

The Wonders of Our God

Think of this selection as a guide book, not an encyclopedia. There is so much that could be said about our God. These pages are intended to give you a few practical pointers for basic understanding and to whet your appetite for taking the lifelong journey into knowing Him better. "In the beginning" we all see His works as Creator, but He wants to be known far more intimately than that. Through Jesus the Great High God has come to earth. Let Jesus take you ever deeper into the endless revealing of God to you.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1
ESV



No man has ever seen God at any time; the only unique Son, or the only begotten God, Who is in the bosom [in the intimate presence] of the Father, He has declared Him [He has revealed Him and brought Him out where He can be seen; He has interpreted Him and He has made Him known]. John 1:18 AMP

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Knowing about God

Now that Jesus has "introduced" Himself to us through our faith-conversion, we know that we are on very solid ground in seeking to gain true knowledge of God through the pages of scripture. As good as that is, however, it is only one of the ways.



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God, the Mysterious Other

Although we are made in His Image, we will never know (within our own nature) what these majestic attributes are like, but it is such a great, good thing that He does! Let your appreciation for the Lord soar as you gaze upon the Most High God.

God, Our Intimate Friend

The funny thing is how we are so bent on trying to be like God when it comes to being all-knowing, all-controlling, and everywhere at once. We race past the true God-likeness waiting for us every day! At any moment we can enter into His divine nature.

God, the Three in One

Get ready for Enigma, Riddle and Paradox. These aren't Biblical names for God, but they might as well be. Solomon wrote it is the glory of God to conceal things and the glory of kings to search them out. Time to explore a Mystery multiplied by Three!

Passover, Pentecost and Booths

What do the three great pilgrimage festivals of ancient Israel have to do with our Triune God? Plenty! Seeing their relevance even for us today, it's no wonder that the Lord commanded His believing people to "present" themselves before Him.

God, Our Father in Heaven

Someone has to be in charge and we couldn't hope for a more loving, joyful or completely competent Being to take the reins. Nevertheless, Satan seduced humanity into thinking that his Enemy is somehow our enemy. Let's set the record straight!

The Father as "Seen" in Scripture

The Lord told Moses that no one could see Him and live. Fortunately, it seems that God is able to break His own rules, because many people have seen God "face to face" with no negative side effects. These close encounters are tantalizing to "see"!

The Father's Heart of Love

We become like the image we bear—the image carried deep inside. For many of us the Father's image has been distorted by Adam's nature, earthly parents, and misguided church teachings. Jesus came to reveal what the Father is really like.



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For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](http://www.healingstreamsusa.org) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](http://www.forerunners4him.org). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](http://www.forerunners4him.org) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](http://www.forerunners4him.org) at our website.



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CHAPTER ONE

The God of All Grace

It is a good thing that our God is a God of grace. We need grace more than the air we breathe! Our need for God to supply us everything necessary for life and right living is endless, because we will certainly need Him to go on supplying all things to us throughout the endless reaches of eternity. Yet, this is apparently what God loves to do: give freely. He gives without measure, without reserve, apparently without our qualification and often without our cooperation. He gives until there is no need left to fill, and then He overfills—just to make sure that our joy begins to match His.

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:10-11
ESV

God Gives Grace

One of His Names actually is the God of All Grace. Don't you love that? If you are crushingly aware of your sins or sinfulness, if you are desperately aware of your needs and weaknesses, you just have to love this Being who calls Himself the God of All Grace. That is exactly what we need!

An old Pentecostal preacher once said that all preaching can be summed up with these two ideas: humanity's need and God's supply. We are the endlessly needy ones and yet the greater tragedy of our need is that we have nothing to give in exchange. Grace means that God's supply comes to us as a never-ending, undeserved torrent of giving.



His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence. 2
Peter 1:3 ESV

Grace is not merely an attribute of God as great as that would be. Grace is a "code name" for the Father who loves us, Jesus whose Blood saves us, and the Spirit who helps us. Whenever you experience a moment saturated with grace, you have just had a close personal encounter with your God! You can look at God and His grace this way:

1. Grace as undeserved love comes to us from the heart of the Father who created us.
2. Grace as undeserved mercy comes to us through the "work" of Jesus at the cross.



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3. Grace as undeserved help comes through the “work” of the Holy Spirit in and around us.

Let’s see how this “plays out” in terms of the new life God is so freely offering us through our faith in Christ.

