious stories I’ve ever heard has hugely helped me to comprehend the profound importance of our relationship to God in this judgment. It is the story of the line of three people who are waiting at the pearly gates. The first man in line approaches the person at the entrance and asks to be let in. He expresses his desire to see the streets of gold he heard so much about. He tells of all his services to humanity including yearly donations to food banks and countless other non-profit organizations, passing on all his used clothing to the poor, and even making a missions trip to help drill for clean water in Africa. The man at the gate asks the first man in line to step to the side for a few minutes while his case is being reviewed. Next in line is a woman who approaches the gate and says “I’ve accepted Jesus Christ, and I’m told that will get me in here.” Again the man at the gate asks her to join the previous man off to the side while her case is being reviewed. Finally, the third person walks up to the gate and immediately falls to one knee. Bowing his head, with cracking voice, he squeaks out **“My Lord and My God”** amid tears of joy. The Man [upstairs] reaches out for the shaking hand and raises His precious soul to his feet saying “Welcome into the home I have prepared for you,” as they walk together into Heaven. This lovely story so eloquently shows that **when you truly have a relationship with someone, you will recognize them when you see them, and they will recognize you.**

²³¹ Luke 16:15

²³² “‘As Surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God’” Romans 14:11 quoting Isaiah 45:23,24 “...All who have raged against Him will come to Him and be put to shame.”

Awarded earned Treasure in Heaven ~

After admittance into Heaven, **the redeemed will be rewarded with the treasure they have earned through their works on earth.**²³³ This is a point of a lot of confusion for a lot of people, so let me be very clear. Salvation and admittance to Heaven to dwell eternally with God is a gift given by Jesus Christ to those who chose to acknowledge His Divinity and follow His example of living in the Holy Spirits' power. It cannot be earned.²³⁴

Treasure in Heaven; however, is being earned constantly by believers who are obeying God out of an attitude of gratitude and being His hands and feet on this earth by consciously letting the Holy Spirit bless others through their loving actions.²³⁵

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

- Luke 12:32-34

It is probable that every silent prayer that you pray for a passing ambulance or sick friend, every unseen and unknown act of generosity is amply rewarded for all of eternity with treasure in Heaven.

*“For God is not unjust; He will not forget your work and the love you have shown Him as you have helped His people and continue to help them.”*²³⁶

Rebecca Springer had a vision/experience of heaven²³⁷ where she described our treasure in heaven (in only part) as gifts given by those who we have blest who have gone before us into heaven. She described past students as having sealed live roses into the floors and walls in transparent beauty to bless her eternal home; and others as preparing divine songs to sing in our honor at our arrival. Her conclusion – “If there is one great central truth that [my experience] teaches, it is that human friendships made in this world are enduring in the second.” **Profound acts of love await us, freely given in gratitude for our smallest acts of love to others on earth.** (Remember that those who have gone before us are probably no longer constrained by time, and so may have all the time in the world to prepare for loved ones arrivals!)

²³³ “For their deeds will follow them.” Revelation 14:13b

²³⁴ “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith –and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8,9

²³⁵ *“Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in Heaven that will not be exhausted.”* Luke 12:33.

²³⁶ Hebrews 6:10

²³⁷ *Within the Gates*, Published by Christ for the Nations

"In His redemptive activity, God does not destroy the works of His hands, but cleanses them from sin and perfects them, so that they may finally reach the goal for which He created them. Applied to the problem at hand, this principle means that the new earth to which we look forward will not be totally different from the present one, but will be a renewal and glorification of the earth on which we now live."

- Anthony Hoekema

The New Earth and New Jerusalem ~

Heaven will come to Earth. All of God's creation (all the cosmos) will be renewed and united in Him. God will restore His physical presence on the earth with the exquisite New Jerusalem. All who chose redemption in life, will enter into an eternal love relationship with God that can only be hinted at in the most "divine" moments in the best marriage here on earth. We will be one with God, ("whose presence is fullness of joy and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore"²³⁸) in heart, mind, body, and soul;

"I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. For they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear."²³⁹

²³⁸ Psalm 16:11

²³⁹ Isaiah 65:17-25



*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” “It shown with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the name of the twelve tribes of Israel.” The city is nearly 1,400 miles long, and wide and tall, laid out like a square. The surrounding walls are about 200 feet thick, made of jasper, and the city is of pure gold. “The foundations of the city walls are decorated with every kind of precious stone. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.” The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light.” “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. **There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.**”²⁴⁰*

*“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. **No longer will there be any curse.**”*

“To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.” “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.”²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Revelations 21

²⁴¹ Revelation 22:1-3,14

*“Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. **The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.**”²⁴²*

*“On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. **The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.**”²⁴³*

*“For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. **And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.**”²⁴⁴*

“In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree.”²⁴⁵

*“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. **You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy;** they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian’s defeat, **You have shattered the yoke that burdens them,** the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.** He will reign on David’s throne and over His kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.”²⁴⁶*

*“The ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will overtake them, and **sorrow and sighing will flee away.**”²⁴⁷*

“And they will hammer their sword into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not life up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war.”²⁴⁸

“Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper’s den. They will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”²⁴⁹

²⁴² Zechariah 8:5

²⁴³ Zechariah 14:8,9

²⁴⁴ Malachi 4:2

²⁴⁵ Zechariah 3:10

²⁴⁶ Isaiah 9:2-7

²⁴⁷ Isaiah 51:11

²⁴⁸ Isaiah 2:4

²⁴⁹ Isaiah 11:7-9. Also note the animals in Heaven!!

“Come!” whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”²⁵⁰

As you can see, “And they lived happily ever” after will fall so far short of the truth that we will laugh a hearty laugh in pure joy – for all of eternity.

What’s the best, most enjoyable, happiest thing you can imagine?
– That’s a shadow of your potential eternity with God.

Eternity with God ~

After Christ judges us and the redeemed are separated from the condemned, **the redeemed will all worship God²⁵¹ together for all eternity in constant unbroken relationship.**

We will again get to start at the beginning God intended with Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden. This time we will tend the earth well, and each live in our own home with our own vineyard, and no tear will fall.²⁵² Perhaps many who have matured especially faithfully and are especially wise and talented will be given their own planet to run? Some who are especially pure in heart will serve God in His Temple forever. There will be singing and dancing; no tears, only joy. There will be endless feasts and food won’t make you fat! As we observe Jesus’ life after His resurrection we realize that He picked up with people right where He left off. **His relationships, memories, and experiences continued on only with enhanced characteristics.**

The Scriptures are unclear as to whether we will come and go from the New Jerusalem or stay there constantly. I surmise that it’s a safe bet that there will be lots of choices and we may do all of them at one point or another as we wile away eternity. We’ll surely eat the unimaginably delicious fruit from the Tree of Life; and revel in the beauty that surrounds us, standing on streets of pure gold, like transparent glass, with all the Saints we’ve ever wanted to meet; and singing praises to God in crystalline voices never heard here on earth; in front of a throne of beauty beyond description, bearing a God that melts us with joy; **all in our new home of peace and comfort and joy and beauty**, which words, and imaginations, and hopes, fail to approach - in the New Jerusalem.

Then, we may explore the universe with Jesus, and see things our current brains can’t even comprehend. Then it might be snow skiing down a 50,000 foot peak on some glacial planet with Saint Paul and our Dad, and then relaxing on a beach of unimaginable beauty with the Holy Spirit and our best friend for a millennia or two. I’m sure several of

²⁵⁰ Revelation 22:17

²⁵¹ “Has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father.” Revelation 1:6

²⁵² “And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain’ the first things have passed away.” Revelation 21:4

my friends will have ‘think and you’ll be there’ – races with Einstein across the universe! **We mustn’t forget the ‘Welcome Home’ party** in the banquet hall to end all banquet halls; with every loved one you’ve never known, and every celebrity and Saint with which you’ve always wanted to rub shoulders; and of course the host –Christ Jesus! We are assured that somehow you won’t miss anyone who isn’t there.²⁵³

We’ll be ready to accomplish the tasks that God has planned for us to do with Him – perhaps run a distant planet, or help create yet another life-form that’s based on some element we don’t even know about (maybe you’ll create that!). We’ll teach each other things, and share our stories at eonic bonfires, we’ll relate and love each other for all eternity in unfathomable ways and to limitless depths. There will never be a tear, never a bored sigh, never a sad thought, never a lonely wish, and never a limitation. I, who am a klutz-extra-ordinare in gravity, will finally get to dance like an angel! I’ll be singing to you like a rock-star, and playing concert piano! In a millennia or two, I’ll even let you take me zip-lining between planets!!

Jesus’ prayer for believers to be One even as He and God are One²⁵⁴ will be realized beyond our wildest imaginings. Humanity was designed for power and authority, and to have grateful hearts full of praises to God (perhaps in large part, for getting us through this lesson in evil!). **We will no longer just be in God’s heart; we will spend eternity in Jesus’ arms, dancing and creating, and ruling, and sharing.**

Restore All Creation? ~

Prolific theologian, and martyred early Church Father - Origen of Alexandria [c.185-254 A.D.] **extrapolated that the grace of God was so great that eventually all creation would be redeemed** and even Satan and his angels would one day be led back to God. This possibility is supported in Scripture by verses such as Romans 11:32 *“That He might show mercy to all...”* and 2 Peter 3:9 *“Wishing all to come to repentance.”*

It is obvious that the overwhelming (or initial) evidence is for condemnation... but we cannot ignore hints such as Isaiah 46:22:

“Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.”

Contemporary theologian Anthony Hoekema adds “We need a clear understanding of the doctrine of the new earth, therefore, in order to see God’s redemptive program in cosmic dimensions. We need to realize that God will not be satisfied until the entire universe has been purged of all the results of man’s fall.”

²⁵³ “For the past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes.” *“The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”* Isaiah 65:16,17

²⁵⁴ John 17:20-26

For Further Study

- Kay Arthur's Precepts studies get you to review the Scriptures and decide for yourself what you believe. They are like a college course in theology you can take alone, at your own pace, or with a group. Contact Precepts Ministries at: www.precept.org, or (800) 763-8280.

Thoughts while reading this Chapter ~

Date:

Activities ~

God is doing all this – right now! He's working on this planet, and She's working in you!

It's not your job to fix your children, your spouse, or even yourself. **It is your job to learn to love God and yourself** – so start now:

1. **Just relax and Be – You.** Rest in the fact that God has all this chaos under control. Forget the “to do” list for awhile, and take a walk in a beautiful park, or sit and listen to your favorite music. Waste some time on GOD and YOU.
2. **Celebrate the fact that God loves YOU!** Have a glass of champagne and toast God. Dance to a song you love with the Lord. Shout out your love to the lover-of-your-soul.
3. **Praise God for all He is doing in your life.** Write a list of all the gifts you'd like the Lord to give you, and ask for them. Picture them and picture God in that picture; then praise Her for all the things she will do in you to create those (or even better!) realities for you as you walk together in this reality.

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

Chapter 11

What are humans destined to do?

“Took them all we did. The drink would not satisfy. Food turned to ash in our mouths, and all the pleasurable company in the world could not slake our lust. We were cursed men; compelled by greed and now we are consumed by it.”

-line from the movie Pirates of the Caribbean, Curse of the Black Pearl.

We be Pirates! ~

~ An Example ~

~ Knowing Evil ~

~ The World is Lost ~

We Choose ~

We have Dominion ~

We are Eternal ~

Respond to God ~

Death is inevitable ~

We are Embodied Spirits ~

Stand in the power of the Lord ~

We can be royal! ~

~ Viceroy of Creation ~

~ Join with God ~

~ Judges ~

~ Priests unto God ~

We have Dominion ~

We be Pirates!

We are pirates in this world cursed to live for ourselves and “take everything we can, and give nothing back,” as pirate Jack Sparrow from *Pirates of the Caribbean* eloquently explained. Ian MacKaye made the same observation about American business: “American business at this point is really about developing an idea, making it profitable, selling it while it's profitable and then getting out or diversifying. It's just about sucking everything up.”²⁵⁵ Absorbing all we can in life just sucks the life out of us. We are fallen people living in a fallen world.

²⁵⁵ from [Salon.com People / Ian MacKaye](#)

~ An Example ~

Author Kay Arthur explains this catch-22 beautifully in her testimony in her book *Lord, I want to know you*:

“For some time I had realized my lifestyle was unacceptable to God. I knew that if I were to stand before Him, I would hear Him justly say, “Depart from Me.”

My sins were obvious. Even I could not excuse them. For the first time in my life, I had seen my poverty of spirit. Although I had tried, I could not quit sinning. Nothing good dwelt in my flesh, and I knew it (Romans 7:18-20).

I had made resolution after resolution to be good, to stop being immoral. Yet I gave in again and again. I finally concluded that there was no way I could ever be set free. I just wasn't strong enough spiritually to change. I knew I was sick – sick of soul. As a registered nurse I was an active participant in the healing of many bodies, but I didn't know of any doctor who could heal my soul. And heal myself? Well, it was impossible. I had tried.

After my divorce, I lived with gnawing guilt until finally my sin became an acceptable way of life. After all, how could my friends condemn me? We all lived the same way!

Some days I even thought, *If I could just be born again. . .have another start at life.* Then I could dream of what-could-have-been-if-only! I didn't know the term *born again* was in the Bible. Although my family was very religious, the Bible had not been a central part of my life. For the most part I didn't know what God's Word said. By this time I had lived for twenty-nine years, and no one had ever asked me when or even if I had been saved. I had never heard an invitation for salvation, nor had I realized that it isn't church membership or being good that makes us Christians.

Heaven and hell? Hell was what you made of your life here on earth. Heaven? Well, if my good deeds outweighed my bad, surely I would make it. At least that was what I was told! To be honest, I never felt that nice people were in any danger. No one around me had a burden for the lost. I never heard a sermon on the need to witness.

When the morning of July 16, 1963, dawned, I couldn't face going to work. I called the doctor I worked for and told him I was sick, that I would see him Monday. I hung up the phone and got Tommy off to day camp. At loose ends, I decided I'd bake a cake and then take the boys camping.

Suddenly, in the middle of the kitchen, I looked at Mark, my younger son. He was so hungry for love! He clung to my apron. I choked out the words, “mommy's got to be alone for a few minutes.” With that I rushed upstairs to my bedroom and threw myself on the floor beside my bed. “O God, I don't care what you do to me. I don't care if I never see another man as long as I live. I don't care if you paralyze me from the neck down. I don't care what you do to my two boys. Will You just give me peace?”

There beside my bed I found that there is a balm in Gilead that heals the sin-sick soul. There is a Great Physician. His name is Jehovah-rapha. But I would first come to know Him as the Lord Jesus

Christ, the Prince of Peace. On that day in my bedroom He applied the cross to the bitter waters of my life, and I was healed of sin's mortal wounds (Galatians 3:13-14; 1 Peter 2:24). I had turned to Jehovah-rapha, returning to the Shepherd and Guardian of my soul (1 Peter 2:25).

Only one Physician can heal the ills of our souls. Why look elsewhere? Why not trust in the name of our Lord and rely on God (Isaiah 50:10)? Where do you run when you need healing? Jehovah-rapha is there – waiting with outstretched arms, Calvary arms.”

Perhaps the premiere Christian hymn

~ **Amazing Grace** ~

written by a converted slave-trader - John Newton

Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found; was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed.

The Lord has promised good to me; His word my hope secures.
He will be shield and portion be as long as life endures.

Thro' many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come.
'Tis grace hath bro't me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun.

~*Knowing Evil*~

Without God, we are hopelessly lost and alone, and in pain. With God we have hope in the loss, isolation, and pain! Either way this life is full of struggle, frustration, and challenge. According to Scripture, this is not a bad thing it just hurts –very, very badly.²⁵⁶ God allows this system. He uses it to get our attention, and to perfect our character. He designed creation perfectly; but Adam and Eve rejected the plan-A design. God is infinitely creative, and flexible enough to make plan-B work. Plan-B honors our first parent's choice to “know evil”. We now must live in this body which is spiritually dead, and function in this spiritually dead world and learn: “*know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God.*”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ “Count it all joy when you suffer various trials for the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” James 1:2-3

²⁵⁷ Jeremiah 2:19c.

~ The World is Lost ~

During His physical lifetime on earth, Jesus Christ told us “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.*”²⁵⁸ **Jesus Christ came and proclaimed a radical new world view: ‘This world is lost, and I Am the way out.** This world is backwards, and those who are poor, humble, and in pain are blest for they see the TRUTH of this REALITY.’

This is the message of the Beatitudes (or Be-attitudes):

- *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- *Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*
- *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*
- *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*
- *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*
- *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*
- *Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called sons of God.*
- *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for there is the kingdom of heaven.*

~ Matthew 5:2-10

This was Jesus’ radical message which ultimately got Him crucified. It challenged the social structure of “the Year of our Lord” A.D 25 Israel to the core. The religious and political leaders wanted to think they were rich and wise and powerful. (Sound any different from us today?) **Jesus came saying you are poor and blind and deceived.** It is difficult (as Kay Arthur so honestly shared) to believe what Jesus Christ says – we are lost, blind, weak, and needy – we be Pirates! As Captain Jack Sparrow said to Will Turner at a crucial moment in Pirates of the Caribbean, “Your father was a pirate, and some day you’re going to have to square with that!” At the beginning of this chapter, author Kay Arthur shared her experience in squaring with that reality. We all have to square with that reality sooner or later and increasingly deeply at various points in our lives. Alcoholics Anonymous calls this finding the bottom of ourselves. This is the beginning of wisdom. **As we comprehend Reality more and more clearly, we see our need for God more and more clearly.** This is God’s desire – that we see our need for relationship with the Almighty and so pursue it. This is why bad things happen to good people. The sooner we see our impoverished state, the better. The sooner we begin to incorporate Divine provision, protection, guidance, and relationship, the sooner we minimize pain, and begin to experience “Abundant Life,” “Enabled Life,” “Divine Life,” and stop existing - being dead men walking, like the pirates in Pirates of the Caribbean.

²⁵⁸ Luke 4:18.

We Choose ~

Each and every day we are faced with a myriad of choices we are required to make and each one can be boiled down to a binary (yes or no) question: “am I going to make the choice which brings me closer to God or the choice which pushes me farther away from Divinity?” **Each endless choice will take us a bit further - in a direction toward God into Heaven, or away from God into Hell – starting NOW!** We can bring heaven onto this earth by choosing to bring God into this world through our lives and our actions – moment by moment - now; or we can chose to writhe in hell (separated from God – by our choice), here and now. **Christianity and Judaism and even Islam are not really about our ultimate destiny nearly so much as they are about our current reality choice.**

If we follow the scriptural directive to think on the things that are lovely, good, of good repute, or positive²⁵⁹ we will end up walking with God and more and more so, allowing Divinity to incorporate into our lives. Less and less, we will be listening to our fallen, negative, distorted, antiquated natural self. But as Kay Arthur so eloquently shared; we can’t do it alone –thus our need for a savior: Jesus Christ and the power to choose redemption – in the Holy Spirit.

Our choices are never clear and easy:

Question	"Yes" answer	"No" answer
Should I get out of bed now?	I can accomplish more	I can pray or meditate
Should I give an extra tythe?	I will have less money and have to trust for groceries	I will be living on my income
Should I change jobs?	will allow me to spend time with my family	will give me less money to invest
Should I read the scriptures?	will give me God's perspective	will give me more time to accomplish things
Should I go to college?	will it teach me the ways of God or man?	will it allow me to follow God's calling to a mission?
Should I go on a mission trip?	I will impress the church	I will have to trust God for a job
Should I go on a mission trip?	I will be way out of my comfort zone	I won't have to feel/see others needs

I hope that you see from this table that depending on what aspect of your soul God is working on, determines which answer will bring you closer to God. **These simple examples show why we can’t tell other people what to do.** Only God can lead them to the healthiest decisions for them, and the ones that will bring them into a deeper relationship with God.