A Life Sustained by Grace

Perhaps the best way to understand grace is to try to remember what it was like to be a child, on those good days when no one and nothing was hurting or oppressing you. In those early “sunny” days of life you easily emerged into freedom. You rarely ever thought of yourself, except at those times when you got a boo-boo or required a bottle. You simply headed out into the world with a reckless abandonment to life.

As a young child you were a confident, bright-eyed explorer of your little world. You were so “brave” you would have crawled off tables or stuck your finger into sockets, if adults didn’t protect you. You readily and freely played with other children. No one had to teach you how to play. No one had to teach you how to be absolutely beautiful and loving, endlessly fascinating to the adults around you. No one that is expect the Holy Spirit who was your secret, unrecognized Teacher.

Did you ever stop to worry if you would ever learn to walk, or crawl, or talk, or feed yourself? No! You went at growth in every area with delight and determination. You couldn’t be stopped! Did you worry about your brain, or your looks, or your body parts, or how the world works? No! You just plunged ahead with an inner conviction that the world was your oyster—given to you for you to enjoy and explore.

A Life Made Possible by Trust

In short, you trusted and loved freely. This made you a marvel to behold! If you lost any or all of this (as most kids do), it was because you have an invisible enemy whose kingdom relentlessly worked to “beat” it out of you through the sins of others, your own sins and the failings of a fallen world.

A child’s whole approach to life is initiated and sustained by the Holy Spirit—without the child ever realizing it or knowing Who to thank! God was doing everything important and necessary for you to be able to be a happy, delighted child. All you had to do was keep trusting, keep loving and keep exploring. Grace made even your part in all this seem natural and easy. Jesus says that the new life requires becoming childlike again!

And He called a little child to Himself and put him in the midst of them, and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you repent (change, turn about) and become like little children [trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving], you can never enter the kingdom of heaven [at all].” Matthew 18:2-3 AMP

Our part is to keep trusting (our God of grace), keep loving (God, others, self), and keep exploring what it means to follow Jesus one step at a time. The new life is literally meant to be child’s play, with a smattering of battles mixed in where we have to take down the old nature of



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our former self, so that we can keep entering into the peace of Christ through our trust and obedience.

Grace Is Indestructible

Since God is asking us to bet our lives on His grace always being there for us, He has shown us how powerful it is.

1. Grace is an unchanging part of the very nature of God.

Giving grace may seem unnatural for us (hence we have a hard time trusting ourselves to it), but it comes naturally to God. It is the way He is. He is not about to change. That's grace.

2. Grace is backed up by the written promises of God.

God knows that to us He's invisible. It isn't that He is truly invisible; it's just that we are blind. To help us He has given us the visible evidence of His Word. The Father has sworn by His own Word, Jesus has testified to the truth of the Word, and martyrs throughout the ages have given their lives in witness to the Word. That's grace.

3. Grace is demonstrated by the Blood of His Son.

Before we even knew we needed mercy, God sent Jesus to the cross. The Blood Jesus shed is a vibrant demonstration of the Father's love and a visible proof (to our eyes of faith) that our sins have been fully covered. That's grace!

4. Grace is guaranteed by the gift of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit has freely chosen in love to live within us. Not only that but He has volunteered to be united to us as a guarantee of the good things to come, as sure and certain evidence that we are being saved. All of the help He gives us is His gift of grace to us, whether it is comfort, joy, encouragement, understanding of the scriptures, love of the truth, hope, strength to persevere, correction, guidance or empowerment for ministry. That's a whole lot of grace!



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CHAPTER TWO

Knowing God

Really knowing God is a lifelong journey. Assuming that you have “met” Our God through faith in Jesus, now you know that to know Him is to love Him. Knowing by faith that you have a Savior in Jesus has brought you peace, confidence in God and an effortless joy in loving Him. Feelings come and go, but a true knowing of God will always restore you to peace, confidence and joy no matter what your circumstances. If ever your love for God wanes, or you yearn for it to wax brighter, seek to know Him better...

“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” John 17:3 ESV

Knowing God Better

Think of knowing God as part natural curiosity, part love-desire, and part raw, naked need! Spiritual rebirth through faith in Christ awakens us to the awareness that God is truly with us and that He can be known. This launches us on a quest to learn everything we can about Jesus. We want to “love back” the One who first loved us by worshipping Him and by being a pleasing child. Naturally enough, now that we know Him, we study the Bible to learn more about Him and we celebrate the faith-revelation which introduced us to Jesus in the first place. Take care, there is much more to knowing God than this.



The main thing to know about our God is that you always need to know Him better than you do (even if you already “know” Him) and that He wants to help you get to know Him better. Truly knowing God is never a “been there, done that” proposition. How well do you know Him right now and in your current situation? Is He capturing your heart, or is something else? Are you entering into His peace and joy, or drifting further away? Knowing Him better changes everything—if He’s what you’re looking for. But if you aren’t looking for Him as the answer to every need, you really don’t know Him like you need to. See how that works? It’s a perfect circle—with you in the loop.

The other thing to know is that what you need is not nearly so much knowledge about Him, as knowledge of Him. Intimacy is the name of the game where the knowledge of God is concerned. Never settle for head knowledge alone or make too much of times close to Him in the past. Be glad for those gains, but the real test of knowing of the Lord comes through how we respond to Him now. We are meant to take our life in His Hands personally, “pressing in” to know Him as well as He has already pressed in to know us.



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"Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth." Hosea 6:3 ESV

One of the ways our God helps is deep down. The desire to know God comes from God. It is a genuine sign that He is drawing us. Even as an unbeliever He placed "eternity" in your heart, making you aware of a void that only God can fill. Now, as one reborn through faith in Christ, He has given you a new heart, already "pre-packaged" with desires to seek, love and serve Him, sustained by no less a Helper than His own Holy Spirit.

Beyond Name Recognition

Knowing God begins with knowing His name, or in reality, some of His many names: Father, Son, Holy Spirit, for instance. But that is just the beginning. You are being invited to know Him far more personally, first of all, by discovering that Jesus is the Savior of your soul. That's where our journey of faith with the living God begins—with the revelation of Jesus Christ as our resurrected Lord. When this happens, people readily say, "I know, that I know, that He is alive and that He is Lord.

Jesus, in turn, wants to immerse you to overflowing with His Holy Spirit through [The Baptism of Power](#). This second revelation can be as intensely personal as the first. For those who receive it, the activity of the Holy Spirit is often more readily identified and cooperated with in daily life. Beyond this, may come a time when Jesus more fully reveals His Father to you. These "enhancements" aren't necessary for getting us to heaven—faith in Christ is all that is required for that—but they certainly can make life more heavenly down here. Intimate revelations don't have to come in any particular order or by any identifiable pattern. Just know that God can be known in these ways and keep pressing in. (For more on this see [Passover, Pentecost and Booths](#).)

Don't stop there. Intimacy means "in-to-me-see." This goes both ways. The more we open up our secret, often shame-filled inner life to His probing attention, the more He opens up His grace-filled heart to us. The more we let Him "see" into us, the more we get to see how merciful, kind and patient He really is. The more willing we become to obey Him, the more we get to see how faithful He really is.

How to "Press In"

How do we go about seeking to know God better? There are three main questions that will press you to Him and help you discover endless revelations of God and His will for you which no text book could ever convey (see [A "Quick Start" Guide](#) for a fuller description of these questions):

- 1) Jesus, what do you want me to do today?
- 2) Father, what are You trying to show me?
- 3) Lord, how should I respond to this?

These questions are guaranteed to lead you into a life-time journey of seeking to trust God (with all He allows) and obey Jesus (in all He asks). Our true knowledge of God is put to the test in daily life. Do we know Him well enough to realize (in one situation after another) that we want to



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stay united to Him above all else? Do I know Him well enough to trust Him? To keep clinging to Him and calling on Him no matter how things seem? To keep obeying Him? Any lack of joy and peace indicates that there is something about the Lord that we don't know as well as we need to in that situation.

It is a good rule of the spiritual life to take everything that happens personally from the Hand of God. This will exponentially increase your conversations with Him. He never desires or does evil, but He chooses to allow it. Why? Let this question press you into the scriptures and into the Lord in conversation. Don't turn your questions into demands for answers or hold them as charges against God that He has done something wrong. He will patiently work with you to get you over any false ideas about Him, but it will certainly delay getting the answers you seek. Let Him reveal things to you at His pace.

It is also a good rule to see every moment you don't like as an opportunity for [Spiritual Growth](#). Yes, we are being "field tested" all the time, but it is truly in a kindly way. God by the way has no need to learn how we will handle the test—we do! Trials, troubles and temptations are meant to reveal to us how much we need to rely on God, rather than on ourselves. If we think we only need God a little bit, we are definitely in the dark, knowing neither the Lord, nor ourselves.