²⁵⁹ Philippians 4:8

We are Eternal ~

We are made in God's *eternal* image. **One characteristic of divinity is not-ceasing to exist.** We will exist in God's image forever. All humans have that touch of Divinity in us which will either shine with increasing brilliance now and forever with God or will fade in significance now and forever, separated from its source.

Being made in God's image, **we are spiritual beings. It is our earthly challenge to develop this un-earthly capability.** Aristotle [384-322 B.C.] wrote:

"We must not listen to those who advise us 'being men to think human thoughts, and being mortal to think mortal thoughts,' but must put on immortality as much as is possible and strain every nerve to live according to that best part of us, which, being small in bulk, yet much more in its power and honour surpasses all else"²⁶⁰

Yet honestly, we each know deep down, that we cannot live this supernaturally enabled life in our own strength. **We require our immortality to be quickened, our divinity to be enabled by God** so that we can begin to reflect our true design with ever-increasing consistency and love in all situations.

Respond to God ~

God made us in His image as an expansion of Deity. We are to enter into that relationship and build upon it as we do any relationship we value here on this earth. Bill Vaswig said it best in his book *At Your Word, Lord – How prayer releases the power of God in your life*:

"I have come to understand prayer mainly as a response to God, although that response is God induced. We pray because it is our nature to respond to God. **We are response-able. That may be the essence of the "image of God" in us.** The more we know of God, the more response-able we become."

We have Dominion ~

All of us have a realm of influence – people who are affected by our choices and decisions - family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors. **We were created by God to count for good in the lives of those we touch.** We are practicing being divine.

One of the stories of this dominion that touches me most deeply is one that came across the internet. Apparently a fisherman west of San Francisco saw a whale so tied up in

²⁶⁰ Aristotle, Eth. Nic. Quoted from *The Abolition of Man*, by C.S. Lewis

ropes and crab cages and lines of junk that she could barely stay afloat and breathe. He called in for help and an hour later a boat arrived with people who could help the whale. Upon surveying the situation they realized that the only way to help the whale would be to put divers into the water to cut each line constraining her by hand - A proposition that could be life-threatening to the divers if the whale were to decide to thrash and whack the divers with her tail. They decided that they were willing to take the risk and four divers plopped into the pacific to see if the whale would let them cut the lines. She remained quiet as they painstakingly cut her free - one line at a time. Upon her freedom they said that she swam in joyful circles a little way off. But before leaving she returned and gently nudged each diver with a touch of thanks. **This is what we have been created for - making an un-demanded, permanent difference in the life of another who can not necessarily pay us back.** Across religious, cultural, even species lines - we are here to bless and not to curse; to make a difference on this small planet with whose care we are entrusted.

*"Eternity is not the hereafter . . . this is it.
If you don't get it here, you won't get it
anywhere."*

~ Joseph Campbell

Death is inevitable ~

Because Eve & Adam chose the fruit that brought death, **we are all destined to die once.** Our current physical bodies living on this fallen planet are being used up and will give out. As we age, we all experience increasingly deeply that death is a 100% certainty. We all will die. **What's at issue for many is whether we are eternal beings and that inevitable death matters.** If we simply cease to exist perhaps it doesn't matter. If we get to try again, and again, and again until we get it right, it is less crucial. But if as the three major world religions hold; this is the only opportunity we have to choose to develop a relationship with God – it matters! The Scriptures say unequivocally Yes, YES, **YES!** – we are being made in God's eternal image; and our destiny matters - eternally. **Now,** is our time to chose Divinity and make this life of struggle more and more bearable, resulting in an eternity with the God we've chosen to draw increasingly near to. Or to chose to reject God's proposal and turn from the Divine offer of assistance and do it our (fallen) way resulting in eternal death and separation from the God we chose to reject. Eternal burning in the Lake of Fire is the promised result. God warns us in the last book of the Bible – Revelation; that if we won't chose relationship with the Lord, because we are loved, please chose it to avoid eternal destruction. God warns that the Almighty will validate our choice to reject Him and separate all Love from us, leaving us to writhe in the Lake of Fire with Satan (the great deceiver) eternally.²⁶¹ **This life is the closest to Hell the redeemed will ever be, and the closest to Heaven the unredeemed will ever be.**

²⁶¹ "If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."
Revelation 20:15.

We are Embodied Spirits ~

We are eternally physical beings. This is a less emphasized truth in Christianity, but it is a revealed Truth in the Bible. As the Westminster Confession says, “All the dead shall be raised up, with the self-same bodies, and none other.” They got this from Scripture. 1 Corinthians 15:49 tells us “*And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.*” What did the ‘man from heaven’ say after His resurrection? “*Touch me and see; a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.*”²⁶²

After our first death, or “graduation to glory”, our redeemed spirit’s temporarily “rest”²⁶³ with God in an un-embodied or temporarily-bodied state. Some theologians call this “intermediate heaven.” Unredeemed souls wait in one of several different places including the sea, death, and Hades/Hell. (See Chapter 15, Why does this Matter? under ~Dante~ for more information.)

The reality of our temporarily un-embodied state is born out in the many reports of people who have had experiences with “ghosts,” and hauntings. Evidently our spirits are not forced to move on and some chose to stay close to what was home. There are legions of stories of ghosts haunting old “haunts”! They tend to have had violent deaths. There is a longstanding Catholic tradition which believes that the redeemed can pray over these precious souls and help them find peace and God’s forgiveness. I have read credible stories of just such spiritual assistance being rendered and witnessed!²⁶⁴

Not until Christ’s return will we receive a perfected physical body.²⁶⁵ **In God’s time we will be physically perfect as well as spiritually complete.** Possibly no longer bound by time or space as we are now; as is suggested by Jesus’ post resurrection appearance inside a locked room.²⁶⁶ We may think and be there, popping in and out where-ever we wish; and yet able to eat, drink, and be touched just as Jesus was after His resurrection.²⁶⁷ We will reign with our Lord and Savior in a perfected physical universe eternally. **This reigning with God was our original purpose,** and we will finally get back to this intended beginning; after this learning and growing period of suffering and experiencing evil on this fallen planet - if we chose to know God.

²⁶² Luke 24:39

²⁶³ “Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.” Isaiah 57:2

²⁶⁴ I was most impressed with Dr. Kenneth Mc All’s testimony in *Healing the Family Tree*

²⁶⁵ “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the imperishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” 1 Corinthians 15:52,53.

²⁶⁶ “When the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” John 20:19

²⁶⁷ “The Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body.” Philippians 3:20-21.

As embodied spirits, **we are told clearly that Christ will give His follower’s perfected bodies** that they will occupy for the rest of eternity.²⁶⁸ It is scary then to conclude that the damned could be given imperfect bodies in which they will *feel* the burning of the lake of fire, and the unspecified torments forever. If we chose to reject God; as physical beings we will experience eternal physical death and destruction, feeling pain and torture, while we writhe in the Lake of Fire – FOREVER. This is essentially the testimony of Bill Weise in his book *23 Minutes in Hell* which I talk about in Chapter 15.

<i>Phases of Human Life</i>				
<i>Phase</i>	<i>Beginning</i>	<i>Chosen Experience</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>State</i>
1.	<i>Conception</i>	<i>Fallen Existence, or Redeemed Abundant Life</i>	<i>Earth</i>	<i>Imperfect Physical Bodies</i>
2.	<i>Death</i>	<i>Suffering, or Rest</i>	<i>Sea, Death, Hell, or Heaven</i>	<i>Temporarily Disembodied (yet recognizable)</i>
3.	<i>Resurrection</i>	<i>Judgment</i>	<i>God’s Throne</i>	
4.	<i>Judgment</i>	<i>Eternal Agony, or Eternal Life</i>	<i>Lake of Fire, or New Combined Heaven & Earth</i>	<i>Destroyed Physical Bodies, or Perfected Physical Bodies</i>

Stand in the power of the Lord ~

All of us know too well, that on our own we fail and fall; but in the strength of the Almighty, we can stand, and succeed, and become a blessing. As we ask, and practice, and learn to let the Holy Spirit function in us and through us; we become more and more enabled. We fulfill more and more of our potential, not just to be “like God” but to have God inside us – permeating us, and bursting out into the world! **God knows what to do. God knows how to do it. If we will just let God be God in us, we get to participate in success!** Eventually, we look really smart, and really together, and really visionary – we look increasingly-so like Jesus! So “Just do it!” and “Hang in there baby!” while you learn to let God be in control.

²⁶⁸ “When the perishable has been clothed with imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true; “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” 1 Corinthians 15:54

We can be Royal! ~

As we increasingly mature and fulfill the Divine purpose for our creation, we handle greater and greater challenges, pressures, and resources. We begin to have larger and larger spheres of influence. We begin to act with greater dignity, kindness, wisdom, truth, grace and love. We begin to act like the royal ~ Children of the King, that we **ARE!** **God tells us in the scriptures that we are designed for several purposes.**

~Viceroys of Creation ~

Our initial instructions from God were to fill and subdue the earth – to own it and care for it well and lovingly as God has shown us. Adams first “job” from God was to name the animals – to add to God’s creation by identifying each creature and getting to know it and love it.

- We are to add to God’s creation – go make something!
- We are to value God’s creation – go hug a tree!
- We are to assist and care for God’s creation – save the whales (or at least your children from the monsters under their bed)!
- We are to examine and learn from God’s creation – shine like the stars!
- We are to love God’s creation – ride your bike and spare the air while reveling in all the life surrounding you!



Picture circulated on the Internet, photographer unknown

~ Join with God ~

Viceroy, agents, co-creators, slaves, servants, assistants, friends, witnesses, warriors, fiancés, co-conspirators; no matter how you define our roles, ***we are to be in league with God***. We are to be learning Her perspective, adopting it, and joining into the work of creating it. God clearly has plans. We are to be a part of the creation or development of *that* reality. Even while we are in this reality we are to begin by praising, glorifying, and serving God here, now, and forever. He deserves it. She's asked for it (and did not demand). He's earned it. It's our job.²⁶⁹ We ARE Children of God. Now; we are to grow up and begin to act like mature, appreciative, capable, qualified, adult children, who obey and sacrifice, and handle authority with mercy, and handle resources with love, and handle truth with grace ~ just like our Father does, as He showed us through His son Jesus Christ, and enables us through Her Spirit.

~ Judges ~

Upon Christ's return; we are told that after Christ determines whose names are in the Book of Life and thereby who gets to stay with God and who has to go elsewhere, the saints will help judge mankind; we will be judging the angels!²⁷⁰ The Scriptures tell us that our battle is not with flesh and blood, but with the powers and principalities in the spiritual realm.²⁷¹ We are also told by God "***vengeance is mine, and retribution.***"²⁷² Most of us do not have the power and strength to judge yet (it causes us to fall into the lower, negative energies of life). Only God knows people's hearts; and so only God can know and act on what is just now. But behind the painful/negative/evil/sinful actions of people are evil spirits, and upon our perfection, it will be both our right and responsibility to achieve justice. **We will judge those evil spirits and mankind, and vindicate what is right and good and remove what is not.** We too will have our retribution. We will have a final say.

~Priests unto God ~

In the Revelation which God gave to John, we get a glimpse of Heaven and the worship of God. At the throne of God is a numberless throng of people, and "four living creatures and twenty-four elders" who are worshipping the Lamb singing:

*"Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."*²⁷³

²⁶⁹ "Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Ephesians 5:19-20

²⁷⁰ "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? Do you not know that we will judge angels?" 1 Corinthians 6:2,3

²⁷¹ Ephesians 6:12

²⁷² Deuteronomy 32:35

²⁷³ Revelation 5:10

How will we reign? How will we be priests to our God? - Who can say? These living creatures and elders surely have knowledge we don't possess, but it's clearly a very positive thing. I can't imagine anyone saying "Thanks, but no thanks - I don't want the honor." I suspect that it's a whole lot more of what we do now, and this life is simply a warm-up for the eternal game. Running a family, ruling a nation, negotiating a business transaction, brokering peace between kids, motivating a corporation, inspiring a friend, forgiving an enemy is all practice for the eternal reign. Singing a song of worship, whispering a prayer, holding onto a hope, trusting a movement of the Spirit; is all practicing being priests unto God. Yah, we're only in pee wee sports right now, but we'll advance through college ball, and through the A's to get into the big leagues if we keep letting the Holy Spirit have her way with us. We'll be ready - in time. **That's our process, and it's leading us to an unimaginable destiny - Fulfilling God's Heart-cry for us.**

For further study

- *Jesus' Plan for a New World*, by Richard Rohr is an excellent book on the Sermon on the Mount and the utterly different way of relating to society which Jesus calls us to.

Thoughts while reading this Chapter ~

Date:

Activities ~

Last chapters' activity was to practice "Being".

Now, I'm challenging you to practice the other side of that coin "Doing," - or acting on God's commands!

Neither are easy. Both are essential to growth.

I have mentored many young women. I have observed over the years that although I see to it that they are well-versed in God's love for them, and that they know what they need to do to grow; unless they are willing to put forth the effort it takes to discipline themselves, they do not move forward. Personal Discipline is pivotal to growth, and there is simply no way around it. If we are unwilling to exercise our Divinely-given right to choose the thoughts and actions that bring us closer to God and other people, - we will not grow. No matter how good our theology is. Oswald Chambers explains it well in *My Utmost for His Highest*:

"Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh..." The cost to your natural life is not just one or two things, but everything. Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself..." (Matthew 16:23). That is, he must deny his right to himself, and he must realize who Jesus Christ is before he will bring himself to do it. Beware of refusing to go to the funeral of your own independence." "The natural can be turned into the spiritual only through sacrifice. Without this a person will lead a divided life. Why did God demand that the natural must be sacrificed? God did not demand it. It is not God's perfect will, but His permissive will. God's perfect will was for the natural to be changed into the spiritual through obedience. Sin is what made it necessary for the natural to be sacrificed."²⁷⁴

Now here's the paradox: Self-discipline is not something that we can accomplish for ourselves. If you think you can, your first lesson will be a BIG surprise! This is often the first area where people will start leaning on the Holy Spirit, and that is just as God intends.

- We have got to give God our 100% effort knowing that our effort is only 20% of the equation and only God will make it actually happen. Thankfully, God honors our efforts and intents and virtual miracles are common.
- We also must remember that less of our "to do list" will be accomplished than we hope, but more of our internal improvement, confidence in God, and ability to cope in the face of frustration and failure will happen. This is God's definition of success.

²⁷⁴ My utmost for His highest, by Oswald Chambers, Special Updated Edition Edited by James Reimann - December 9 & 10 devotions.

What's the weakness that's bothering you most about yourself? Start there, and do something minor about it now, making plans to do something else minor about it tomorrow, and the next day, until you are in the habit of addressing it, and the major changes will follow. Especially as you learn to involve the Holy Spirit in this process and pray for the obedience, wisdom, perseverance, and the whole host of other gifts you will need from God to really make these changes permanent and part of your character (which are the ONLY kind of changes God is really interested in).

1. Say a prayer daily asking God to reveal the areas you need to work on, and then to give you the help you need to work on them.

2. Get up fifteen minutes earlier daily and read a few sentences of Scripture after you pray and before your day.

3. Are you really bold and ready for a long-term challenge?

Consider tackling The Alcoholics Anonymous Twelve Steps:

1. We admitted we were powerless over [alcohol - or your personal weakness] – that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being to exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

~ History was made ~

“Learn from yesterday; live for today; hope for tomorrow.”
– Albert Einstein

Chapter 12

The Progressive Revelation

“We understand the end from the beginning because
we are tapped into He who wrote the end from the beginning.”
- Mario Murillo, in I am the Christian the Devil warned you about.

The Historical Record ~

Relationship ~

First lesson –the fall ~

Second Lesson – God Sees & Uses All ~

Non-interference ~

The first Covenant with all humanity ~

Pre-emptive strikes ~

Example ~

The Covenant honed to one family line -

~ Sacrifice ~

~ Responsiveness ~

Monotheism (One God) ~

~ Moses ~

~ The Exodus ~

~ Passover ~

~ Sabbath ~

~ Holiness ~

~ Atonement Introduced ~

~ Paradox ~

Kings and Prophets ~

The Second Covenant ~

The Revelation Transfers ~

The Spiritual Revelation ~

Atonement Provided~

The Sexual Revelation ~

The Indwelling ~

Wedding ~

Betrothal ~

The Only Way ~

An Important note ~

Our Progressive Revelation ~

The Historical Record ~

Islam, Judaism, and Christianity all agree that God operates through history. God began a progressive revelation of Divinity to humanity by selecting specific individuals throughout history to use as examples to all peoples of each period in time. Beginning with Adam & Eve, progressing through Noah, Abraham, and into the nation of Israel; God saw to it that this revelation of Divinity to humanity was retained through oral tradition and documentation beginning with Moses writing Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and perhaps Job. This written self-revelation through historical record continued through the prophets and onto the life of Jesus and the Acts of His Apostles. The Scriptures end with a prophetic Revelation of God's plan to restore the perfect created order.

Genesis contains 2,369 years of oral tradition and/or written manuscripts that were probably available to Moses in the awesome libraries in Egypt.

Relationship ~

God rules the universe and made humanity in His image to rule this earth in relationship with Him. Humanity was created in God's plan with free-will. Born in intimate relationship to God with jobs to do in co-creative relationship with God; God committed to letting us chose and make our own decisions (and live with those repercussions) which He will not over-ride. God creates by speaking things into being, and Adam imitated his Father by naming the animals. **Humanity was following God's example and God was pleased.**

First lesson –the fall ~

Tests prove growth to both the student and the teacher, and so God allows tests. **The first big test was meeting the serpent and obeying our creator's boundaries** – Adam and Eve failed.

1.) They bought the lie that they needed more knowledge to be like God and ate the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. They already were experiencing good, so **the only knowledge to be gained was that of evil.** Humans chose to learn about evil and so death entered our experience.

2.) That brought with it the obvious value of life. **We learned that life had to be offered to sustain life** (we eat plants and meat). We also came to understand the supreme value life has to God, and realized that offering life was the greatest sacrifice we could think of to try to appease an angry God whom we had rejected.

3.) **We gave away our ruler-ship of this earth to Satan** who began an agenda of blood-shed and destruction trying to usurp power from the creative, all-powerful God; who has committed himself to a policy of non-interference.

Adam & Eve's first mistake was disobeying God's boundaries and choosing to go it alone. But perhaps more crucial was their second mistake – hiding from God. Instead of running to their loving Father and falling on their face in apology, they hid – they turned away from God; killing the relationship and wounding God. **Perhaps in part because of this choice to hide, God hid paradise from them until all could be repaired and unified.**

With Adam & Eve's sin, God revealed that a blood sacrifice is required to atone for sin. Killing an animal represented us choosing to kill our natural nature of sin and corruption. God may have pointed this out in killing the first animal to clothe Adam and Eve. **First lesson – life is in the blood, and God values life, therefore God values blood.** Blood was not to be shed easily or lightly. Through clothing Adam and Eve in animal skins, God expressed the seriousness of His desire to clothe humanity again in Divine perfection by killing their sin nature.