The Shame Blocker

One of the greatest barriers to knowing God intimately is shame. Because of their inner sense of guilt and shame, both Adam and Eve instinctively hid from God. They felt too exposed and naked before His "jeweler's eye," choosing fig leaves as a covering, rather than coming clean. They also tried to deny responsibility for their sin in futile attempts to cast the blame anywhere but on themselves. Know that Adam's nature will still try to make you run and hide from God due to an inward sense of guilt and shame over sins, weaknesses and failures. Yet, God has fully remedied this!

The Blood of Jesus covers our sins so completely that we who are "in Christ" have been forgiven, justified and accepted—just as we are. This means we can go "boldly" to our Father at any moment of weakness or need, fully expose our shame or failing to Him, and have faith-confidence that He will work to rescue and restore us. We are set free by the grace of the cross to be absolutely honest about any sinful disposition we see in ourselves. God already knows the worst, has utterly forgiven us, and wants to help us.

In practical terms this greatly expands the conversational intimacy we can enjoy with the Lord. In God's grace-filled presence we don't have to "dress up," pretend we are doing better than we are, and fight to stay on our best behavior (as we might in Church on Sundays). We can be ourselves and have honest conversation with our Great Friend about those sides of ourselves we would "die" of embarrassment from, if they were exposed to anyone on earth.

If you really want to know Him well, don't be afraid to get "buck-naked" before your God, confessing everything to Him with the confidence of a child. He has the love and patience to talk over anything with you that is troubling you in any way, whether it is your incorrigible weaknesses, your sins, or your endless need for His encouragement and help. Don't hold back! He loves it when you give Him everything you've got. This clears the way for Him to transfer His grace-gifts to you.



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CHAPTER THREE

Knowing about God

Just as a person in love wants to discover everything they can about their beloved, we too desire to learn all we can about the One who has so thoroughly captured our hearts. Now that Jesus has “introduced” Himself to us through our faith-conversion, we know that we are on very solid ground in seeking to gain true knowledge of God through the pages of scripture. [The Living Word](#) will help us understand [His Written Word](#) to us. As good as that is it is only one of the ways...

Truly, you are a God who hides yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior. Isaiah 45:15
ESV

You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, declares the Lord. Jeremiah 29:13-14
ESV

A Divine Game of Hide and Seek

Is God playing hide and seek with us? Why so much mystery? Why the screen of invisibility? Why do we have to search and dig for truth? Doesn't it seem at times that life would be so much better if God would just show up make a few things plain as day? In point of fact He has shown up and wasn't shy about giving His opinion when He did. Because God came to live with us in the Person of Jesus Christ, we now have a rock-solid starting point in our quest to know more about God. Don't think that just because you know Jesus, the game of hide and seek is over. No, my friend it is now beginning in earnest. Ready or not, Jesus, here we come!



Imagine life as a gigantic board game, Jesus as the starting point, you as the player, and true knowledge of God as the hidden prize, scattered all along the way.

True knowledge about God always leads to greater intimacy with Him and (as we are discovering) there is no greater joy than being in His presence. What an incentive!

There are five main ways that you can gain true knowledge of God. God has hidden these all over the board. Let's say that He did this so that those who don't want to play the game won't be bothered and pestered by bumping into Him every time they take a step. He also did it so that you and I could experience the joy of discovery. What are these five main ways of gaining true knowledge about God? In order of authority they are Jesus Himself, the Bible, all of Creation, human History and You (don't skip ahead to that one, it is the least dependable!).



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1. Knowing about God through Jesus

The first principle for understanding what the Bible has to say about God on any of its pages is Jesus. He is the Beginning and the End of our journey in this as in everything else. Just as intimately knowing God can only happen through a faith relationship with Jesus, so too, knowing true things about God and God's ways primarily comes to us through Jesus. Consider these qualifications possessed by our glorious Lord:

Jesus' words give us His definitive interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures.
Jesus believed that many things in the Hebrew Scriptures spoke about Him.
Jesus' life is a living display of God's Word.
Jesus' life is a living display of God.
Jesus is the Eternal Word of God.

Everyone on earth has an opinion about God. Jesus is the only person whose opinion is absolutely correct in every respect. Who He is, what He says and what He did are the final words on any question about the nature of God. He told us many times in the gospels that everything He did and said was at the direct leading of His Father in heaven. No one has ever revealed the invisible God so completely or so perfectly and no one else ever could, for He Himself is fully God. It takes One to truly know One.