Second Lesson – God Sees and Uses All ~

Upon eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God had to ban Adam & Eve from Eden lest they eat of the tree of life also, and live eternally in this fallen state. **Now living outside of perfection and having to struggle for their survival, they began to learn about evil.** When their sons Cain and Able grew and tried to worship God, Cain brought in the fruit of *his* labors as a sacrifice. Able brought in the sacrifice of blood ordained by God. When God accepted Able's sacrifice and rejected Cain's efforts, Cain was so mad that he murdered his brother Able. God was trying to reveal to the brothers what an acceptable sacrifice was. Cain missed the lesson and killed the one who got it. **Next, God revealed that the Holy one sees all, and we are our brother's keepers,** by warning Cain and then promising to protect him even in his sin. God mercifully, again reinforced the idea that the Holy One can still work with us and through us even when we sin.²⁷⁵

Non-interference ~

The One True God watched humanity disregard His fatherly love and relationship and chose moral and social destruction, until He regretted having created humanity. He decided to start humanity over again with the only man on earth who had chosen relationship with Him – Noah.²⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that God's relationship with Noah is so close that God gave him very specific, and very bizarre instructions and Noah follows them. Taking decades to build a "boat" when it probably had never before rained (the earth may have still been covered with the thick moist covering scientists suspect was once around our blue ball.) God then does a huge part of the work sending the animals to Noah. **With Noah, God showed us that the Holy One is serious about eliminating all sin.** Again the world restarted with only one God-fearing family. Again, humanity receives a promise from God. This time God increased the value of the promise to a covenant (a two-way relationship).

²⁷⁵ This story is told in Genesis 4.

²⁷⁶ This story is told in Genesis 6-9



The first Covenant with all humanity ~

After the flood of God's wrath subsided; God smelled Noah's fragrant worship, and The Holy One made a covenant with Noah's descendents, and "every living thing."²⁷⁷ God decides to commit to a plan and promises His ongoing love with a sign in the sky. A rainbow will forever-after remind humanity that God makes promises. Here he promised not to destroy the earth again with water. Here, God is again

offering a relationship and promising His protection and asking nothing in return. Ever the gentleman, He comes bearing gifts to His beloved creation.

Pre-emptive strikes ~

Starting over; God again seems to be playing out his policy of non-interference, but He doesn't let them go so far. He sits back and watches what humanity is going to do. He allows them to grow as they choose until they try to reach His kingdom by their own work - building the tower of Babel.²⁷⁸ At this point He complicates their plans by confusing their speech, and again He sits back and watches. **Here we learned that God loves diversity and hates human's independent attempts to be god (or live life without God, cutting God out of the equation).** When we chose to prioritize making our own name and not honoring Deity we steal God's glory. When we take credit for our own accomplishments and do not acknowledge God's creative gifts to us and in us, we steal God's glory. God guards Her glory.²⁷⁹ His designs are to teach people to acknowledge their creature-ship, and Her glory as Almighty Creator. (The truly astounding thing is that Deity never does this in a way that *forces* our compliance!)

Example ~

Now God has begun his pre-emptive strikes to keep things from spiraling back into moral and social chaos, and seems to decide that **humanity needs more help - A physical example of how close things could be between God and humanity.**

He now calls on presumably His most Godly humans – Abram & Sari. It is again interesting to note that God is able to ask very hard and very bizarre things of this man who obeys without question. He is called to leave all that he knows (the cradle of civilization in Er of the Chaldees, the country of the tower of Babel), and go on a long and arduous journey into the desert. **The example God is setting up is to raise Abram from created possession to friend** and God emphasizes this elevation by changing Abram and Sari's names to Abraham and Sarah.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ Genesis 9:10

²⁷⁸ This story is told in Genesis 11

²⁷⁹ "I will not give my glory to another." Isaiah 42:8

²⁸⁰ Their story is contained in Genesis 12-25

The Covenant honed to one family line ~

With Abram God commits to bless his lineage with His personal, direct, participation; equaling - relationship. It is very interesting to note that initially God is doing all the promising and asks nothing in return of Abram. As the Covenant develops and God is investing more oversight, direction and protection, God begins to ask for obedience and the reciprocal response to the covenant - circumcision. (Isn't it interesting that God chose a mark that was extremely personal and not obvious to others! - A body part that had excess skin which when removed increases hygiene and sensation!)

Abraham experienced a bit of what God would experience 2,000 years later as Divinity sacrificed a portion of Divinity in Her only Son.

At eighty God promises Abraham the desire of his heart –a son, and then stretches him another ten years before miraculously delivering on that promise. Because God stalled, Abraham & Sarah try to “help” God and settle for a surrogate child through Sarah’s handmaiden. That wasn’t God’s plan, and they live to regret their impatience as Sarah’s servant Hagar becomes proud and rude to Sarah. After the birth of Sarah’s child Abraham must send Ishmael and his mother away to keep peace. **Now, the Muslim nation is born of man’s efforts, and the violence of wounded, rejected, pride.**

~ Sacrifice ~

In the ancient world sacrifice was the heart of worship in most civilizations. Most religions required sacrifice to appease the gods and ask for favors. With YHVH sacrifice was for cleansing from sin and thanksgiving to God for the abundant provisions already received. When Isaac, the child of the promise, is young (less than 30) God harshly tested Abraham and told him to take his son two days journey away and sacrifice him. Did Abraham trust God enough to resurrect Isaac or again create a second miracle birth to Abraham and Sarah in order to fulfill the Divine promise to make Abrahams descendants as the sand in the sea? Yes, he did; for he traveled for two days in absolute agony knowing his mission; telling his son, in faith, that God would provide the missing sacrifice. Abraham passed this test with flying colors being willing to even bind his son and put him on the altar before God stayed his hand and saved the boy. God also met Abraham’s need and provided another sacrifice in a ram caught in a thicket not far away. **Here again, we learn more deeply, that God does require very difficult and very painful sacrifices; but He provides them.**

~ Responsiveness ~

God wants returned relationship. That requires more than processing sin, it requires softened hearts and devotion to Him. As each of Abrahams descendants grow up, God chooses the most responsive child (more often *not* the first-born) and continues His revelations. He continues his blessings and protections to all of the offspring (note

Ishmael, & Esau's lives);²⁸¹ but His extensive relationship and revelations are to Isaac, and then Jacob (who pursue God). It is important to note that all of the people used in Scripture are present with their warts and all sin. Scripture is painfully honest, and not at all dressed up. Yet God seemingly ignores the sin of His faithful, and continues to work with them to provide well for their needs and perfect their character; producing saints that are still revered today.

Isaac, and Jacob famously are raised “in the faith” and yet they must struggle to “own” it, to the point where a very mature Jacob actually wrestles with God in his most terrified state, and God honors his perseverance and final pursuit of God by changing his name to **Israel, and the nation we recognize today is born of struggle between God and man.**²⁸²

Through the succeeding generations, God continues teaching humanity about healthy living and a right response to God. **The fundamental lessons are: sin produces death; God values life (which is contained in the blood); and Her desire is to have a relationship with humanity.** All other lessons are slowly building on this foundation as God slowly unfolds His redemptive plan for mankind to Israel and through Israel to all of humanity.

“In order that all the peoples of the earth may know thy name and fear thee, as do thy people Israel.” - 1 Kings 8:43

Monotheism (One God) ~

~ *Moses* ~

The next big lessons of the covenant came through Moses. Again God meets a friend and builds a very intimate and very demanding relationship with him. After Moses responds in violent passion to God's heart of love and equality - by killing a soldier for beating a slave; Moses runs away into the desert. He thought he had failed and was being disciplined in hot isolation; but really he had proven his love for God and God now had to hone Moses' dependence on God for everything in the isolation and suffering of the desert. The lesson took forty years. At the end, God tells Moses to go confront Pharaoh in Egypt, and his polytheistic (many gods) society; demanding that God's enslaved people go free. Moses was clearly especially brave and obedient, (and well trained by his forty years of desert dependence), to come up against the leader of the most powerful nation at the time; eventually leading a whole people-group out of captivity armed initially only with “because **I Am** said so”!²⁸³ Uniquely, I Am promises Moses nothing, and he doesn't even get to enter the promised-land with his million(s) of followers. But Moses alone in Scripture sees God, and that appears to be enough for him.

²⁸¹ Genesis 21-26

²⁸² Genesis 32

²⁸³ Moses' story is told in the Scriptural book of Exodus.

~ *The Exodus* ~

The Exodus from Egypt and the Passover Feast that God commands observed forever in remembrance of the event are all highly symbolic.

The Exodus is the example that humans are slaves to sin and unable to free themselves. God triumphed over the most powerful man on earth in Pharaoh who was considered a god; showing that there is no power on earth that comes close to the One True God. He did this systematically; clearly besting the major gods of the two-thousand that Egyptian’s worshiped at the time.²⁸⁴

Miracle or Plague	Possible Bested Egyptian god(s)	Method	Interesting note
#1 Moses staff turns into a serpent.	Thermothis, the serpent goddess of fate	Moses’ serpent ate all of Pharaoh’s	Egyptians were able to turn staffs into snakes too
#2 Nile turned to blood	Sothis, the Nile god	Turned Nile waters red	Egyptian magicians duplicated this feat
#3 Frogs	Heket, primordial frog goddess	God’s frogs over-ran Egypt (You want frogs – you get them!)	Egyptian magicians duplicated this feat
#4 Gnats	Seth, god of chaos, & desert storms	Gnats overwhelmed man and beast	Egyptians were no longer able to duplicate
#5 Swarms of insects	Osiris, ruler of dead, life, and vegetation	Insects laid the land waste.	God protected His people in Goshen
#6 Plague on livestock	Aker, earth-god, helper of the dead	Livestock died	God protected His peoples’ livestock
#7 Boils on everything	Khnum, giver of Nile, and mankind	Boils on everything	Pharaoh admits his sin
#8 Hail	Nut, sky goddess	Severe hail of fire & ice	God warned those Egyptians who would listen
#9 Locusts	Khepri, primordial god and rising sun.	Locusts like never before ate all remaining vegetation & darkened the sun	Pharaoh tries to negotiate. God doesn’t negotiate
#10 Darkness	Aton, sun god &/or Ra god of sun & earth	Three days of impenetrable darkness	Still light in Goshen!
#11 Death of firstborns	Selket, guardian of life, protector of dead	All Egyptian firstborns died	God played off of Pharaoh’s threat “you shall die”

²⁸⁴ The story of the plagues on Egypt are in Exodus chapters 7-11.

The most current and interesting explanation of these plagues I've seen was in a History channel presentation

– *The Exodus Decoded.*

~ *Passover* ~

Passover was instituted the night before Israel left Egypt. God instructed the Israelites to start their new calendar now, and to sacrifice a pet lamb per family for their sin, and eat that animal for dinner. Is the message obvious? ***Wonderful things must now die so we can live; we're starting fresh – free to choose God!*** Now they are having the concept of atonement for sin expanded from the individual sacrifices which Noah and Abraham offered, to one perfect lamb per family as adequate for atonement of sin.

They were to wipe the lambs' blood around the door frame of their home that evening and sit down to a minimal meal, which would turn into a carefully designed feast of remembrance. The blood on the door identifies the family with the family of God. They were "under the blood" claiming its substitutionary life. **The Angel of Death recognized that as the sign to "pass over" that home and not kill the first born(s)** in it that night when the final plague was killing a person (or more) in every home in Egypt. **Here, God Almighty was making a point to all of humanity – all firstborns are mine, and I ransom them for your sin;** My people I will protect, if they will choose to be identified with me, and obey me. Israel was commanded to observe Passover forever – in remembrance of God's deliverance from slavery to sin.

In this ancient world there was so much worship of so many gods that it took the following millennia and much emphasis in the Scriptures to get God's people to understand monotheism, and God's holiness. These are some of the steps I Am took.

~ *Sabbath* ~

To understand God's holiness, Israel had to see themselves correctly. That takes time. These people had been worked half to death; they were tired. They needed rest, clear minds, and open hearts to begin to rise up to the level God had planned. So, forty-five days into their freedom, now safe from Pharaoh, **God instituted the next celebration – rest. Sabbath was the next permanent addition to God's required response to His Covenant.**²⁸⁵ Ever a practical God, I Am, wants us to learn to Be; Be-ing content (not always toiling after something else), and Be-ing in loving relationships (with God, ourselves, and others). Relationships take time. Time has to be set aside; and God, and

²⁸⁵ "So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant." Exodus 31:16

ourselves, and others prioritized. Karen Burton Mains in her book *Making Sunday Special* put it like this:

“Sabbath, properly understood, is rest from the bondage of work. God, ever a Liberator God, is concerned about our freedom. Psalm 127:2 declares: “It is senseless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, fearing you will starve to death; for God wants his loved ones to get their proper rest.” God gives us fifty-two Sabbaths, or seven and a half weeks, of vacation time a year! –time during which we are to do no work. As Thomas Aquinas put it, each week one goes on ad vacandum divinis – a day of vacation with God.”

She points out that in our fallen condition the work is never done, and so we must learn to rest on the Sabbath as though it were. “When we cease from our work and let Christ do his work within us, we realize that our work is not so important.” God’s work is being done in us as we wait. God is building Her divine romance within us.

“To misunderstand this love scheme is also to misunderstand the role of Sabbath. For Sabbath is the ring a loving God, the Divine Wooer, gives his chosen one to wear; it is a gold band to remind her, through the long days of waiting, of his betrothal covenant – a sign to her and to all the other eager young lords, the overly attentive suitors, that she is engaged to, set apart for, this One Great Lord. She belongs to Him.” “Sabbath is a love day, a day to adore. I don’t work. This is a day set apart for loving.”

~ Holiness ~

It is through Moses that God’s people are taught God’s first requirement – to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and mind and soul; and to express that love, and build on it, by keeping the Sabbath. It is through Moses that the world received the Ten Commandments, and all the laws teaching God’s people about Holiness, so they could understand the next big revelation – atonement of sin. During Moses time God’s people learn of God’s holiness, and His requirement that His people also be holy or “set apart”. They are taught in great detail how to do this. It involves worship, and this involves the obvious outward expressions of the inward orientation toward God. Giving gold and the best raw materials they have to God, giving their time, and rested contemplation. They are to give the best of their time and talents to God. Their best artisans and craftsmen create the exquisite tabernacle for God to live among His people, and deepen the relationship.

The Tabernacle was an exquisite moveable tent. It was made of silver and bronze by the finest craftsmen. It’s top and sides were constructed of heavy drapes of blue and purple and scarlet fine linen spun by skilled women. Inside, fragrant incense was always burning. It contained the Ark of the Covenant, the Table of Showbread, the Lamp stand, and the Altar of Incense – all golden. And amazingly – God’s glory and presence. The instructions God gave the Israelites about the Tabernacle are in Exodus chapters 35-40.

As an act of their worship and the giving of their best to God; they must atone for their sin. **They learn that God is a gracious God and is building their understanding of the needed sacrifice from one sacrifice per person, to one sacrifice for the family at Passover, and finally to one sacrifice for the nation on the day of atonement.** This honed-in, national sacrifice was a foreshadowing of the one sacrifice for all time that was coming in the Messiah.

~ Atonement Introduced ~

While the massive family of Israel turned nation and wandered in the desert; Moses was pushed to keep peace and civility. God directed him to take a goat and ceremoniously lay his hands on it for not just one person, or even one family, but for the whole nation of Israel. Thereafter, on the Day of Atonement, The priests gathered the nation and two goats were sacrificed. Hands were placed on the head of the animals transferring Israel's sins onto them. One was taken outside the camp and let-go taking Israel's sins with it - far away. **Now, the concept of one sacrifice for one sin, is expanded to a "scape-goat" for a whole nation's sin.**

The other goat was ritually sacrificed. There were many aspects required of this ritual which were all highly symbolic. The goat represented Israel's guilt. It was chased down, killed and the blood drained. Then the entrails were carefully removed and burned. **The lesson – it's a job to deal with our sin and guilt, but it's a job God commands to provide healing for humans.**

From here developed the regular Temple sacrifices:

- Doves sacrificed regularly for personal sin.
- A bull for the King.
- The Atonement and Scape-goats sacrificed yearly for the whole nation.
- One perfect lamb for each family at the beginning of the Jewish year, as the celebratory remembrance of the Passover sacrifice of the first-born sons that set God's people free.

~ Paradox ~

Here was the beginning of different sacrifices for different levels of sin in the nation of Israel - mine, yours, and ours. A bird for just me, a lamb for your family, a bull for the king, and a goat for our whole nation! **Death leads to life, sacrifice produces healing.** In Leviticus 26:11-13, God shares His heart:

"I will make my abode among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the Lord your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slave; and I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect."

After the nation of Israel became established in their promised land; they developed as a true nation, and God continued to increase the revelation of Divinity to them through Judges, Kings, and Prophets. God was slowly revealing the difficult-to-understand paradoxes that comprise Divinity. Among them – **set-apartness encompasses union**. Deity begins to hint at Her desires for a Holy union.

Specifically, God used the prophet Hosea:

- To live out the Holy One’s perception of His people as having prostituted themselves to other gods and loves.
- To act out God’s marital designs for this wanton harlot He sees as a beauty.
- To display God’s continued commitment to them, even in the face of such deep rejection.

“And in that day . . . you will call me, ‘My husband,’ and no longer will you call me, ‘My Baal’ . . . And I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord”
– Hosea 2:16, 19-20

God was giving these revelations of the depth of Her love, simultaneously with the Divine revelation of judgment and justice:

- Played out in the repeated invasions and captivities of the nation of Israel by foreign armies.
- As Israel endured Divine discipline in captivity in foreign countries, God sent prophets to remind them of God’s continued care for them.

Gene Edwards in his poetic story *The Divine Romance* speaks of God’s view of Israel:

“In the eyes of earthen man she was a nation, but through the eyes of God a woman. . . He loved this one, visited, counseled her.”

Kings and Prophets ~

With the giving of the Scriptures, from Moses until Messiah, the nation of Israel was stuck in a time warp, learning and re-learning the lessons of God revealed through Moses. **They didn’t catch the Divine proposal.** They didn’t get it that God was their God and so they demanded a King. That went badly. After that; the prophets preached, cajoled, and begged for God’s people to return to God and His perfect ways for 400 years (roughly 840–420 B.C.). At the very beginning in the first chapter of the most respected prophets’ oracle; Isaiah gives God’s cry of frustration:²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ Isaiah 1:2-4,10-14

*“Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the Lord speaks, “Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have revolted against Me. An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master’s manger, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand.” Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! **They have abandoned the Lord, They have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him.** Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers, of Sodom; Give ear to the instructions of our God, You people of Gomorrah. “What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?” Says the Lord. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to Me. New moons and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies – I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them.”*

Finally, God gave up and pouted and planned during another 400 years of total silence.

Immanuel

By, Michael Card

For all those who live in the shadow of death
A glorious light has dawned
For all those who stumble in the darkness
Behold your light has come

Immanuel
Our God is with us
And if God is with us
Who could stand against us
Our God is with us
Immanuel

So what will be your answer?
Will you hear the call?
Of Him who did not spare His son
But gave him for us all
On earth there is no power
There is no depth or height
That could ever separate us
From the love of God in Christ

Immanuel
Our God is with us
And if God is with us
Who could stand against us
Our God is with us
Immanuel

The Second Covenant ~

“The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached.”

- Luke 16:16

In the fullness of time, the people of God had been occupied and deported, and were just learning what it meant to worship only One True God. The world was becoming connected in commerce and ideas, and most roads ran through Israel. Rome, one of the cruelest and most oppressive nations was in power. It was time for the next revelation – **Messiah.**

Humanity was building their knowledge and their corporate ability to understand concepts outside of themselves. Perhaps God got frustrated with the Holy One’s inability to relate to fallen, limited, humanity. It was time for a fuller (in *every* sense of the word) revelation of Deity. Yet Israel was expecting a military conquering hero to come and wreck vengeance on their many enemies. They still weren’t ready for a suffering servant to come and earn their atonement once and for all, for them and all humanity.