No man has ever seen God at any time; the only unique Son, or the only begotten God, Who is in the bosom [in the intimate presence] of the Father, He has declared Him [He has revealed Him and brought Him out where He can be seen; He has interpreted Him and He has made Him known]. John 1:18 AMP

The statement is often made that all religions of the world must be compared to what the Bible says about God and in particular what it says about Jesus. This is true, but it doesn't go far enough. Even what the Bible seems to say about God and Jesus, must be compared to what Jesus says in the Bible and how He lived. Jesus is the central principle of our efforts to interpret and understand what the Bible is trying to say to us. Without Him at the center we risk being as mistaken as the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They honestly thought they knew a lot about God based on their understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures, but they missed it by a mile.

And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. John 5:37-40 ESV

2. Knowing about God through the Bible

Both testaments of scripture make up the fullness of God's written Word. He has not stopped speaking, but He has (apparently) stopped writing scripture. This is important for it means that everything that the Lord wanted to say to us in written form has already been recorded. We can, therefore, be absolutely confident that the Bible contains everything necessary for putting us on track with God and for overseeing our growth in a true knowledge of Him. Nothing needs to be added to or taken away from the scriptures we have been given.



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All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV

The Bible is our ultimate authority in the absence of Jesus' magisterial Presence. How His Return will affect our relationship to His Word is hidden beyond the veil of time. God's Word will never "pass away," but its unique place in our life will likely change when faith becomes sight and everything now hidden is finally revealed. We won't be looking something up in scripture, if Jesus happens to be standing beside us! We won't be trying to chart the events of the End Times once we have passed through them. So, things will be different then, but how different?

This much is certain: until the King arrives in Person, His written Word is the final Word on any subject. For now, even our personal faith-knowledge of Jesus must be placed under submission to His written Word. Whatever we may think that we know about God, Jesus or anything else must pass the test of scripture: does it conform to what God has written? [The Living Word](#) will never contradict His written Word. Not so the devil. We can be sure that the deceiver will be continually trying to throw us off track. God's Word, however, is so true and so important that the Lord even place it above His incomparable Name.

Because the Bible is so vital to our knowledge of God, the question of interpretation naturally rises. Do we have what was originally written down? Is it being accurately translated? Are we able to understand it as God would desire? While we don't have any of the original documents straight from the hands of the Biblical authors, we do have the most highly attested manuscript evidence of any writing coming out of antiquity—hands down. We also have a wealth of translations to choose from and compare, not to mention whole libraries of commentaries. Just remember that the translation preferred by heaven is French. It's the R.S.V.P.—*répondez s'il vous plaît*, or please reply!

"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." John 14:21 ESV

3. Knowing about God through Creation

What a shame it is that so many of the people who peer most devotedly into the mysteries and beauties of creation take as their starting point a world view that excludes the Creator. What joy, what wonder, what gratitude is lost to those poor benighted scientists who see only nature, while turning a blind eye to nature's God. Prior to Darwin's Origin of Species, the vast majority of the world's scientists were Christians, Darwin included. Now that has flipped. Though this is undoubtedly a personal tragedy for scientists captured by atheism, it demonstrates a widespread spiritual disease: putting creation above its Creator, the essence of idolatry.

Think of creation, just for a moment, as a pair of glasses. It is much more than that, but it is also precisely that. From the vast reaches of interstellar space to the tiniest particles of subatomic matter all of creation is designed as a pair of glasses, a set of lenses through which we can peer into the Mind of the Maker. Just as every work of art bears the stamp of its artificer, so creation reveals the One whose Hands formed it out of nothing. Odd, don't you think, that so many are studying the glasses, never realizing that we are meant to put them on and gaze upon Someone who is already looking into us?



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The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows and proclaims His handiwork. Day after day pours forth speech, and night after night shows forth knowledge. There is no speech nor spoken word [from the stars]; their voice is not heard. Yet their voice [in evidence] goes out through all the earth, their sayings to the end of the world. Psalms 19:1-4 AMP

The Lord apparently expects that we will “see” Him through His creation and that this is meant to give us accurate information to add to our knowledge of God. From His point of view, we are “without excuse” if we fail to read the visible evidence He has given us in the way that He intended. We are not nearly so much “in the dark” as atheists and agnostics would have us believe. Such arguments may seem reasonable to those who don’t want to look beyond the veil of time and space, but the truth is quite different.