Amazing fact:

The scientific probability of only eight (8) of the prophecies being fulfilled by one man is 1 in 10 to the 17th or 100,000,000,000,000,000

-taken from Peter Stoner in *Science Speaks*. (<http://sciencespeaks.dstoner.net>)

With Yeshua, or Jesus Christ, God was giving the best He had – **Himself**. To meet and restore Her people to Himself and build the perfected body of believers Divinity desired when God first created humanity. Jesus Christ was born fulfilling 332 Scriptural prophecies and lived a fully-human, and simultaneously fully-Divine life on earth. This means that, like the television show character Bewitched; Jesus was fully capable of wiggling His nose and making it happen. But unlike Bewitched, Jesus always chose not to do so while living in a limited body constrained by time and space and human limitations. **Jesus had given up a limitless existence by design and choice to experience humanity as we do.** This “second Adam” was the next truly “evolutionary” step, creating a fulfilled humanity which could now be indwelt by God. We are told that Jesus was the first-born of many brothers. He showed us how to move up the created order to the next step by choosing His offer of unified relations - indwelling, transforming Divinity, parked inside our spirits and souls; further unifying our human created triune nature. Does that make us now quadune?

For Further Study:

For a much deeper explanation of this exponentially improving created order see C. S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity, Book IV*.

The Spiritual Revelation ~

Yeshua was born supernaturally, announced supernaturally, protected supernaturally, and proceeded to show us how to live supernaturally. He orchestrated his death to coincide with the sacrificing of the perfect lambs for Passover (the new beginning of not just that year!). **Jesus chose to die –one death for all humanity.** Jesus came to die as the first-born son, the perfect lamb for the family of God sacrificed to meet God’s righteous requirement of blood for sin. In doing so, He extended an open invitation for all of humanity to join that family-of-God. He had told his disciples many times beforehand that it was for this sacrifice that He had come.²⁸⁷

There are always many layers to God and Divine Revelation. Not only did Jesus achieve atonement for humanity, but He also restored God’s Glory, as John Piper explains:

²⁸⁷ During His trial before Pilot Jesus said “**For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the Truth.**” – John 18:37; “**The reason My Father loves me is that I lay down My life.**” –John 10:17

*"God put forward his Son on the cross "to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins" (Romans 3:25). In other word, by forgiving sin in the Old Testament and by tolerating many sinners, God had given the impression that his honor and glory were not of infinite worth. Now to vindicate the honor of his name and the worth of his glory, he required the death of his own Son. Thus Christ suffered and died for the glory of his Father. This demonstrates the righteousness of God, because God's righteousness is his unswerving allegiance to uphold the value of his glory."*²⁸⁸

By the first century, oral and written traditions circulated widely that detailed how many of Judaism's prophets had died. Martyrdom- the act of serving as a "witness"- was viewed as part of the prophetic vocation. "Abraham carrying the wood was like a man carrying his cross." That comparison from a Rabbinic midrash (interpretation) links the Roman mode of execution to the first great patriarch's willingness to sacrifice his only child to God on Mount Moriah (Genesis Rabbah 66:3). The suffering required to follow God's will, no matter what the cost, expressed the heart of the prophetic conviction.

- From *Rabbi Jesus*

Atonement Provided~

With His death and subsequent resurrection, Jesus overcame Satan. Once and for all fulfilling God's requirement for atonement and forgiveness of sins. He opened the door for adoption into the family of God. **Humanity now has a career path: growth from "creation of God," through "friend of God," to "child of God," headed toward "lover of God."** As Karen Burton Mains puts it:

"God, ever the Gentleman Caller, speaks our name; he too personalizes his attentions. He whispers **beloved**, and we know in one sense that this is a corporate endearment, but we hear the words spoken singularly."

"The deliverance turns into a holy courtship, and the Divine Deliverer begins to define a betrothal agreement. He, the great lord, a most commanding potentate, is proposing marriage to the former slave girl of lowly nomadic origin. If she will set herself aside for him; if she will refuse to keep company with other men, and seek no other lovers; if she will learn to love Him with her whole heart, soul, and strength; if she will pledge herself to live a life different from all the other slave girls of common derivation, then he will covenant to be her husband, to betroth her to himself, to bless her with his riches, to endow her with his royal inheritance, to marry her at a future date, to celebrate the wedding feast at a gathering of the nations of the world, and to keep the marital love warm, living, eternally lasting." "All love stories, whether ancient or modern, whether fiction or true, are but pale imitations, impoverished comparisons to the cosmic drama which

²⁸⁸ For more on this see John Piper's *The Justification of God*.

begins on the stage of the Old Testament and continues with a “second act” performed on the platform of the New.”

We are told that Jesus Christ was the first-born among *many* offspring – **many will accept His proposal!** He was the final sacrifice fulfilling God’s possession of first-borns and ushering in a new spiritual plane of existence as supernatural humans filled by the Spirit of God. Now, upon leaving earth for a predetermined length of time known only to God the Father, Jesus Christ has left his reputation and testimony in the hands of a band of very human followers. These many offspring, struggling to mature into “betrothed of God,” are not left without Divine help.

God the Holy Spirit was given to indwell these limited humans upon their request, and perpetuate the salvation process in these spirits of the followers of Christ until His return.

The old order of things – the First Covenant with its physical emphasis on law and people having to work at being holy; is gone. The new order of things – the Second Covenant with its Spiritual appropriation of holiness is here.

How do I look in my white wedding dress? Please forgive me; I’m still working on walking with the grace and dignity that it merits! No, I haven’t quite grown into it yet.

Jesus became the “new Adam” having corrected our first parents sin’s and initiated the creation of humanity which has now begun a perfection process. The “fruit” from His sacrifices are His brothers and sisters who comprise the “Body of Christ,” and are becoming the “Bride of Christ”. They are those humans who will inherit the “Kingdom of God” with Christ, and share every privilege that comes with it.

(See *Sanctifying Christ’s Body* in Chapter 10, for more)



The Sexual Revelation ~

The historical record tells us that Jesus experienced every aspect of humanity except His sexuality. Jesus’ sexual experience, or lack there-of, brings up interesting questions on several fronts. This causes a fundamental crisis of sexuality for many Christians. If Jesus didn’t have sex, is their sexuality “bad”? This question shows why we have to take all of Scripture in context, and help each other understand it fully. The Old Testament Scriptures (especially Song of [Songs or Solomon], and Hosea) make it abundantly clear that **God highly values sexuality.**

Among God's first commands were the directive to go and procreate. In *The Act of Marriage*, **Dr. Norman Wright pointed out the medical observation that our human bodies were not designed just for procreation, but more fundamentally for enjoyment.** Within Divinely healthy parameters, God wants His people to explore and enjoy and fulfill their sexual design.

Divinity is holy. Our bodies are to be holy. God is unwilling to physically unite with sin in any way shape or form. The Holy One is unwilling to sully the perfect union with anything less than complete Oneness of body, mind, and spirit. **Humanity is not yet perfected, and so Jesus was not yet able to complete the union He desired.** God does not see us as whole enough yet to handle the union God has in mind. The committed, intimate, co-equal, union of the holy marriage bed holds myriads of hints at how deeply and profoundly God wants us to know Her, and unite with Him, and feel safe, and protected, and enjoy the experience. **This life, and our current sexuality is practice; preparing us for the something like it, but beyond all that we can ask for or imagine better that God has in store for those who choose Her disciplines.**

It is hard for us in our sexually obsessed society to get our heads around celibacy, and monogamy, and the Biblical directives. But history and recent medical science are proving its appropriateness. Beyond the logical physical and psychological safety these directives provide, there are myriads of blessings of security, discipline, and positive energy to produce, that these limitations create. The Almighty has repeatedly proved that She asks nothing of us that He has not done before us. We are to keep the marriage bed holy and abstain from uniting with sin sexually (that means chastity, virginity, and monogamy). **Jesus again proves His Divinity and obedience by living his thirty-three years (well into His sexual prime) keeping His marriage bed holy, and waiting until His betrothed bride is prepared and ready to explore complete UNION!** (We're now on 2,010 years and counting!)

The Indwelling ~

Per Jesus' promise, after His resurrection, the provision of the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost; forever-after enabling His brothers and sisters to follow after Him, responding to God in Spirit and in Truth -supernaturally. The Holy Spirit is "the pledge of our own inheritance."²⁸⁹ **She helps us perfect our character so we have the strength to function well now and are prepared for Heaven.**²⁹⁰ Having God's Spirit enabling humans to talk to, and respond to, and copy – God. (Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery!) We too can now live supernaturally. Now we too can obey. We now have the internal power available to choose to love others in the face of hate, to choose to give of ourselves when we're tired and empty. We now have access to the strength to provide the nourishment our families need with the money that used to be spent on mind numbing drugs-of-choice! We can now choose to run to God and ask forgiveness instead of trying

²⁸⁹ "Having believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." Ephesians 1:13-14.

²⁹⁰ "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace." Romans 8:6-17

to hide. We now have access to God's personal cell phone number and can contact Him at any time. He even gave us the state-of-the-art (internal chip) cell phones to use! Total provision. **A complete fix of the broken relationship between humanity and God is now available;** but still not forced. With this Second Covenant, the offer escalates from "Friend of God" to "Child of God"; with the accompany reciprocal response expanding from "following the letter of the laws" to giving *all* of ourselves to God, and allowing **God** to enable us to "live the Spirit of the Law" (which is usually more difficult than only following the letter of the law!).

This freedom from the "Law" needs to be correctly understood. In many nations around the world, Christians are persecuted by the rulers because the governments hear this emphasis on "freedom from the Law," but don't understand the paradoxical fact that Christians are people under authority. Primarily, the authority of God, but secondarily the authority of leaders. 1 Peter 2:13 directs believers to "*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.*" God is not an easy God. Governments are theoretically designed to protect and bless people. But we all know they fail miserably. Divinity even requires obedience to tyrants and promises a great reward for such illogical behavior. **It's all about faith.** Is God big enough to be able to make good come from evil? Will we wait in patient endurance until She accomplishes the final "fix"? Are we willing to sacrifice ourselves as our elder brother did and love these tyrants into the Kingdom of God, by returning good in our actions for their evil behavior?

Since Jesus' ascension into heaven leaving room for God the Holy Spirit, to indwell Her followers and multiply Christ's "offspring," or "fruit;" **God has slowly been multiplying our understanding of Divinity through saint after saint after saint.** Saints are people who have chosen to be exceptionally brave, obedient, and courageous, and experience God. Many have written about their experiences and left us a great legacy. Each of these precious saints has expanded on what had been revealed before, and affirmed the personalness of God's interest and ability to talk to us, and walk with us, when we are willing to listen and obey. Christians are now learning to live an expanded God-life. They are the next created order - "working out our salvation", by practicing being God's children, and Jesus' siblings, working toward becoming the Bride of Christ, and Vice-Roy's who will rule with and serve God - eternally.

The Revelation Transfers ~

For at least three-thousand years God used Israel as the example, and focused His attention on this nation. Now it's time for God to gather in the Gentiles. **Christ came to and through Israel and hoped for them to take the Divine message of the acceptable sacrifice to the nations.** As a nation, they refused. So Plan-B got put into effect – individual Jews took the message elsewhere. Humanity's disobedience never frustrates God's plans! Romans 11:31 tells us about this transition:

“They [Israel] have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you [Gentiles] that they also may receive mercy.”

Christ’s Jewish followers left Israel and took the message to the nations in the form of the developing religion called “Christianity.” Romans 11:25-26 tells us of this transfer:

“I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: A hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved.”

God has it all under control. Divinity has a time, and specific number of converts She is waiting for. **Nothing frustrates God’s sovereignty.** Not disobedience. Not sin. Not rejection. God perseveres through all of it, never leaving His character of love.

Betrothal ~

In the Jewish wedding tradition, if we said “yes” to Jesus, we are **betrothed – legally contracted to Christ**; excitedly waiting for the betrothal time to end and God the Father to tell His Son that it is time to go and claim His Bride (the Second Coming). The time when our new home is expanded and in perfect order and it is time for the wedding feast to begin. This Jewish betrothal or engaged period, shows us how deeply God desires to unite with us in every way possible, and in ways I’m sure we cannot yet even imagine. **God wants us!**

After we say “Yes” to Jesus we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. **We are now challenged to learn to function Spiritually or super-naturally in this physical world, while we wait for our Bride-groom to come and take us away!** This is the meaning of the Parable of the ten virgins which Jesus told in Matthew 25:1-13. The Holy Spirit and I have to hone our working, living, and loving relationship every day as we learn to function in union in this still fallen world. As redeemed, we still have to work and learn to accept our forgiveness, and function in our new adopted family. We have to gain confidence in our new status as Children of the Eternal King. All of this gaining strength and confidence and Divinity, mysteriously brings glory to God, while preparing us for the next step - forming the Body of Christ - here on earth.



Wedding ~

Upon Christ's return we have much to look forward to. I covered this in Chapter 10, *What is God going to do?* I hope that you will see there, that from Isaiah to Revelation the Scriptures declares the New Heaven united with the New Earth as a central component of redemptive history and intention. **In that perfect place and time, perfect people will unite with their perfect God, and all will be well.**

"According to Scripture the present world will neither continue forever nor will it be destroyed and replaced by a totally new one. Instead it will be cleansed of sin and re-created, reborn, renewed, made whole. While the kingdom of God is first planted spiritually in human hearts, the future blessedness is not to be spiritualized. Biblical hope, rooted in incarnation and resurrection, is creational, this-worldly, visible, physical, bodily hope. The rebirth of human beings is completed in the glorious rebirth of all creation, the New Jerusalem whose architect and builder is God Himself.

- Herman Bavinck

The Only Way ~

God chose to reveal Himself as Jesus Christ, and is planning to form the Divine body-counterpart as the "Bride of Christ." The New Testament Scriptures are very clear that Christ is the ticket to the wedding banquet – you have to want HIM if you want to marry God! Acts 4:12 is particularly clear:

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

It makes sense – if Jesus is God's chosen revelation of Himself and you don't like Jesus, - you certainly don't want to unite with God now, and definitely not forever!

God chose the system and God says that Jesus is His revelation of Himself and the only path to Heaven. Does that mean that those before Christ, and those since who have never heard about Him are doomed –*NO* [remember God’s character – He is love as well as justice]! The New Testament book of Romans deals extensively with this issue:

*“For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.”*²⁹¹ *“Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”*²⁹² *“For God does not show favoritism, All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.”*²⁹³ And what does the law say? Primarily: *“You shall love the Lord your God.”*²⁹⁴

Don’t forget that Jesus will be the judge – He knows whether we chose Him as the creator of all things, as our higher power, or as Messiah. **It’s only those who have heard about Jesus’ love and still rejected it, that we can know are doomed.** And even then, God and our prayers will never give up! Only Jesus Christ, on judgment day, knows for sure who will be with Him in paradise, and who has spent their entire life choosing exclusion.

An Important note ~

Men in our society can have a very difficult time with the projected future of uniting with Jesus Christ. After all He’s a man, and it brings up fears of falling into homosexuality which is prohibited as a sexual perversion which is damaging to the human soul.²⁹⁵ This again shows why good Theology is invaluable in bringing us into right relationship with God. This is why understanding the often forgotten fact that the Holy Spirit is feminine is so critical. She is the definition of beauty, love, comfort [in her presence who needs food!], and commitment. Men who understand this Truth, can focus their amorous feelings for God on the Holy Spirit and find all of the stumbling blocks to embracing those feelings disappear. Remember: God is Spirit and we must worship Her in Spirit and in Truth!²⁹⁶

²⁹¹ Romans 2:13

²⁹² Romans 1:19-20

²⁹³ Romans 2:11-12

²⁹⁴ Matthew 22:37

²⁹⁵ *“They exchanged the Truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.”* Romans 1:25, 27

²⁹⁶ John 4:24

Our Progressive Revelation ~

Learning to worship God in spirit and in truth can be a very challenging and often slow process. As I write this book, I look back on my own process of realizing my calling. I had suffered from Chronic Fatigue and Fibromyalgia for fifteen years, and was unable to work at my previous career. I was barely surviving (physically or emotionally) as a wife and mom. As I slowly improved, I wanted to return to “productive labors” and tried many times. All of which failed. Lost as to why the Lord would not restore my health, I asked a group of my closest girlfriends why they thought the Lord kept me unable to “work.” All four very intelligent and Godly women said the same thing, (something that *never* happens!) – “you should write!” “What would you like to write?” Astounded, but not convinced, I argued with God for another year and a half – “I’m trained in two careers, and journalism isn’t one of them! – Why can’t I do something I’m good at?” **“Why can’t You call me to something I’m trained in! – Something that’s easy!”** No go. I looked for every other conceivable job and opportunity and all doors were nailed solidly shut. It wasn’t until I finally began writing in earnest, out of exhausted obedience; that my health really began to improve in earnest, and my joy in life began to improve. God had waited patiently for eighteen years, for me to be ready to work with Him on His project. There are still no guarantees about the worldly success of this project –Me! But God is progressively revealing His plan for my life, and I am slowly surrendering to it; **Only to find that the joy I had pursued elsewhere is a product of the obedience which I had devoutly avoided.** The thing I thought would be the most difficult, has turned out to be the easiest! As God and I journey together through the Holy Spirit’s influence in my life; I grow, and improve, and struggle, and comprehend – more love, more hope, more patience, more potential, more joy, more challenge, more stretching, than I thought the human frame could contain. But it’s all good. God is good. **Life is a journey. We are learning the heart of God as we learn about our own hearts too.**

Our lives too are a progressive revelation.

We have to learn deeply that the acceptable sacrifices of God no longer require a blood sacrifice - but now our blood, sweat, and tears! As we too carry Christ’s cross onward through our efforts to know God, care for ourselves, and our fellow travelers on this planet; we learn to love ourselves and God, we gain in strength and love, and are increasingly able to love our families, and neighbors, and widows, and orphans, and prisoners of spiritual as well as physical jails. As Randy Alcorn observes: “Our error has not been in overestimating the extent of God’s redemption and resurrection but *underestimating* it.”

The Truth is revealed – We are in God’s heart, and God wants to be in ours!

Deeper Still

by Scott Krippayne

*Here I am in this familiar place again Standing on the shore of my complacency
Ankle deep in love I once was swimming in Shallowness has taken over me*

*But the current pulls the sand And moves my stubborn feet
From the dryness of the land To where the waves pound over me*

*Chorus: Take me deep enough where I can see
The bottom of Your heart Deep enough that I can know Your will
Deep enough to know that we will never be apart
And when I get there Take me deeper still*

*Take me through the wonders of Your faithfulness Help me see the depth of my own
need Lead me to the water where Your mercy is For You and You alone can set me
free*

*I am covered by Your grace Far away from shore
As You're taking me to places I have never seen before - Chorus:*

*I want to drown in the water I want to drown in Your truth
Take me all the way under Where I have to trust in You - Chorus:*

For further Study:

- *John Piper's Desiring God, the 10th Anniversary Edition. He had the same idea I did! The first appendix in the back called *The goal of God in Redemptive History* reviews God's revelations as I have and probably better!*

Thoughts while reading this Chapter ~

Date:

Activities ~

1. Watch Nova, or PBS, or NatGeo, **programs on history and religion on your television.**

2. Take a class on religion at your Church, College, or on-line with the institution that you are most interested in. Consider a survey of religions course, or an ethic's course, or a theology course - of course!

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

Chapter 13

How have we gotten so many different religions?

*“We can believe what we choose.
We are answerable for what we choose to believe.”
– John Henry Newman.*

*Babel ~
Abraham ~
Ishmael to Islam ~
Israel and Judaism ~
Judaism to Christianity ~
Christianity ~
~ Catholicism ~
~ Protestantism ~
~ Offshoots ~*

Knowing a bit about the history of a subject puts it into a context that can help it to make more sense. Like a roadmap. I can see I'm on a road; will it take me west or in circles?

“Will the road you're on take you to my place?” – God.

God knows us and knows what we need – besides light and oxygen, and food, we need meaning and significance.