For that which is known about God is evident to them and made plain in their inner consciousness, because God [Himself] has shown it to them. For ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature and attributes, that is, His eternal power and divinity, have been made intelligible and clearly discernible in and through the things that have been made (His handiworks). So [men] are without excuse [altogether without any defense or justification]. Romans 1:19-20 AMP

Even so, all this talk of science and study is sliding past the point: the highest response to the glory that the heavens “declare” isn’t an equation, it is joy filled with wonder. Gazing upon the sheer beauty and serenity that so much of the natural world evokes lifts all of us heavenward, even if we don’t believe that there is a heaven beyond what our eyes see. Oh, but how much higher it carries us when we do!

*Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), from “Aurora Leigh”

4. Knowing about God through History

Seeing the Lord’s Hand in history is, admittedly, a bit murkier than looking through the clear lens of the natural order. That’s because our history, practically from the beginning, doesn’t speak nearly so loudly about creation as it does the fall. Down through the ages comes the oft-repeated doom of our inhumanity to ourselves, as well as the curse of catastrophes not directly traceable to our depravity. Where do you find God in that? With the help of “training glasses”!

Rather than jump into secular history first, we school ourselves to see the Lord’s Hand at work in the redemption of our story that He initiates and which the Bible illuminates. The term for this is salvation history. Jesus is not only earth’s Creator (seen through nature), He is the world’s Redeemer (seen through history). For this reason, our history is rightly called His-story for without His Hand upon the process, the world’s history would be unrelieved darkness, spiraling into oblivion. As it is there are many points of light where His redemption breaks through, enlightening, ordering and relieving the chaos we continually create.



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The most notable events of salvation history are the calling of Abraham, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the conquest of the Land, the Exile and return from Babylon, the life and ministry of Jesus, and the spread of the Early Church. These and the many other events recorded in scripture show us how God works in history. By them we can learn to look for signs of His hand in secular, or non-biblical history, as well as in our own individual stories.

Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. Psalms 98:1-2 ESV

We learn, for instance, that God sets his favor upon certain individuals and nations, but that doesn't mean He lets them get away with murder. Over the Topsy-turvy course of its history Israel was both highly favored and severely punished. There is always a higher expectation and a corresponding discipline placed upon those whom God has favored: The rich are expected to be charitable; the strong are expected to protect the weak. If not, the favor of their position is removed. In terms of justice He doesn't "play favorites" at all. He is the active judge of the nations as well as individuals, interceding for the oppressed and opposing the obstinate.

The nations have sunk in the pit that they made; in the net that they hid their own foot has been caught. The Lord has made himself known; he has executed judgment; the wicked are snared in the work of their own hands. Psalms 9:15-16 ESV

Frederick Dennison Maurice, an Anglican priest and theologian in Victorian times, once commented that the absence of any abiding kingdom on earth, far from making him disbelieve in God's hand in history was in fact its surest proof: God is always at work taking down every reign of fallen humanity that does not live up to its high calling of doing justice. However, the Lord doesn't only take down, He also raises up. Interestingly, the Bible shows us that God "raises up" individuals and nations to accomplish His purposes without always telling them what He is doing or even letting them know who it is that is using them. Cyrus, the Persian king, had no idea that He was directly serving the mercy of Israel's God, rather than his own; nor did Pharaoh suspect that his own hardness of heart was playing perfectly into God's plans for Israel. By this we can see that even if we can't see how God may be using our nation or ourselves, He very likely is. Seek Him for eyes to see as well as ears to hear. You just may be surprised and delighted by what He shows you.

5. Knowing about God through Our Lives

You are the living experiment. You get to put "to the test" everything you are learning about God. We are never to put God to the test by making demands or trying to force His Hand, but we are invited to put to the test things that He tells us about Himself. In fact, there is no better way to really get to know God than to step out in faith in response to something You believe He is telling you to do or showing you about Himself, and then find out in the process how He works, how merciful He is and how faithful He is. As you can see, this leads very nicely into knowing Him better in an intimate and relational way. But it also reinforces all of the "objective" things that we are learning about Him in His Word. What are you waiting for? Set up your next experiment in trusting and obeying God by asking Him to lead you step by step through this day and right on into your destiny. You are certain to learn many great things about Him along the way!



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CHAPTER FOUR

God, the Mysterious Other

In saying "Let Us make man in our image," our God didn't mean that we would be like Him in every respect. Father knows better than to turn over to the likes of us, these seven characteristics of absolute deity. We will never know (within our own nature) what these are like, but it is such a great, good thing that He does! Let your appreciation for the Lord soar as you gaze upon the Most High God.

"Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? Exodus 15:11 ESV

We See in Part

So much can be known about God, though even that is only the merest fraction of knowledge.