All I really need to know about Life, I learned from Noah's Ark:

- Don't miss the boat.
- Don't forget we're all in the same boat.
- Plan ahead--it wasn't raining when Noah built the ark.
- Stay fit--when you're 600 years old someone might ask you to do something really big.
- Don't listen to critics, just get on with what has to be done.
- For safety's sake travel in pairs.
- Two heads are better than one.
- Build your future on high ground.
- Speed isn't always an advantage, after all, the snails were on the same ark with the cheetahs.
- When you're stressed, float awhile.
- Remember the ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic was built by professionals.
- Remember that the woodpeckers inside are a larger threat than the storm outside.
- No matter what the storm, when God is with you, there's a rainbow waiting.

(author unknown)

Our world is so big and so overwhelming at times. Yet if we look at the over-all picture God seems to have kept it surprisingly simple. He started out in one area of the world relating to people and giving us revelations of Himself. Next He will complete the work in the same area – the near east. But as history has shown, it isn't an easy or simple process. God knows us and knows what we need – besides light and oxygen, and food, we need meaning and significance:

Babel ~

After the world wide flood deposited Noah's Ark on Mt. Ararat in Armenia; the Tower of Babel split created many different languages and nations. Each of Noah's sons' family-groups wandered in a different geographical direction and created religions to try to explain their existence and express their need for greater fulfillment and find forgiveness of sin. Shem's descendents went west and created the Arabs, Israel and Asia. Jephath's descendents went north and became the Anglo-Saxons. Ham's descendents went south populating Africa. From these groups we gained Buddhists, Confucius', Hindus, Islam, Jews, Taoists, and Zoroastrians, to alphabetically list only a few.

Abraham ~

God chose one family-group to continue to reveal His eternal Truth to – Abram son of Terah, descended from Noah's son Shem. At God's direction, Abram left Er of the Chaldees (the height of civilization at the time); and wandered to the area of modern day Israel (then called Cannan). During his wanderings God changed His name to Abraham. He produced two sons, Ishmael by a servant girl, Hagar; and Isaac – the miraculous child of his wife Sarah at age ninety. (For more on this see Chapter 12)

Ishmael to Islam ~

Abrahams' first son Ishmael was rejected by God to receive the continuing revelation, because he was a child of Abraham's human efforts to fulfill God's promise not the miraculous child of God's promise. (God wants to do it!) Yet God perpetuated the

For Future Generations

By 4 Hymn

The signs are obvious, they are everywhere
All that we hear about is the gloom and despair
Too many would be prophets sayin'
"It's the end of it all"
'Cause mother earth can't take much more
The hammer's gonna fall

So nature has its needs, that's a lesson learned
But it appears to me there are greater concerns
'Cause we can save the planet
Thinkin' we will somehow survive
But father time is calling us
To save somebody's life,
So...

CHORUS

I won't bend and I won't break
I won't water down my faith
I won't compromise in a world of desperation
What has been I cannot change
But for tomorrow and today
I must be a light for future generations

If we could find a way to preserve our faith
So those who follow us
See the price that was paid
Then maybe when they question
What it's gonna take to survive
They'll find the strength to carry on
In what we leave behind

REPEAT CHORUS

Lookin' in the eyes of the children
Knowing that tomorrow is at stake
When the choice is up to them
Will they have the strength to say

We won't bend and we won't break
We won't water down our faith
We won't compromise in a world of desperation
What has been we cannot change
But for tomorrow and today
We must be a light for future generations

z blessings of Abraham's abundance onto Ishmael who wandered east and became the Arabs and the religion of Islam. Islam holds many of the precepts of Judaism but slowly developed through Arab Astral religions into a separate religion hundreds of years after Jesus Christ with Mohammad [570-632 A.D.], who had visions and believed that he was the next progression in the progressive revelation.

Mohammed acknowledged the Sovereignty of Christ (but did not fully understand or embrace His teachings) and reintroduced ancient Arab Astral ideas to monotheism. "All Islamic worship commandments were not the result of Islamic divine inspiration; they all existed in Arabia before Mohammed and the Qur'an."²⁹⁷ Muhammad was a war lord and responsible for thousands killed during his lifetime, (Six hundred Jews on one day of a slaughter.) Muhammad inspired and gave Jihad (the killing of all non-muslims) in Surah 2:190, to dominate the world and kill all "Infidel" or non Muslims. Educated Muslims generally understand that the religion is based in the worship of "Allah" (who is not YHWH, the One True God, the Father of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) but the pre-Islamic moon god corresponding to the Babylonian god Bel²⁹⁸, who is symbolized by the crescent moon which tops Arab mosques and minarets. From the standpoint of a progressive revelation, Islam attempts to claims Abraham and his One True God, and worships Allah (Bel) passed down from Arabia who is one of the many evil spirits, false gods, or "fallen angels," discussed in Chapter 3. Fundamentalist Islam as it stands today is not a progression of the revelation from YHWH, but an extension of Babylonian Astral Religions cultivated in Arabia and reintroduced by Mohammed. Islam has no assurance of salvation except in Jihad" which requires followers' suicide while killing others in religious fervor (hence 9/11!).

"The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one."
- Wilhelm Stekel

Israel and Judaism ~

YAWH continued His revelations after Abraham to Isaac who fathered twin sons Jacob and Esau. Esau (again the elder son, as was Ishmael) rejected God's gifts, and Jacob (the younger son) valued them highly enough to steal them on two occasions. After Jacob's betrayal of Esau he runs in fear for his life and spends many years with his uncle where he is equally betrayed and also hugely blest. He returns to Esau with 12 sons and incredible wealth. Just before he reached Esau (in absolute terror for his life) he wrestles with God until dawn. At dawn God changes his name to Israel, and that religion is born of struggle between God and man.

²⁹⁷ Taken from Mozafar's true story in the collection *Into the Den of Infidels* published by VOM.

Confirmed by scholars as noted at www.biblebelievers.org.au/islam.htm

²⁹⁸ Encyclopedia of Religion, I:117 Washing D.C., Corpus Pub. 1979

We get the national title “Jews” from the southern tribe of Israel descended from Judah the youngest of the 12 sons of Israel.

The land his tribe inherited was called Judea. The capitol was Jerusalem. Ten of the northern tribes were carried off to other countries during the five times the nation of Israel was conquered, and are called the “Diaspora” today.

Through the nation of Israel, Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea. He was descended through both King David’s line, and the priestly line of Levi. He lived for 33 years and proclaimed Himself as the Messiah their religion had long awaited. This claim was rejected by the religious and political leaders of the time and Jesus was brutally and cruelly crucified. He resurrected three days later and presented himself to his splintered and dejected following. (For more on Jesus see chapter 5.) From this group of Jews the religion of Christianity began.

Christianity ~

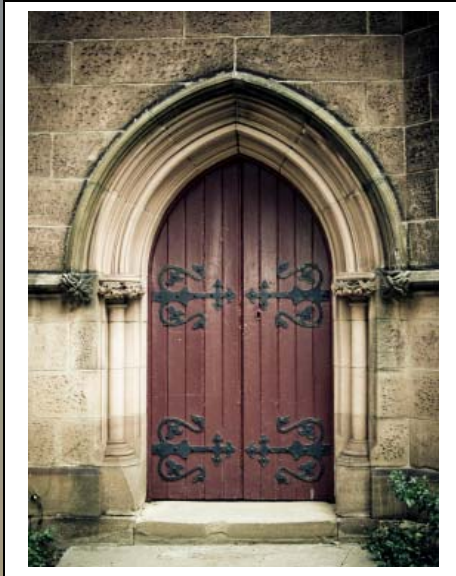
Christianity was originally a Jewish group focused on Messiah Jesus. They saw themselves as a fulfillment of Judaism, not at all as a new religion. The two coexisted uncomfortably for forty years until the final ties with Judaism were cut in 70 A.D., when the Christians decided to flee Jerusalem instead of staying and defending the temple from the Romans rage.

As persecution of both Jews and Christians raged, the surviving followers were chased out of Israel and dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. The precepts and practices of Christianity were then honed in this Hellenistic (Greek and Roman) environment and it began to lose its Hebrew roots. As Christianity grew in strength and numbers eventually a political ruler was converted. In 313A.D. The Emperor Constantine, proclaimed Christianity the official Roman religion. From this we gained the Roman Catholic Church, and the Christian “Canon” (or Bible; See Chapter’s 14, and 16 for more detail).

~ Catholicism ~

As the Roman Catholic church grew in size and power, the inevitable dive into corruption and pride produced the next set of warps in the faith; including the Crusades, and the wars that still break out today between the Catholics and Protestants in Ireland. These inevitable corruptions first produced a split between the Eastern and the Western branches of the Catholic faith. This produced what we call the Greek Orthodox Church which stayed in the east, and the Roman Catholic Church which progressed west.

~ Protestantism ~



In Germany in 1517 the Catholic Church was seen by Martin Luther as keeping the scriptures away from the people among other things, and he instigated the next split called the “Reformation” between Catholic’s and what would become Protestants by posting the Ninety-Five Thesis on the Whittenburg Cathedral door. Protestants were returning to the belief that Christ died for all and all should have access to Him. This should not require a priest, and all people should be able to read the Scriptures. This began the Anglicans, Lutherans, Calvinists, Anabaptists, and the great success of the printing press! From this protestant reformation developed the Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, and all who call themselves Protestants.

~ Offshoots ~

Throughout history people continue to learn and grow positively *and* negatively; consequently religions split. Every religion has continued to split to this day. Protestantism has produced: Church of Christ, Church of the Latter Day Saints, Evangelical Free, Friends, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormonism, Mennonite, Non-denominational, Seventh-Day Adventists, and many more.

Some Protestant splits believe “Christian doctrine” and some have strayed enough to be considered “Cults.” I highly recommend Josh McDowell’s thorough but brief discussion of this issue in “Section 3: Christianity Compared with Other Religions” found in the book *The Best of Josh McDowell, A Ready Defense*, compiled by Bill Wilson.

Thoughts while reading this Chapter ~

Date:

Activities ~

1. Attend worship services at the center of your families' religion. Then attend services at another denomination that interests you, meet some of the people there and ask them a few of your most pressing questions.

2. Worship without religion by reading your Scriptures, meditating, and praying; asking God to reveal Deity to you personally. Act on your revelations, and discuss those with others asking God for confirmation and clarity of Her revelations.

For Further Study –

- I highly recommend *My Utmost for His Highest*, by Oswald Chambers. (Be sure and get the special updated edition edited by James Reimann as previous editions are in Old English and difficult to understand.)
- Or if you want a more spiritual approach – *Space for God*, by Don Postema

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

~ Some Background ~

*“Life can only be understood backwards;
but it must be lived forwards.”*
– Soren Kierkegaard

Chapter 14

Where do we get this stuff?

“This is either madness or brilliance.”
“It’s remarkable how often those two coincide.”
-lines from the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean, Curse of the Black Pearl.*

From Holy Scriptures ~
Divinely Inspired ~
From the Holy Spirit enlivening Scriptures ~
From Professionals ~
From Saints inspired by the Holy Spirit ~
From Science, Archeology and Scholarly Study ~



From Holy Scriptures ~

Since ancient times, Judaism has revered the Scriptures as God’s revelation of Himself, and Divine rules-for-living, for mankind. **Most of our understanding of God is based on these Holy Scriptures.** The amazing, mysterious, and seemingly crazy part is that the Scriptures are understood to have a life-force of their own. This life-force comes mysteriously from God.

The Torah

The Five written Books of Moses
(Revealed to Moses by God.)

Consisting of:

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

As well as **the Oral Torah**

Consisting of:

- The Mishnah
- The Gemara
- The Midrash
- Halachah

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law,”²⁹⁹ and

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”³⁰⁰

“Inspired” means *God-breathed*. **God is the origin and revealer of all knowledge and mystery.** “How? -you ask. 2 Peter 1:21, tells us,

“No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

God wrote the Scriptures through human beings using their experiences and talents and Her inspiration:

“Which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.”³⁰¹

This leads Christians to understand that the Holy Spirit supernaturally empowers not only the writers, but also the readers’ mind and psyche to understand the words in the Holy Scriptures and to be affected by them. This leads Franciscan Priest Richard Rohr to say “that the authority of the Bible lies not just in ancient texts but in the living Christ of history.”



Divinely Inspired ~

“Jewish tradition considers every letter, word, line, story and detail of the Written Torah to be of divine origin and therefore containing an infinity of meanings. In principle, it’s impossible to say that any one line, story, or book of

²⁹⁹ Deuteronomy 29:29

³⁰⁰ 2 Timothy 3:16

³⁰¹ 1 Corinthians 2:13

The Bible

Contains 66 books divided into

The Old Testament or “Covenant”

(revealed by God to ancient authors)

Containing:

The Law ~

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

The Prophets ~

- Joshua
- Judges
- 1 & 2 Samuel
- 1 & 2 Kings
- Esther
- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel
- Hosea
- Joel
- Amos
- Obadiah
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi

The Writings ~

- Ruth
- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Solomon
- 1 & 2 Chronicles
- Lamentations
- Daniel
- Ezra
- Nehemiah

the Torah means only one thing. **There are levels upon levels of meaning in every tiny detail.**³⁰²

Most Christians agree. In Scriptures we have God coming to us to reveal Deity to us, but we have to receive it – correctly (as *God* means it, not as we want to understand it!). Communication *is* a complicated process. The Air Force did a study which determined that people normally retain only about 10% of what they hear, 30% of what they read, 50% of what they hear and read, but 90% of what they hear, read, and do. – That’s why I’ve included activities for you to integrate this information into your life!

From the Holy Spirit enlivening Scriptures ~

This brings up for me a major complication, for I have seen (and history has proven) that people can pull some strange and even dangerous ideas out of Scripture (in every religion). Not retaining or incorrectly applying the Scripture they may or may not have even understood. Therefore, God has not left us alone to try to understand Divine communications on our own. When Jesus Christ left us in bodily form and ascended into the clouds He left us with a promise *“the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you,”* in John 14:26. Therefore, **the most unique aspect of Christianity is the presence of God Herself in the form of the Holy Spirit indwelling us and helping us understand the communiqués from God correctly!** Since Jesus left us, if we’ve invited the Holy Spirit in, we now have God living inside us. It’s something that really does have to be experienced to be understood. For how can we know – really understand what it is like to be poor unless we’ve gone without most things? Or how can we have a concept of Venice unless we’ve really sailed those streets? It is one thing to have a picture from a magazine of Venice in our heads, along with stories about how you cruise in gondolas there, while it is something completely different to have memories and smells, and friends, and “inside information” about Venice which floods your mind and emotions at the slightest suggestion of the place. **When we ask God to indwell us and receive the Holy Spirit, the world really does begin to look and feel different – almost categorically opposite, and richer; you do notice the difference.** People really do give up their booze and go to work. People really do stop judging others and start serving

The New Testament or “Covenant”

(Revealed by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to Apostles and associates)

Containing:

The Gospels “Good News”~

- Matthew
- Mark
- Luke
- John

Historical narrative~

- Acts

Epistles “Letters” ~

- Romans
- 1 & 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1& 2 Thessalonians
- 1& 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon
- Hebrews
- James
- 1&2 Peter
- 1, 2, & 3 John
- Jude
- Revelations

³⁰² Arthur Kurzweil, in The Torah for Dummies.

them. People really do read a passage from the Bible they've read a hundred times before and suddenly brighten and say "Oh, so *that's* what God's saying!!!!" This really is one which you have to try it, and you'll like it! Only with the Holy Spirit's internal presence can you really appreciate what I'm saying about the Holy Spirit and her in-explainable ability to enlighten our understanding of Holy Scripture.

*"We know that we live in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit".*³⁰³

From Professionals ~

Our direct information from Scriptures through the Holy Spirit is also augmented from several places. The work of **linguists** who have studied the meaning of words and their translations is of course invaluable. There are additional **historical writings** from other authors such as Josephus, a Jewish historian (37-100 B.C.); Pliny the Elder (23-79 B.C.); and Philo, an Alexandrian philosopher (20 B.C. – 40 A.D.); that add to our understanding of the historical facts of Scripture and enrich our understandings of what those times were like.

Then there are a whole host of historical and **theological writings** that have come to us from saints of old such as Augustine, John of the Cross, Newton, Ignatius of Loyola, Julian of Norwich, and John Bunyan, to name just a few. More recently, the practice of Christianity has been greatly enhanced by writers such as the revolutionary Christian psychologist Carl Jung, The British linguist C.S. Lewis, and the German martyr Deitrich Bonhoeffer. Contemporarily, I have been awed and inspired by the writings of Father Richard Rohr, Richard Wurmbrand, and Dallas Willard.

The really amazing and hard to grasp part of the source for our current understanding of theology comes from the belief by Christians and Jews **that the writings of these saints were inspired by God the Holy Spirit**, using the unique experiences of each individual and orchestrating their circumstances and perceptions to have a new or deeper or different insight into God and our relationship to the Holy One. Arthur Kurzweil shares a tip from his teacher in *Torah for Dummies* saying,

"In principle, it's assumed that everybody hears the Torah differently. This doesn't mean that Torah study is a free-for-all where every and any interpretation is always correct. But as my teacher says, each person has a personal relationship with God, and that relationship is a completely private affair. You can and should work with a Torah teacher and try to understand the Torah through the commentaries of the great sages, but in the final analysis, you have to trust yourself and make your own decisions. As one tradition states, each of us is a letter in the Torah, and each of us must find our letter."

Mine's "P" (for peculiar, and precious in His sight!). "P" is in a lot of words, so I'm always looking for the other letters to help me understand the message. **This is exactly**

³⁰³ 1 John 4:13

why it's so important for all of us to enter into the discussion about God and share our letters!

From Saints inspired by the Holy Spirit ~

Both Jewish and Christian beliefs are a progressive interpretation of revelation from the Holy Spirit using faithful and obedient or “Holy” men and women throughout time. **We have built our understanding of God on the insights of those who have gone before us, honed by the practical and divine guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.**

I first became aware of this amazing process as I participated in a Bible study with 12 other women for a year. We all studied the same passages each week and answered the same page of questions. We then came together for a few hours each week and shared what we were learning. I was blown away to observe how 12 women could study the exact same information and learn so many diverse things from it. As I pondered this phenomenon I realized that each insight each woman got from the scripture passage combined with her life experience and personal lens made perfect sense; even to me. The Holy Scriptures *are* that alive and vital as Hebrews 4:12³⁰⁴ tells us.

We can compare this historical building process to the adaptation of the wheel into cars and trains. Each successive person has taken the inventions of someone before them and honed them, improved upon them, or built upon them, until we now have trains that are a mile long, and pull unfathomable loads, and go at speeds aptly compared with a bullet. Without the contributions of any of the persons in the process, would we be traveling this quickly and efficiently today?

Now that I've shared the recognition that Christianity has of its personal-ness, let me share with you a few quotes showing the personal experience of saints with their God:

Quotes ~

- **Jacob/Israel** [Circa 1800 B.C.] Father of the Jewish nation

“God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.”

- **Daniel 2:20-23** [605-536 B.C.]

“Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. And it is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men, and knowledge to men of understanding. It is He who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him. To Thee, O God of my fathers, I give thanks and praise, for Thou hast given me wisdom and power; even now Thou hast made known to me what we requested of Thee, for Thou hast made known to us the king's matter.”

³⁰⁴ “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

– **King Nebuchadnezzar** of Babylon [605-562 B.C.] *“It seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and His dominion is from generation to generation... The Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom He wishes and sets over it the lowliest of men.”*

- **Thomas A Kempis** [1380-1471 A.D.] from Imitation of Christ, Book 4.

“Oh the marvelous goodness and kindness that you show to us that you, Lord God, Creator and giver of life, lower yourself to come to such a poor soul, and with the fullness of your divinity and humanity satisfy her hunger! O happy mind and blessed soul that receives you, the Lord God, with devotion, and in receiving you is filled with spiritual joy! Oh, how great a Lord the soul receives! What a beloved guest she brings into her home! What a sweet companion she greets! What a faithful friend she welcomes! What a beautiful and noble spouse she embraces! I love you beyond all loves and beyond all desires! My sweet beloved, let heaven and earth and all their array be silent in your presence, for whatever they have of loveliness and worth, they are all your gifts. They can never rise to the splendor of your name, whose wisdom is beyond all measure.” -

- **A.W. Tozer** [1897-1963 A.D.]