There is a wonderful story about one of the twentieth century's greatest theologians, Karl Barth. He said that he had a dream in which he found himself entering a vast library in heaven. It was absolutely crammed with books and teeming with scholars from all the ages. He became aware that he was pulling a little child's red wagon filled with the many volumes of his own life's work.

About that same time everyone in the library turned towards him to see what he was bringing into heaven. For a moment there was silence while he wondered what they would think about all the serious things he had had to say about God. Then he knew: They all burst out laughing!



We only see in part. Sadly, we can be so blinded by pride that we don't even see how small a part it is. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't press in to understand

all that we can, or that we never get anything right. We may succeed in getting a lot right from an earthly perspective, but even that will be seen to be pitifully little when heaven comes to earth and faith becomes sight. The good news is that even eternity will not be long enough to exhaust the full disclosure of the Mystery who is our Maker. Seekers of truth and lovers of God will never be bored!

These meditations on the "non-transferable" attributes of God are hardly meant to be definitive, much less exhaustive, especially since what God cannot share with us as a part of our likeness with Him, must forever bear an un-image-able strangeness, unimaginable for us to comprehend. Rather, let them carry your thoughts upwards into wonder, joy and praise.

7 Non-Transferable Attributes



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1. Holiness

Holiness is a word that attempts to describe the inconceivable purity of God. Strictly speaking, holiness is not an attribute of the Most High, so much as His essence: the triune God is holy. But what does this mean? Certainly, it means the very opposite of what we are: we are impure, unholy, sinful. In His holiness, God is wholly different from us, making it a fearful thing to fall into His hands, for our God's holiness is like a consuming fire, destroying anything unholy that draws near. Just as Peter recoiled from Jesus at first, our own lack of holiness can make us want to pull back from a close encounter with God. By faith we esteem God's scintillating purity, but by nature (fallen nature) we also fear it. At bottom we don't understand it. How can we? It is so entirely unlike us.

We are given clues, however, that enable us to envision the holiness of God. One is the innocence of children, especially infants in whom the sinful influence has not had time to gain much ground. One friend, helping at a nursery, said that she became enrapt gazing into the eyes of a baby, seeing and sensing such a purity of love streaming out of the infant towards her. Suddenly, she experienced the overwhelming love of God that was pouring into her through the baby. It thrilled her, filled her, then unnerved her. She couldn't bear up under the intense intimacy of peering into eyes so wholly devoted to her in love. God's holiness is like that. Even angels (at times) cannot bear to look upon it.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" Isaiah 6:1-3 ESV

2. Infinite/Eternal

The Word says that God placed eternity in our hearts. Good thing He put it there—our minds simply cannot take this one in. The attempt to do justice to the vastness of interstellar space defeats all but poets and artists. To the dry calculations of science must be added some expression of the heart, for mere words and numbers fall flat. Yet, even our stupendously enormous universe has its limits. At its outermost limit it is still expanding. Into what? Nothingness? Primeval darkness? Or taking into account the equally vast age of this cosmic explosion, we press our minds in vain to imagine what could have been present billions of years ago, before our Lord first decreed that there be light.

From that light both space and time now form the continuum in which we are inextricably bound. Yet beyond all space and time, all matter and energy, is One who is Eternal and Infinite, unbounded by the worlds He created, unlimited by the flow of time He set in motion. He always is, He always was, He always will be. Can you place that inside your mind without it exploding? Then hold it in your heart, instead, as a very comforting understanding that there is nothing in your life that is bigger than your God. And rest assured that He has more than enough time on His Hands to come to your rescue at any time.

"There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty. The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Deuteronomy 33:26-27 ESV



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3. Self-Existent/Self-Sufficient/Sovereign

It is often observed —usually when someone has been humbled by a failed attempt to rule their world—that God is God “all by Himself.” He doesn’t need our help or our advice. His idea of the perfect system of government is neither a democracy, nor a republic, but a benevolent dictatorship with Him in charge. Our Sovereign Lord is Self-existent and Self-sufficient, something we try to be, but can’t. This puts us at a disadvantage when it comes to impressing the Lord with our many reasons why He needs to do things our way, but it should be grounds for eternal rest, if only we could just die to self and let Him be God in our place.

The originating sin of original sin came about when Adam and Eve fell into thinking that they could become “as God.” We need always keep in mind that our likeness to our Maker and Redeemer doesn’t extend that far. As created beings we are forever dependent upon the grace of our Creator to keep us in life (we are not self-existent), to supply our needs (not self-sufficient), and to lead us into all truth (not sovereign in knowledge). He is asking us—considering His eminent qualifications as Parent—to “die” to the god-project and become like little children instead. He guarantees that if we do, we will enter the kingdom of joy and peace He has prepared for us.