“God takes pleasure in Himself and rejoices in His own perfection. The divine Trinity is glad in Himself! God delights in His works. A mother and a father do what they do because they love to do it. It is the same with this awesome, eternal, invisible, infinite, all-wise, omniscient God, the God of our fathers, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the God we call “our Father which art in heaven.” He is boundless and infinite; He can’t be weighed or measured; you can’t apply distance or time or space to Him, for He made it all and contains it

Great is Thy faithfulness

Classic Hymn by Thomas Chisholm
& William Runyan.
Copyrighted in 1923

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God
my Father;
There is no shadow of turning
with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy
compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been, Thou forever
will be.

Refrain

Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies
I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath
provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord,
unto me!

Summer and winter and
springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their
courses above
Join with all nature in manifold
witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy
and love.

Refrain

Pardon for sin and a peace that
endureth
Thine own dear presence to cheer
and to guide;
Strength for today and bright
hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten
thousand beside!

Refrain

all in His own heart. While He rises above it all, at the same time this God is a friendly, congenial God, and He delights in Himself. The Father delights in the Son: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). The Son delighted in the Father: “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth” (Matthew 11:25). And certainly the Holy Ghost delights in the Father and the Son.”

-Simone Weil [1909-1943]

French Jew, social activist and political radical, shares her thoughts: “He is our Father. There is nothing real in us which does not come from him. We belong to him. He loves us, since he loves himself and we are his.”

-Billy Graham [1918-present]

After a lifetime of public evangelism for Christ, shares in his Autobiography *Just as I Am*, “Most of all, if anything has been accomplished through my life, it has been solely God’s doing, not mine, and He -not I- must get the credit.”



From Science, Archeology and Scholarly Study ~

The archeological and scholarly contributions to our understanding of Scriptures are growing by leaps and bounds with the discoveries of ancient texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Nag Hammadi Papyri Codex, Washington Codex, and many other ancient discoveries. The efforts of the scores of scientists discovering and researching these finds are adding great depth, and detail to the sometimes sketchy information presented in Scripture, so that our understanding of the life and times of our ancestors, as well as their thoughts and even experiences are becoming greatly enhanced.

For Further Study

- *Torah for dummies* by Arthur Kurzweil. An easily understood overview of Torah.
- *A Ready Defense* by Josh McDowell. A very well researched collection of historical facts related to Christianity.
- *The Secret Initiation of Jesus at Qumran*, by Robert Feather. Recent historical evidence about Jesus’ life.

Thoughts while reading this Chapter ~

Date:

Activities ~

Talk with other people and begin to actively participate in your own faith and theology building.

1. Go to the religious leader of the practice you were raised with, or another practice, and ask your most pressing questions. How do they differ from and agree with your practice of origin? Consider taking them to lunch while you do this, or sending them a thoughtful gift to express your appreciation for their time.

2. Find a Spiritual Director and begin talking with them about your most pressing questions. They are trained to help you put together many diverse pieces of your life. You can locate one at www.sdiworld.org.

3. Some of the best places to talk to other people about God are Sunday school classes, and Bible Studies, or other small groups that are designed for this purpose. Here, people have come wanting this kind of conversation and are thinking about these topics already. Information flows freely and in a focused manor.

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

Chapter 15

Why does this matter?

“What we are is God’s gift to us. What we become is our gift to God.”

– Eleanor Powell

Potential ~

Sin ~

Grace ~

Relationship ~

Our Eternal Nature ~

Judgment ~

Treasure in Heaven ~

Our Destination ~

Near-Death ~

Purgatory ~

Hell ~

~Separation from God ~

~The Beginning of Eternal Punishment~

~ A Holding Place ~

~ Dante~

The Lake of Fire ~

The Second Death ~

23 minutes in Hell ~

Death ~

Potential ~

God created each one of us uniquely. Not only do we look different from each other, but we have different temperaments, talents, and capabilities. **When God was designing us She had hopes and dreams for us.** He knew how much Divinity could accomplish in us during our lifetime. Have we let the Almighty do this Divine work in us and through us? Have we lived up to our potential?

Most people are wise enough to admit “no.” But we must bear in mind that God is so infinitely creative that although we may have blown “Plan A” decades ago, God can still make miracles using “Plan B.” I suspect in my life I’m on “Plan L” or “M!” But even having wasted half my life, I can still ask and allow God to now do 100% of what She’d like to do with “Plan M!” **Our sin does not have to get in God’s way.**

Sin ~

Sin is “missing the mark,” falling short of God’s perfect standard, which is everything done in love for God. The word comes from an archery term and means hitting the target, but not getting inside the center circle. Spiritually, sin is not putting your supreme value on God, and settling for something lesser. Practically, sin is giving into our fallen fleshly nature and thinking backwards – what is wrong seems right, and what is right seems wrong.³⁰⁵



The New Testament Scriptures tell us that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”³⁰⁶

- Does your sin bother you?
- Does the prospect of death matter to you?
- Does an offer of eternal life seem attractive?

Randy Alcorn points out a possible scope of the problem in his book *Heaven*:

“The second law of thermodynamics, entropy, tells us that all things deteriorate. This means that everything was once in a better condition than it is now. Children and stars can both be born, but both ultimately become engaged in a downward spiral. Even the remotest parts of the universe reveal vast realms of fiery destruction. On the one hand, these cataclysms declare God’s greatness. On the other hand, they reflect something that is out of order on a massive scale. It seems possible that even the second law of thermodynamics (at least as it is popularly understood) may have been the product of mankind’s fall. If true, it demonstrates the mind-boggling extent of the Curse. The most remote galaxy, the most distant quasar, was somehow shaken by mankind’s sin.”

*“We can believe what we choose.
We are answerable for what we choose to believe.”*

– John Henry Newman.

Grace ~

Richard Foster once pointed out to me that **even if we had never sinned we would still need God’s grace.** I had to think about that for years, but I realized how right he was, for it is Divine Grace that sustains us. God graces us with the planet we need to sustain us – just the right distance from the sun, with just the right amount of atmosphere and gravity and full of the needed resources. The unmerited favor to create us well, in the exact environment we need to survive, full of the challenges and suffering we require to

³⁰⁵ “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.” Proverbs 14:12

³⁰⁶ Romans 6:23

grow and mature. Even with the perfection of the original design warped, God still has us in the exact environment we need!
~ God's Heart.

Where we are makes all the difference in the world.

Relationship ~

Who we are has profound implications too!

Billy Graham said: "You're born. You suffer. You die. Fortunately, there's a loophole." That loophole is a relationship with God. Yes, everyone is made in God's image. Yes, everyone is in God's heart. But if we never acknowledge that proximity and begin a **relationship with our benefactor, we never maximize our benefits from that association.** Why settle for bread and water when if you ask, you can have steak and eggs? When you were born you didn't just accept your first meal from your mom and then walk off never to speak again. You were carefully cared for (to the best of their ability) and asked for more – often (and loudly). Relationship with God makes you a child of the King. This relationship offers strength to live, comfort in the suffering, and meaning in death. It offers hope of better things both now and for eternity. It offers the direction to fulfill your personal design, and mitigation of some of the pain in living. It offers hope for more meaning, and vision for improvement **-NOW.** Even in this life we realize that our relationship choices affect us. One has eternal implications.

Our Eternal Nature ~

Because of Christ's sacrifice, death has lost its sting.³⁰⁷ **If we claim Christ, we no longer have anything to fear, but fear itself.** Yes, death will hurt. But it doesn't kill, it is merely a transition - like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. Death is us entering our cocoon, knowing we will emerge.

Death is like the "labor" of pregnancy – God allows women to get so round that they are willing to do anything to get that baby out! They are more than willing to endure the pain they know is ahead, for the reward they expect – a wrinkled, screaming, infant! As soon as the labor is over and mom is holding the precious new soul (fresh from God's creative hand), all pain is forgotten.

On the other side of death, we will again be fresh in God's creative hand! We will have endured the transition and we will be ready to start again in God's perfection – we will have graduated to Glory! We are eternal beings. We will live on eternally either in Paradise relating directly with God, or in the Lake of Fire writhing next to Satan. The Scriptures are very clear that our relationship choices matter *- e t e r n a l l y .*

³⁰⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:55

In his book *Rabbi Jesus*, Bruce Chilton summarized Jesus' goals well:

"Rabbi Jesus pushed, bullied, cajoled, berated, threatened, wheedled, whined, and otherwise made himself a nuisance until his disciples came to think of their lives not as the happenstance of pleasure and pain, but as a prophetic vocation. Each of them was to seek the life beyond this life. In God's presence alone the sum of one's sojourn on earth was measured. He offered an answer to the question posed in Ecclesiastes: "Who knows whether the spirit of people goes up above, and whether the spirit of beasts goes down under the earth?" (3:21). The direction of one's spirit, he taught, was no mere matter of happenstance; it was within one's power to influence. For this rabbi, whether you realized the Spirit of God within you or not was no abstract issue; it was a matter of life and death. He saw we are all poised on the razor's edge between our divine potential and the abyss of Gehenna [hell]. The struggle truly to be in the image of God was something you worked out in your life, in the choices you make, the strength of your convictions, the purity that could only come from your heart. It is not what goes into a person but what comes out of a person that defiles one, he had said. And what proceeds from a person is either all or nothing. "Because what should a person give for redemption of one's life?" In his final months his parables penetrated into the core of what it means to be alive and human. The disciples learned that putting their lives in jeopardy, for all the risk involved, enabled them to stand before the heavenly Chariot [God's throne] with the one like the person [Messiah]."³⁰⁸

For Further Study on how deeply all this matters, I highly recommend Richard Fosters collections of excerpts from the historical writings of some of the greatest minds in Christianity:

- Devotional Classic's or
- Spiritual Classic's, both edited by Richard Foster.

Check out his organization @ www.renovare.org to drink deeply of the things that really do matter!

Our Destination ~

In his book titled *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn asks the critical question: "Is Heaven our default destination... or is Hell?" God has revealed the Truth in the Scriptures. Christ told us in Matthew 7:13-14:

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

³⁰⁸ P.277,278.

Earlier in Deuteronomy 29:29 we were told: “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever.*” Both Heaven and Hell are absolutes in Scripture. And both have been revealed to us in amazing detail. We are further commanded in Colossians 3:1 to “*Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*” I love how Randy unpacks that command:

“The command, and its restatement, implies there is nothing automatic about setting our minds on Heaven. In fact, most commands assume a resistance to obeying them, which sets up the necessity for the command. We are told to avoid sexual immorality because it is our tendency. We are not told to avoid jumping off buildings because normally we don’t battle such a temptation. The command to think about Heaven is under attack in a hundred different ways every day. Everything militates against it. Our minds are so much set on Earth that we are unaccustomed to heavenly thinking. So we must work at it.”

Have you heard the classic challenge? – ‘If you shoot for the sun and you only attain the moon, that’s quite an achievement!’ **God is always calling, challenging, imploring us to effort to be the best we can be.** If we are always focused only on our little tiny world, the best we can be is a slightly better version of ourselves than we currently are.

Yet if we let God keep our focus on Divine Realities, and our hearts longing for the perfection of God’s plan, the best we can be is something far above and beyond all that we can ask for or imagine. Again, Randy Alcorn says it well:

“Perhaps you’re afraid of becoming ‘so Heavenly minded you’re of no earthly good.’ Relax – you have nothing to worry about! On the contrary, many of us are so earthly minded we are of no heavenly *or* earthly good. C.S. Lewis observed “If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.”³⁰⁹ We need a generation of heavenly minded people who see human beings and the earth itself not simply as they are, but as God intends them to be.”

God wants to give us everything!

- Her indwelling presence – starting now to help us achieve God’s best design for us here on earth;
- and then His perfect home for our eternal dwelling.

³⁰⁹C.S. Lewis from *Mere Christianity*



Earth is an in-between world touched by both Heaven and Hell.

Earth leads directly into Heaven or directly into Hell, affording a choice between the two.

The best of life on Earth is a glimpse of Heaven; the worst of life is a glimpse of Hell.

For Christians, this present life is the closest they will come to Hell.

For unbelievers, it is the closest they will come to Heaven.

The reality of the choice that lies before us in this life is both wonderful and awful.

- Randy Alcorn in *Heaven*

Near-Death ~

We owe a debt of gratitude to scientists who study reality for our amazing collection of information in this age. It sheds additional light on the question of where we go after death. According to the International Association for Near-Death Studies most “near death” experiences involve rapid travel toward a light, a feeling of being “somewhere-else,” then often, instantly understanding your life, and having some kind of a conversation with God, or a mind to mind understanding of judgment, which can be consoling, loving or terrifying. Often, people are greeted on the way to the source of the light by loved ones. **“Near-death experiencers’ commonly say it was unlike a dream, “more real than real;” the most powerful event in their lives. They struggle to find words to describe it, but insist they now know something new about reality, that “there’s more than what’s here.”**³¹⁰

I treasure the true story shared with me years ago by a man who had a near-death experience. He shared that he had been rather a wild-one and had a motorcycle accident as a young adult. He related the common experience of traveling with no effort through a long bright tunnel toward “a light that was brighter than anything you can imagine, but didn’t hurt my eyes.” Arriving there he was instantly aware of phenomenal things and his life made perfect sense to him for the only time ever. He was aware that he was at his judgment. Voices addressed him and told him he had a choice to make. He could stay or return to earth. He asked the voices if he had done what he was supposed to down on earth, and their reply astounded him, for they *laughed*. He felt no “judgment,” and he didn’t tell me that they told him anything specifically. He simply understood that the voices of God found the humor in the unaware wild young spirit that entertained any

³¹⁰ www.lands.org International Association for near death studies.

possibility that he could have accomplished much of divine significance or plan during his short selfish stint on earth. He chose completely of his own volition to return, and woke up in a hospital in a world of hurt. When I met him, years later, he was doing all in his power to help others and make an eternal difference with his restored life. He was a huge blessing to me!

Another insight into our eternity in Heaven is the published story of Rebecca Springer's near-death, vision/experience.³¹¹ She was unconscious for a matter of days, but experienced a period of years in Heaven. She summarized her experience this way:

"Emphatically the vision teaches there is a continuity between this life and the next, and the idea that heaven is a place fundamentally different from earth is wrong. Of course, as far as environment is concerned, all is perfect there. Nevertheless, heaven is a place where its inhabitants continue to learn and to develop." "The more earnestly we follow the studies and duties in our life of probation, the better fitted we shall be to carry them forward, on and on to completion and perfection there."

The After-life ~

These near-death stories really help us sort out the cryptic information on the after-life contained in Scripture. Scriptures suggest a couple of different things: Jesus told the thief dying next to Him on the cross, who had acknowledged His Deity, that *"today you will be with me in paradise."*³¹² Jesus also describes those passed-on actively in stories such as the story of the rich man in Hell begging for Lazarus to help him.³¹³ Further evidence for the activity of those in the after-life is Revelations 6:9-11 where the saints under the alter ask God when He will vindicate them; He gives them instructions to *"wait a little longer."* This may lend support to Jesus' also mentioning the dead *"sleeping"*.³¹⁴

These near-death stories seem to dispel the concept of sleeping, but maybe not. Since "near death" experiences obviously did not complete the "death;" perhaps after the welcome home party and a very fulfilling conversation with God, you are escorted to your 5-star hotel room under the Alter, where you can take the most luxurious nap of your life (waking only occasionally to ask "are we there yet?" or to go greet an arriving friend). The redeemed don't reappear in Scripture until Christ calls them to be robed and escort Him to the reclaiming of His eternal kingdom on earth.³¹⁵ (And that may be just the first group of the redeemed.) See Chapter 10 *"What is God going to do?"* for more on this topic.

³¹¹ *Within the Gates*, a booklet published by Christ for the Nations.

³¹² Luke 23:43

³¹³ Found in Luke 16:19-31

³¹⁴ "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep." John 11:11

³¹⁵ "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen." Revelation 19:11,13,14

For me, Rebecca Springer's account of her time in Heaven really puts the two together, for she describes the typical near-death experience and then years in Heaven where both relational interaction and rest were her activities.³¹⁶ Her account of her time in Heaven was heavily weighted in healing of intellect, emotions, and body; and involved much rest!

Death ~

The information I used above from the International Association of Near-Death Studies, only mentions in passing that peoples experience can be "terrifying." Most near-death testimonies talk about the "light" and loved ones and understanding mysteries, and so seem inviting. But most people fear death and that seems reasonable for as I also mentioned earlier, Matthew 7:13 tells us that the gate is wide that leads to destruction and *many* enter through it.

Death can be scary. I witnessed a neighbor shiver at the retelling of the death of her unsaved husband. She made it very clear that his passing was not at all peaceful and serene. I immediately thought of the scene from the movie *Ghost*, as the ghost (Patrick Swayze) chases the young man who murdered him. That unredeemed young man is hit by a car. As the redeemed ghost looks on from the spiritual realm, a dark cloud immediately envelopes the unredeemed accident victim and a myriad of small black goblins grab him and haul him into the inky blackness - screaming. Not a pretty scene, and not a comforting thought. We have much to fear in death if we do not have the Holy Spirit's assurance of Salvation.

"I had far rather walk, as I do, in daily terror of eternity, than feel that this was only a children's game in which all the contestants would get equally worthless prizes in the end.

- T.S. Eliot

Judgment ~

"*Every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*"³¹⁷ upon His triumphal return. Then, He will proceed to judge every soul who has ever lived to determine their destiny for the rest of eternity.³¹⁸ Did they choose relationship and draw nearer to God incorporating Divine strength to do good? -Writing their names into the "Book of Life?" Or did they run from God on every occasion, and cower in His presence choosing not to draw near? -Having no idea what was "good" let alone how to accomplish it?

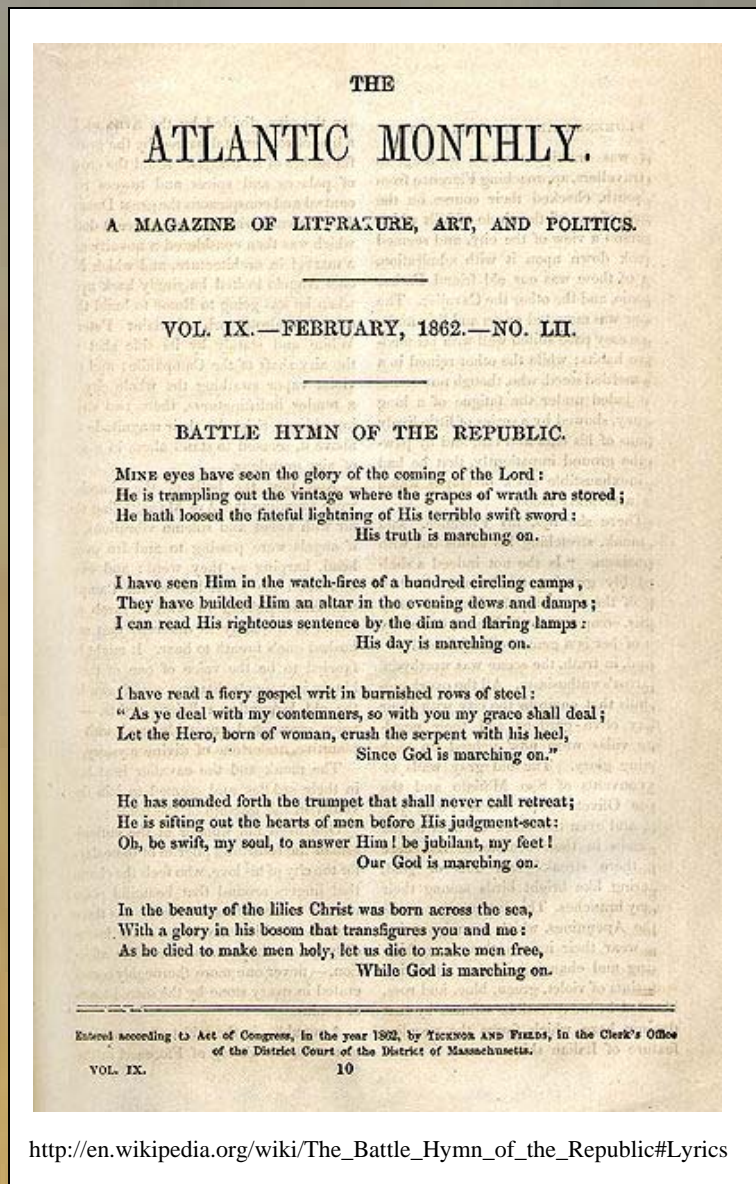
³¹⁶ *Within the Gates*, a booklet published by Christ for the Nations, containing Rebecca Springer's story.

³¹⁷ Romans 14:11

³¹⁸ "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out-those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." John 5:28,29

Even without the Scriptures, or Gospel “Good News,” people can see the greatness of God in creation; sensing that there is so much more; and realizing that they are finite and owe much gratitude to God for life, and talents, and provisions. The Scriptures tell us:

“Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and Deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not glorify Him and thank Him as God.”³¹⁹



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Battle_Hymn_of_the_Republic#Lyrics

³¹⁹ Romans 1:20-21

John Piper summarizes judgment this way in *Desiring God*:

“When every human being stands before God on the day of judgment, God would not have to use one sentence of Scripture to show us our guilt and the appropriateness of our condemnation. He would need only to ask three questions:

- 1) Was it not plain in nature that everything you had was a gift, and that you were dependent on your Maker for life and breath and everything?
- 2) Did not the judicial sentiment in your own heart always hold other people guilty when they lacked gratitude they should have had in response to a kindness you performed?
- 3) Has your life been filled with gratitude and trust toward Me in proportion to my generosity and authority? Case closed.”

Russell Stendel summarizes judgment this way in *Rescue the Captors 2*:

“The people that are living their own life and trying to use God to make the most of their own life are going to be separated off from the ones that are willing to sacrifice their own lives in order to live God’s life. This is what it is going to come down to in the end.”

What does the Bible tell us? In John 5:28,29 we are told:

“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”

Jesus was even more dramatic in Matthew 25:46:

“These [unredeemed] will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Treasure in Heaven ~

God is very clear that upon His return, He will judge our actions and motives, and look for the ones He was attempting to develop in us. **The actions or works that will count will be the ones the Holy Spirit has done in and through us**, not the works we’ve “done for God.” Russell Stendel is a modern-day “Indiana Jones” who has been working in Columbia most of his life. He has made huge in-roads bringing Christ’s love to the drug cartel, the government, and the indigenous militia all of whom have been fighting each other throughout his lifetime. He has some very illuminating insights which he shares in his books retelling his many exploits in Columbia. In *Rescue the Captors 2*, he points out:

"If it doesn't have to do with a relationship and dependence on God and on the life of Jesus Christ, it is sin." "God will receive us and the work done in and through us by the Holy Spirit, if we are in a blood covenant with Him." "When we are covered by the blood of Jesus, God begins to work in and through us by the Holy Spirit. This work is acceptable to God."

Our character, or works, or fruits of the Spirit won't determine our salvation, but they will determine our "treasures in Heaven." Do you want to be rich or poor for all eternity?

Hotel Hereafter –

Would you like your room smoking or non-smoking?



Purgatory ~

Purgatory is a Catholic concept and not strictly Biblical. (It isn't mentioned in the Scriptures.) It is a concept used in an attempt to help people understand the death and judgment process. It is described as an intermediary place where the dead go to await Christ's return and "*work out their salvation.*"³²⁰ As it helps people connect with God's grace and desire to perfect them, it is a very comforting concept. Yet Protestants don't agree with the concept of Purgatory because they think it minimizes the importance of our lives here and now, for it is here and now that we are told to "*work out our salvation*". (They disagree with the concept of reincarnation for the same reason.) Finally, the concept of Purgatory also minimizes Christ's substitutionary death. Why would God [who can speak creation into being] go to all the agony and effort of dying, if it weren't necessary?³²¹

³²⁰ Philippians 2:12

³²¹ "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" Luke 24:25,26

Webster's definitions:

Hell 1: a nether world in which the dead continue to exist : HADES. 2: the nether realm of the devil and the demons in which the damned suffer everlasting punishment. 2a : a place or state of torment or wickedness. b: a place or state of turmoil or destruction.

Purgatory 1: an intermediate state after death for expiatory purification; *specif* : a place or state of punishment where-in according to Roman Catholic doctrine the souls of those who die in God's grace may make satisfaction for past sins and so become fit for heaven.

Hell~

Hell for us today is kind of a catch-all title for excruciating suffering in a place we don't at all comprehend. Let me break it down a bit for you.

~Separation from God ~

In *The Tempest*, William Shakespeare says "Hell is empty, all the devils are here." I agree with him and not-so affectionately call this life "hell" when I'm having a bad day. For **spiritually hell means "separation from God,"** and this place surely feels distant when I let the evening news and the jerks surrounding me color my vision. But, my negative feelings aside; Hell in the Bible is a distinct (and distant) place containing the souls of the departed. Like Heaven, it too could be another dimension, or both physical and spiritual state. Knowing near-death stories makes this even more comprehensible for we know that the body dies, and yet the spirit moves on.

~ The Beginning of Eternal Punishment ~

Historically many people have chosen to interpret Hell as just a concept - of a dominating God trying to scare people into submission. Others who have felt God's endless grace can't conceive of this gracious God condemning anyone to eternal damnation. Neither group has come to grips with the paradoxes of God. Those who have thought deeply for centuries about God's character have realized as William G. T. Shedd put it in 1885, "The doctrine of Christ's vicarious atonement logically stands or falls with that of eternal punishment." I find Randy Alcorn's contemporary explanation in *Heaven* easier to understand:

A few of God's Warnings about hell

God shall judge the righteous and the wicked. - Ecclesiastes 3:17

For all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He. - Deuteronomy 32:4

The wicked are reserved for the day of doom; they shall be brought out on the day of wrath. - Job 21:30

Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup. -Psalm 11:6

Destruction from God is a terror to me. -Job 31:30

For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. -Psalm 73:27

The expectation of the wicked is wrath. - Proverbs 11:23

Because of the fierce anger of the Lord. - Jeremiah 25:37

[Adulterers] house is the way to Sheol, descending to the chambers of death. - Proverbs 7:27

Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth. -Isaiah 38:18

But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction. -Psalm 55:23

For in death there is no remembrance of You. - Psalm 6:5

Then I will bring you down with those who descend into the Pit, to the people of old, and I will make you dwell in the lowest part of the earth, in places desolate from antiquity, with those who go down to the Pit. -Ezekiel 26:20

For a fire is kindled in My anger, and shall burn to the lowest hell. -Deuteronomy 32:22

"By denying the endlessness of Hell, we minimize Christ's work on the cross. Why? Because we lower the stakes of redemption. If Christ's crucifixion and resurrection didn't deliver us from an eternal Hell, His work on the cross is less heroic, less potent, less consequential, and thus less deserving of our worship and praise."

~ *Sheol or Hades* ~

In the Hebrew Scripture the word for Hell is *Sheol* or Hades, which means "the world of the dead as if a subterranean retreat." Sheol is referred to as the lowest place, and implies emotional distress in the Scriptures. It's during the common era in the Bibles' New Testament that Hell begins to take on the torments "*where the worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.*"³²² Hell begins to be identified with the valley of Ge-hennna which was the place outside of Jerusalem where the trash was perpetually burning. **Hell is referred to as fact throughout the Scriptures.** Isaiah 28:15 & 18 tell us that before the "*Cornerstone in Zion*" [the Messiah] we had a "*covenant with death*" and a "*pact with Sheol*". The Psalmist reassures himself with "*For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol*".³²³

~ *A Holding Place* ~

Since everything changed with Christ; it **is possible that Hell was initially a holding place** for all departed spirits until

Christ overcame Satan in hell and returned with a fair number of refugees.³²⁴ Chuck Smith draws this conclusion in his book *What the World is Coming To*, where he says

³²² Mark 9:47

³²³ Psalm 16:10

³²⁴ "The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people." Matthew 27: 52,53.

"[Jesus] emptied that portion of Hades where the faithful with Abraham had waited for God to fulfill His promises."

It seems most likely that Hell is holding only unredeemed souls, for Psalm 9:17 says "*the wicked shall be turned into hell*" and Proverbs 23:14 refers to discipline delivering souls from Hell in a preventative fashion.³²⁵ Finally, Jesus himself warned His disciples "*Fear him [Satan] who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell,*"³²⁶ and defines it further as "*the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*"³²⁷ Christ referred to Hell eleven of the twelve times it is used in the New Testament. **He was serious about warning us against the result that He came and died to prevent.**

~ Dante ~

Until recently, contemporary concepts of Hell came almost entirely from Dante's classic poem *Inferno* describing 9 circles of Hell. Written in Italy sometime between 1308-1321 A.D. this amazing literary work describes hell and the suffering of the damned in great detail. It has caused some confusion however, for hell is not the final destination of the damned. Revelation 20 verses 11-15 give us the process.

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades [Hell] were thrown into the Lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire"

So, it appears that Hell is currently one of several holding places for departed souls, (the above passage also mentioned the Sea, Death, and Hades).

The Lake of Fire ~

These passages clearly tell us that "the lake of fire" is the final retribution of the unredeemed. Hell, along with Satan, and the death he brought to humanity, and all his minions, and everyone whose name is not written in Jesus Christ's book of life; all end up in the lake of fire. If we didn't respond to being cradled in God's heart, we will get booted out - not into the cold, but into heat beyond our comprehension!

³²⁵ Proverbs 23:14 "You shall strike him with the rod and rescue his soul from Sheol."

³²⁶ Matthew 10:28

³²⁷ Jesus teaching His disciples about His coming judgment of humanity in Matthew 25:41

The Second Death ~

There are two deaths we are told about in this eternal existence we have now begun. The first death is the one we all expect where our physical body expires and we leave this earth. The second death will only be experienced by those who rejected God's grace and chose damnation. It will result in their eternal occupation in the Lake of Fire. **The second death is an eternal death, and God clearly warns humans about it.**³²⁸ Bible commentator John MacArthur observes:

"No one in Scripture spoke more of judgment than Jesus. He spoke of sins that could not be forgiven, of danger of losing one's soul forever, of spending eternity in the torments of Hell, of existing forever in outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."³²⁹

In the Scriptures God is very clear that justice and retribution are part of the Divine character, and the result of His righteous anger won't be pretty. God is who God is. He gets to set up the rules and enforce them as She pleases. The fact that God goes so far out of the Holy Ones' way to warn people and redirect people is grace in action. God has every right, and all the power in the universe with which to zap us off the face of the earth at the slightest infraction of Her desires. But Divinity is not like that. God informs, teaches, redirects, warns, begs, and even came down and died the required physical death, to keep us from the fate of those who repeatedly choose to ignore the hoops God jumps through to get their attention off of the tyranny of the present and onto the freedom available in the future through extensive Divine efforts.

~ 23 minutes in Hell ~

I and many people today, used to take Hell rather lightly; after all it's in another place and another life and doesn't seem currently critical in the here and now. Many theologians have gloried in taking hell as a concept or metaphor, not to be taken literally. But as I age and death becomes more certain, I am forced to wrestle with Reality. The question of my eternal fate is becoming more and more personal and immediate, as each day passes. Bill Wiese brings a whole new jolt to reality in his New York Times Best Seller *23 Minutes in Hell*, where he tells of his personal experience there.

"Is hell a literal burning place? Absolutely. The place is an inferno. I saw the pit – a mile across and consumed with fire. I saw the liquid fire that falls like rain. I felt the extreme heat, and I smelled the stench of burning things. I do not believe the scriptures references are merely symbolic or allegorical; I believe they speak of real fire. There are many important scriptures, and I urge you to read each one of them so that you can make your own informed decision." "I believe the scripture states that presently it is in the center of the earth. I somehow knew that I was in the lower part of the earth, and I sensed

³²⁸ Revelation 20:14

³²⁹ The MacArthur Bible Commentary, speaking on Mt. 25:31-45

it to be approximately thirty-seven hundred miles deep. It was as if my senses were keener or more aware than normal. I remember thinking, **Most people up on the earth's surface have no idea that there's a whole world going on down here below the surface. They don't know or wouldn't believe that so many are here.** I remember falling to get there and ascending through the tunnel when I left."

Bill Wiese's descriptions cast J.R.R. Tolken's epic fiction *The Lord of The Rings*, in a whole new light, and lend amazing support to Dante's descriptions!

No matter how we look at it, Hell clearly isn't a positive place. Even if hell is just Satan's current hold-out with his captives; it is separated from God - and when you think about what that means it isn't pleasant. Fire and brimstone aside; physical, or metaphorical; **separation from God would mean separation from all that God is: love, justice, patience, provision, peace, kindness, joy, comfort, protection.** Just imagine being in a place with no protection, only violence; hate, impatience, disregard, distrust, anger, unhappiness, and evil reign unchecked; with certifiable eternal torment yet to come – indisputably submerged in FIRE!!

Sixteenth-century Carmelite (Catholic) nun, Teresa of Avila wrote of an agonizing vision she had received of the Lake of Fire:

"I was terrified by all this, and, though it happened nearly six years ago, I still am as I write: even as I sit here, fear seems to be depriving my body of its natural warmth. I never recall any time when I have been suffering trials or pains and when everything that we can suffer on earth has seemed to me of the slightest importance by comparison with this... It has been of the greatest benefit to me, both in taking from me all fear of the tribulations and disappointments of this life and also in strengthening me to suffer them and to give thanks to the Lord, Who, as I now believe, has delivered me from such terrible and never-ending torments."

WARNING: The seriousness of sin can be infinite. **Don't leave God's heart.** Invite Divinity to live in yours and praise God from the bottom of your heart, for the gift of Divine, eternal, Fire Insurance!

For Further Study -

- *23 Minutes in Hell*, giving his experience being in Hell. by Bill Wiese
- *Heaven*, His extensive research and report on Heaven. by Randy Alcorn

Thoughts while reading this Chapter ~

Date:

Activities ~

Being clear in our understanding of what we believe, motivates us.

1. Plan to read one of the *For Further Study* books and get settled in your hope for heaven. Then claim your assurance of Christ's atonement which will keep you out of hell.

2. Oswald Chambers tells us "The golden rule for understanding in spiritual matters is not intellect, but obedience." So, **share your newfound understandings with those you love**, and talk about what you are learning, because Jesus asks us to be "witnesses" for Him. Also, Jesus knows that talking about things helps us get them cleared up in our heads, and invites others to help us work them out. Through thought, talk, discussion, and experience; we learn to know things deeply and not just comprehend them intellectually.

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com

Chapter 16

Conclusion

*“You are precious and honored in my sight
And I love you.”*

-Isaiah 43:4

Now – after all this, I’m hoping that your vague idea that there must be a God now has some substance and structure. And more importantly - a great deal of personality! God’s Divinity is difficult and often feels demanding. Yet, from my experience, *God is funny and fun, and annoying, and anonymous, and anxious for us!* I hope you now see that too. I hope you’re inspired to continue to dig more deeply into yourself and God and continue to unite the two. I hope you now have a vision for how great your future can be – because you are *not* alone. God is with you, even within you if you ask! The power behind the universe wants to be the power beneath you!

I am aware that many of you deep thinkers are wisely questioning my presentation as “too literal” – after all much of Scripture is allegorical. I too am absolutely certain that God is not a big bird just because Jesus described Himself as wanting to gather Jerusalem under His wings;³³⁰ and yes, the Ezekiel passages about the dry bones certainly shout allegory!³³¹

Please understand that my point is *not* that every word in Scripture is going to happen exactly the way it reads (or I’ve interpreted it here). If you got that from this book, I apologize profusely, for that was not my intent. My point is only that God is certainly capable of doing something no matter how bizarre its comprehension is to us right now. No matter how astronomical an idea is, it is important to recognize that God is infinitely bigger! I practiced interior design and learned how critical the little details are to communicating an idea. As I study Scriptures I am struck by all the details. I know they are there for a reason and are important. As I look at the over three-hundred prophecies that Jesus Christ fulfilled – everything from being born in Bethlehem to also being from Egypt; I have to wonder if all those details about other prophesied events aren’t going to become astoundingly True too? And yet, paradoxically – Scriptures *are* allegorical also! Which verses are precise and which are allegory? I’m quite certain I won’t know for sure until Christ returns and explains it – just like He did for His disciples after the resurrection!

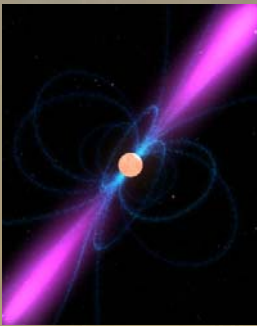


Carina Nebula

³³⁰ Psalm 17:8 & Luke 13:34, among others.

³³¹ The story is told in Ezekiel 37

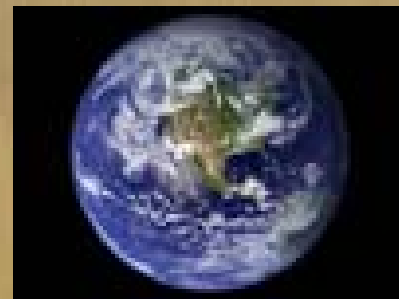
My point is only that the creator of black holes and pulsars, our earth and possibly an infinite number of other planets; can easily flood this planet, feed millions for decades in a desert, create an army out of dry bones or dust, and drop a 1,400 mile cube city down from Heaven onto a hill in Israel. NO PROBLEM. I'm not saying that these interpretations of Scripture are 100% correct. I'm quite certain that they are *not*! What I am saying is that this is the best that the deepest thinkers have interpreted, and I know about so far to share with you. I am confident that these ideas are somewhere in the ballpark of "truth," and adequate to give structure to your life, but not something to build your life around. **God is the only thing stable enough to build your life on!**³³⁰ (*Not anything any mere mortal might have to say about Divine mysteries.*)



Pulsar animation

What I am hoping you get from this writing is that God is infinitely able to do what-ever Divinity desires (and Divine desires are going to be infinitely above and beyond anything we can imagine!). We humans need to take God out of our ornate boxes and let God be God. While we concentrate on being human – well; and stop trying to run a world we don't really even comprehend. We need each other, and our different perspectives to do that. We need to enter into the discussion and compare our unique understandings so we can all see better and more fully, and think more clearly and creatively, and feel more deeply and significantly. We need each other, and **we need God!** Although God is "omni" – everything; in Her wisdom, He chose to limit Divinity and experience humanity. As the four Peveny children in the epic *Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis discovered after journeying through that mysterious land of talking animals and coming to know its maker – "He's not a *tame* lion, but He's GOOD!"

It is my prayer that you saw in this book just how good God is. His love is profound. Her grace is limitless. The Divine desire and motivation is to include you in the eternally perfect family. God's willingness to do whatever it takes to perfect a broken creation is infinite. ***You are in God's heart.*** Will you stay and snuggle in?



Earth Picture from NASA

³³⁰ "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 3:11 All pictures courtesy of NASA www.nasa.gov.

Now that it's done, I see this book as a bullet train. I had the incredible privilege of engineering it from hundreds of parts invented or honed by hundreds of souls much greater than mine. I felt God's presence and feel like Her ghostwriter. I learned so much. I hope you did too. Thank you for riding with me on this journey of discovery through very mysterious and amazing terrain. I know we rocketed through it and saw but a fraction, but I hope that our journey together has blest you and taken you somewhere that you wanted to go. I hope you also feel a new confidence in where you are and new enthusiasm in the direction you have chosen to go!

My intended destination for us was into the heart of God. I hope that you now find yourself there. Whether you continue on this train or choose another, I wish you Godspeed.

You remain in my heart and prayers.

~ Heather

THE INTERVIEW WITH GOD

I dreamed I had an interview with God.

"So you would like to interview me?" God asked.

"If you have the time" I said.

God smiled. "My time is eternity.
What questions do you have in mind for me?"

"What surprises you most about humankind?"

God answered...
"That they get bored with childhood,
they rush to grow up, and then long to be children again."

"That they lose their health to make money...
and then lose their money to restore their health."

"That by thinking anxiously about the future, they forget the present,
such that they live in neither the present nor the future."

"That they live as if they will never die,
and die as though they had never lived."

God's hand took mine and we were silent for a while.

And then I asked...

"As a parent, what are some of life's lessons you want your children to learn?"

"To learn they cannot make anyone love them.
All they can do is let themselves be loved."

"To learn that it is not good
to compare themselves to others."

"To learn to forgive by practicing forgiveness."

"To learn that it only takes a few seconds
to open profound wounds in those they love,
and it can take many years to heal them."

"To learn that a rich person
is not one who has the most,
but is one who needs the least."

"To learn that there are people who love them dearly,
but simply have not yet learned how to express or show their feelings."

"To learn that two people can look at the same thing and see it differently."

"To learn that it is not enough that they forgive one another,
but they must also forgive themselves."

"Thank you for your time," I said humbly.

"Is there anything else you would like your children to know?"

God smiled and said,
"Just know that I am here... always."

-author unknown

For more encouragement and information on the author go to www.GodforEveryone.com

Chapter 17

Some Terms to Define

“The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.”
– John Wesley

All sub-groups in society have their own language, special concepts, and terms which they use in addition to the language of the nation they reside. Christianity is no exception and has much “Christian-ese.” I have attempted to define much of it here, which I hope helps with understanding and comfort in the subject.

A

Adultery ~ A married person having sexual intercourse with someone who is not their spouse.

Amen ~ I agree. It is traditionally said at the end of prayers, and is a clue that the person is finished. So, as a child, I thought it meant “the end.” Yet we say it at the end of prayers reminding ourselves that we’ve prayed God’s words, in God’s strength, by faith, and we are choosing to agree with those words of God. The Pentecostals have its use more honed – they join each other in prayer, agreeing out loud, by frequently saying “Amen, brother (or sister)!”

Anointed ~ Dedicated to God, set apart and empowered for a specific purpose.

Agnostic ~ A person who is uncertain whether or not God exists.

Apologetic ~ A person who does the work or process of defending the faith of Christianity.

Apostles ~ The twelve “official” leaders which Christ left behind to lead his church, and expanded to thirteen when Saul was converted to Paul.

Atonement ~ Literally, “At-one-ment.” The complete solution for the problem of sin. Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, achieved this total fix from God’s perspective.

Apocrypha ~ Writings originally considered “cannon” or the official standard of Faith for Christianity. Some of these writings were removed by the Roman Catholic Church when it split from the Eastern Greek Orthodox Church, and then more were removed when Protestants split from Catholicism. *The Common Bible* now includes them. The best argument I’ve heard for their exclusion in Protestant Bibles is that not once were they quoted by Jesus or His followers, while their “Bible” books are quoted often.

Apologetics ~ The study of defending the Gospel, or Christianity.

Atheist ~ A person who believes in the existence of God and chooses a position against Him.

Wonderful Words of Life

By Philip Bliss

Sing them over again to me,
Wonderful words of Life;
Let me more of their beauty see,
Wonderful words of Life.
Words of life and beauty, Teach
me faith and duty.

Christ, the blessed One, gives to
all Wonderful words of Life;
Sinner, list to the loving call,
Wonderful words of Life.
All so freely given, Wooing us to
heaven.

Sweetly echo the gospel call,
Wonderful words of Life;
Offer pardon and peace to all,
Wonderful words of Life.
Jesus, only Savior, Sanctify
forever.

Beautiful words, Wonderful
words, Wonderful words of Life.

B

Believers ~ People who choose faith in God as revealed through Jesus Christ.

Betrothed ~ The Jewish term for engagement. This period was considered married and required a “divorce” to end it, but the marriage was not yet consummated, and the couple still lived with their respective parents.

Bible ~ The Holy Scriptures. Has many forms and translations.

Bishop ~ The head of a Dioceses in the Catholic Church.

Blasphemy ~ Calling God evil, and rejecting the Holy Spirit whom a person has known.

Body of Christ ~ The corporate body of believers in Jesus Christ. This includes everyone who has believed on Jesus, and is acting in obedience to Him.

Book of Life ~ The book kept by God noting all the names of people who have loved God and served God, and acknowledged God - especially in His human form as Jesus Christ (also called Lambs book of life Revelation 21:27); these are the names of all the people who will spend eternity in Heaven with God according to Revelation 3:5.

Born again ~ the slang term for the spiritual transformation which occurs when someone accepts the Divinity of Jesus Christ and the subsequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Bride of Christ ~ The corporate Body of Christ, perfected, and made ready for the complete union with Christ that the Scriptures only hint at.

Brothers ~ In the Catholic tradition it is a title meaning involved in leadership but not ordained; in the Protestant traditions it means people related in the Body of Christ.

Burden ~ the weight of sin that we all carry and feel deeply.

C

Cannon ~ Literally, “the measuring rod” or “yardstick.” The “standard,” or officially accepted list of books that define Christianity. The time tested, yet not fully agreed upon books (several different denominations add a few) that are considered “God inspired” and constitute Scripture.

Christ ~ meaning “Messiah”.

Catholic ~ The first Christian religion which developed into an authority system headed by the Pope in Rome.

Celibacy ~ Choosing a life-style that does not include sexual relationships.

church vs. Church ~ church with a little “c” is a religious institution. Church with a capitol “C” is really the “Body of Christ,” in the New Testament Scriptures.

Charismatic ~ Greek root word *charismata* meaning unmerited favor (grace gifts) – usually used as a title for the Christian sub-group of people who use the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Cult ~ A group with Christian beliefs but adding some significant doctrine not accepted by general Christian interpretation of the Scriptures. Some examples are Gnostics (for their *later* rejection of the physical-ness of Jesus), Mormons (for their emphasis on salvation by works), Jehovah’s Witnesses (for their rejection of the value of the human soul), to name only a few.

Conscience ~ Oswald Chambers said it best, “Conscience is that ability within me that attaches itself to the highest standard I know, and then continually reminds me of what that standard demands that I do. This explains why conscience is different in different people. If I am in the habit of continually holding God’s standard in front of me, my conscience will always direct me to God’s perfect law and indicate what I should do” If I

am not educating myself on God's desires, and asking the Holy Spirit to teach them to me and keep me in them, then my conscience is suspect.

Conservatives ~ The sub-group of Christians who place their doctrinal emphasis on the law and observance of Scriptural details.

Convert ~ Someone who has experienced Conversion (see definition below).

Conversion ~ A change from the normal physical perspective on life to a spiritual one. The time when people choose to submit to Jesus Christ's spiritual and physical ruler-ship of their lives and receive the Holy Spirit internally as gift; animating them to begin functioning spiritually. (Some denominations break this process up and call the indwelling of the Holy Spirit portion, [which sometimes does come much later]; "the baptism of the Spirit.")

Covenant ~ A two-way agreement similar to a contract, except that contracts tend to have ending dates. A covenant has no end.

D

Devil ~ Satan, Dragon, Lucifer, Serpent, all names for the chief manifestation of evil in this world. "The great deceiver," "The father of lies," "The enemy of our souls," are but a few of his titles.

Deity ~ God, "The rank or essential nature of a God" Historically used more loosely than just THE GOD, and often included lesser powers, or gods.

Divine ~ Coming from God.

Divinity ~ the quality of being Divine.

Doctrine ~ The set of beliefs a religion is built on, or identifies as crucial within that religion.

Dogma ~ Someone officials' collection of what you are supposed to believe, whether you believe it or not. (Thus Dogma varies dramatically based on the institution you are associating yourself with.)

E

Elect ~ The people chosen by God.

Enthusiasm ~ God within you, passion from God.

Evangelicals ~ The sub-group of Christians who consider themselves "Born Again," and place their doctrinal emphasis on witnessing this belief in Jesus Christ to others.

F

Faith ~ The evidence of a regenerated Spirit. The gifting from the Holy Spirit which allows a person to trust God and not depend on their own capabilities. (See 1 John.)

Father ~ Title for a Catholic religious leader of a church.

Fellowship ~ Congenial group relationships; the foundation of Christian interaction and the historical context for group worship and meals.

Fornication ~ Sexual relationship(s) outside of marriage.

Fruits of the Spirit ~ Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Gentleness, Faith, and Self-control; Divine gifts given by the Holy Spirit to enable Her followers.

Fundamentalists ~ A sub-group of Christians who put more emphasis on their doctrine, and "following the rules."

G

Gemara ~ Aramaic commentaries on Torah. Part of the Oral Torah

Gentiles ~ Everyone who is not Jewish.

Glory of God ~ The splendor that surrounds God, visually and spiritually. What God looks like to God – unveiled; Gods' shape or clothing and content. Further expounded in Chapter 12.

God ~ **The** Supreme Being – “The Man upstairs,” “The Holy One,” “YHVH,” “The Almighty,” “Trinity,” are only a few of the titles people use to refer to this supreme entity which is unseen, and other worldly; except during the thirty-three year manifestation of Jesus Christ bodily.

God the Father ~ The director, the personality of God which is the ultimate authority. (See Chapter 2.)

God the Son ~ Jesus Christ, the physical representation of God on Earth. (See Chapter 5)

God the Holy Spirit ~ The Spirit of God, The second or third* person of the Trinity or Godhead or Divinity. (See Chapter 6) *Eastern Christianity counts the Spirit second in the Trinity, Western Christianity counts the Spirit third. (Biblically, neither the Spirit nor the Son seem to care!)

Glory of God ~ God's glory is Divine unveiled magnificence and excellence. (Most of it is veiled right now!)

Godhead ~ Another name for the Trinity.

Good News ~ The positive content of the Gospel being turned into a title for that message.

Gospel ~ The message of the good news of Jesus Christ's offer of redemption from sin and reconnection with God.

Gospels ~ The first four books of the New Testament; Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They contain the story of Yeshua, Jesus, or the awaited Jewish Messiah of Israel.

Graduate to Glory ~ death. The transformation from this physical world to the Spiritual world of God's presence and Glory.

Grace ~ Unmerited favor. God giving us EVERYTHING, when we deserve nothing. It is usually used with the Spiritual gifts of salvation and God's Spiritual indwelling emphasized; but it encompasses both the spiritual and the physical gifts of life: oxygen, cogence, and all other things required to survive let alone thrive.

H

Hades ~ A place separated from God that holds the souls of the dead.

Halo ~ An aura of light emanating from people, initially conceived around the head and now scientifically documented to emanate from people in inferred light spectrums.

Hedonistic ~ Self-serving, doing things for physical pleasure as the highest priority.

Hebrew ~ The early national title for the group of people we now call Israel or the Jews.

Hebrew Scriptures ~ The Torah (the Old Testament).

Hell ~ Separation from God, and a holding place of the dead.

I

Incarnate ~ Made physical from the spiritual.

Inspired ~ “In Spirit,” functioning in the Spirit's power.

Israel ~ The father of the Hebrews/Jews, and the name of the nation descended from him.

J

Jews ~ the national group of people descended from Israel. Ten of the Twelve tribes went into captivity and disappeared. Two remained, the largest of which was the tribe of Judah. This became the name Jews, the remnant of the Hebrews whose capitol was Jerusalem. (See Chapter 13).

Jesus ~ An Incarnation of Divinity called the “Son;” The historical person born roughly 4 B.C. who lived 33 years until His crucifixion and later resurrection. (See chapter 5)

K

Kiddish ~ Jewish blessing said over a glass wine. Also the name used by some for the celebration of community involving the breaking of bread and drinking of wine, observed at the end of Shabbat services, and at all feasts.

L

Lake of fire ~ The eternal destination promised for Satan and all those who reject God and His revelation of Himself as Jesus Christ.

Law ~ A set of requirements you must do, whether it is good for you or not.

Lost ~ People who have no understanding of God and therefore are not acting in the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit in their lives, or holding on to the hope of an eternity in Heaven.

Liberals ~ The sub-group of Christians who embrace more contemporary ideas, and place less doctrinal emphasis on historical traditions.

Lucifer ~ Satan, Dragon, Devil, Serpent, all names for the chief manifestation of evil in this world. “The great deceiver,” “The father of lies,” “The enemy of our souls,” are but a few of his titles.

M

Mass ~ The regular Catholic religious worship service or group experience.

Messiah ~ means “anointed one” in Hebrew and Aramaic. Anointed by God.

Midrash ~ Doctrinal studies of the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures, or Torah. Part of the Oral Torah, collected 100 B.C. – 300 A.D.

Mishnah ~ Meaning “explanation or teaching,” were a collection of Jewish traditions and exposition of the Oral Torah. Written in Hebrew approximately 200 A.D. they are often regarded by Jews as the second law.

Monogamy ~ Choosing a life-style that is committed to one sexual partner of the opposite sex.

Monotheistic ~ Belief in one God

N

New Testament ~ The written history of Jesus Christ and the prophetic warnings of our time period. This book is made up of 27 “books” which are the writings and letters of Jesus’ early apostles and followers, covering 4 B.C. to today. (See Chapter 14 Where do we get this stuff? for more information.)

O

Old Testament ~ The ancient stories from the era before Christ preserved in Scriptures in the 66 books contained in the “Old Testament.” These stories cover almost 4,000 years of oral and written history preserved by very diverse writers who are believed to be Divinely inspired. (For more information see Chapter 14 Where do we get this stuff?).

Ordained ~ A documented position of someone who has been educated, approved, and ceremonially presented by a governing religious group as understanding and correctly communicating their doctrine.

Orthodox ~ Conservative. Believing a specific body of doctrine with great historic traditions behind it.

P

Pagans ~ People who don’t believe in God.

Pastor ~ Title for a Protestant religious leader; and Catholic title for the head of a Parish.

Pentecost ~ The day the Holy Spirit first indwelt believers. The story is told in Acts 2.

Pentecostal ~ The Christian, Protestant, sub-group or denominations which focus more on the Gifts of the Spirit.

Polytheistic ~ Belief in many Gods.

Prevenient Grace ~ The unmerited favor of the Holy Spirit at work in the life of a person who has yet to choose belief in God and Jesus as His revelation. Because God knows that someday this person *will* choose belief, so God is helping them even before the choice is made.

Priest ~ Title for an entry level Catholic religious leader.

Prophet ~ a person who communicates God’s will and the future to the people as divine inspiration leads.

Protestant ~ The second major category of Christian religions developed after Martin Luther split from Catholicism. (See chapter 13 on Religions for more information.)

Psyche ~ The Greek word for Soul

Psychology ~ The study of the human psyche/soul.

Parson ~ Another title for a religious leader, usually a small town religious leader.

R

Rector ~ Title for a Catholic religious leader.

Redeemed ~ Those people who have chosen to take Christ up on His offer of assistance in this life through the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit, and later, eternal life with Him in Heaven.

Regeneration ~ God’s supernatural work in our hearts which produces repentance.

Repentance ~ Means “turning around or away from something.” It is our required response to God’s grace. By turning from our sin, and embracing God’s love.

Resurrection ~ Conquering death by coming back to life after death.

Retribution ~ Getting even, producing justice.

Reverend ~ Ordained (approved) religious leader.

S

Sacrament ~ An outward sign of an inward grace. Protestants recognize Baptism and Communion, the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist. Catholics add Confirmation, Marriage, Penance, Holy Orders, and Extreme Unction.

Saints ~ Godly people who have made exceptional efforts to follow after God. An official title conferred by the Catholic Church in Catholicism; but an inclusive group of all the members of Christ's body who take that membership seriously in Protestantism.

Salvation ~ Atonement of sin achieved by the life and death of Jesus Christ

Sanctification ~ In Hebrew, the word for *marriage* means our completion, our perfection in God. A setting apart of our souls to God. Generally perceived as a process. (See Romans 6-8, and Ephesians 4.)

Satan ~ The entity embodying evil.

Saved ~ The slang term used for people who have claimed God's offer of atonement.

Scriptures ~ Holy writings that define religions.

Second Coming ~ The awaited return of Jesus Christ as the conquering warrior that the Jews have long expected.

Sect ~ A religious group.

Service (s) ~ The regular group worship experience. Or Extending yourself to help another person.

Shekinah ~ Hebrew word for God's glory, specifically associated with the visually observable quality of the Holy Spirit. (See Chapter 6).

Sheol ~ Hebrew word for hell. (See Chapter 15).

Sin ~ "Missing the mark," falling short of God's perfect standard, or anything not done in love. The word comes from an archery term and means hitting the target, but not getting inside the yellow center circle. Spiritually it is not putting your supreme value on God, and settling for something lesser. Practically it is thinking backwards – what is wrong seems right, and what is right seems wrong.

Sister ~ Women consecrated to the Lord in Catholic traditions; women related through the Body of Christ in Protestant traditions.

Soul ~ The container of our mind, will, and emotions. (See Chapter 2.)

Spirit ~ That part of us which is invisible and a reflection of the Divine.

Synagogue ~ A Jewish smaller local house of worship.

T

Temple ~ The title of the building used for religious services. The main synagogue building which is central to Jewish faith.

Testimony ~ A witness to and about something.

Theology ~ The study of God, or the science of discovering God.

Torah ~ The Jewish term for the first five books of Scripture written by Moses. (See Chapter 14).

Trinity ~ The name emphasizing the three-person aspect of God unified in One God. (See Chapter 2).

U

Union ~ The concept of joining with God as one complete entity. Hinted at by sexual intercourse in the context of intimate marriage; containing full knowledge, understanding, disclosure, value, and esteem- all wrapped in wholistic love; Ultimate arrival, similar to the concept of nirvana.

Unredeemed ~ Those people who have not acknowledged the Divinity of Jesus Christ and are therefore not redeemed from this fallen state and are not destined for an eternity with God.

W

Wholistic ~ Lacking no part, containing everything in perfection = whole and complete.

Worship ~ Prioritizing and focusing on God in thought and actions. (See Chapters 3 & 9.)

Y

Yeshua ~ The Jewish Messiah awaited by Israel; the common name in first century Israel of “Jesus,” translated “Joshua”.

Z

Zion ~ God’s mountain, in Jerusalem.

For Further Study –

I can highly recommend Richard Fosters’ Celebration of Discipline.

Where he says:

“We have only one thing to do, namely, to experience a life of relationship and intimacy with God.”

Thoughts while reading this Chapter ~

Date:

Activities ~

Since God is a relational God and wants us in and learning from relationships on this earth, work on yours or make some more!

1. Work on your connection to God by **repeating this affirmation to yourself** as often as possible:
 - I am eternal because I am made in the image of the eternal God.
 - I can choose to love, because God loves.
 - I can act in kindness, because kindness is God's character.
 - I can choose faith instead of fear, for Christ has conquered death, and made a way.
 - I can sacrifice myself, because God has shown me how.
 - I can hope for a better life now, because God has made every good gift available to me through Jesus Christ.
 - I can bring God glory, by letting God shine through me.
 - I can do all things because The Holy Spirit dwells within me.
2. **Do something special or extravagant for your spouse or family** – maybe just sit down and look them in the eye and tell them how much you love them!
3. Join a Bible Study, or Church or AA group, and **start building relationships with Godly people.**

For Group questions and activities see: www.GodforEveryone.com