And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:2-4 ESV

4. Transcendent/Immutable

Once we give up trying to change God (by talking Him into our way of thinking), we end up discovering that it is a very good thing indeed that He is unchangeable. He is already getting everything right, already knows everything that can be known, can’t possibly make a mistake in anyone’s life and never, ever sins. Besides, He is overwhelmingly, supremely happy. His joy over the way His work is progressing knows no bounds: His love will triumph in the end! What need is there to change? And since He is immutably “fixed” on forgiving, loving and saving us, what could we possibly want changed?

Admittedly, all of this unchanging goodness is going on behind the veil of God’s unearthly transcendence. He reigns from heaven’s invisible heights, hidden from our probing, anxious eyes. To bridge the gap He has pledged Himself to us in His Word and tucked Himself inside us, but there is no escaping the fact that we have to trust ourselves to Someone who primarily lives in regions of “unapproachable light,” utterly beyond our vision. We do get to see “in part” down here, but the major part of what we’d like to see is hidden from us. That’s where our eyes of faith come in.

He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. 1 Timothy 6:15-16 ESV



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5. Omniscient

Now we are moving into the familiar realm of the Big O's —omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence—what we typically think of when we think of God. Let's don't let familiarity with these concepts breed complacency, as in "Omniscient? Oh yeah, I've got that one. It means God knows everything." Is it really that simple? Let's pick up that thought and see where it leads us. Jesus said the Father knows every hair on our head and every sparrow that falls to the ground. If that's what it means, then I can handle it. There is room in my mind for this, because it sounds like something I could also know, if I wanted to take the time to count hairs and sparrows.

Let's zoom further out into time and space for a moment. By scientific estimate the universe is about 16 billion years old. God knows every one of those milliseconds as if it were happening now. There are about 100 billion galaxies with an average of 100 billion of stars each. God not only knows and calls every star by name, He knows where every atom and molecule is and has been and is going to be. He knows us the same way. We have billions of cells (He knows them all). We have 1500 thoughts per minute (He knows them all). We have a past we've largely forgotten, a future yet to experience and a present we don't understand. Yet, His knowing of each one of us is perfect. Now multiply that by the billions!

Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. Psalms 139:1-6 ESV

6. Omnipotent

You may have heard people say, when explaining some bizarre event, that "God is all powerful. He can do whatever He wants." No, He can't. That's our idea of power! God isn't all powerful in that way. There are many things that He can't do. Whether He can't do them because He refuses to do them, or because it is entirely contrary to His nature, or because He can't find it in Himself to do it, is debatable. What's clear is that there are "limits" on His omnipotence. For instance, He emphatically states that He does not lie, change His mind, or act unjustly. Although this clearly is a limit on what God can do, it is also a sign of His tremendous power: we lie and do wrong to get out of trouble or to get what we want. He doesn't have to (nor would He want to).

Most tellingly, God cannot or will not "force" salvation on anyone. The Father desires "all" to be saved, but this is something that even He cannot make happen. There is a mystery here of free will and love. It hurts to read the Old Testament prophets and feel the anguish of how God's heart was rent by faithless Israel. He wanted Israel to love Him—for His sake or theirs, it matters little. The pain is immense, as it could only be with a Heart so great. The Lord has the incomprehensible power required to create an entire universe out of nothing. He can still perform the most outrageous miracles. He overturned the power of sin and death by His own death and resurrection. For all that He cannot "make" us love Him. Oh, but how powerful it is when we do.



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Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns." Revelation 19:6 ESV

7. Omnipresent

Lance Wallnau has been popularizing the phrase “Jehovah Sneaky” to describe God’s crafty ways of accomplishing some of His purposes. Nowhere is this more evident or more needed than with the mere fact of His omnipresence. God cannot help being everywhere at once: He created absolutely everything, sees into everything, and sustains everything. How could He possibly stay out? If He truly departed from any part of His creation all light would be extinguished, all life would flicker out, all reality would become false: nothing would be left but the primordial “darkness.” Yet, this ineradicable necessity creates a genuine problem for one of His creatures—us!

But wait a minute. Aren’t we the ones who are always pining away for a feeling of His presence or a true glimpse of His glorious features? Yes, but we are also the ones who, like Adam and Eve, are hiding from Him in guilt and fear. In fact, without the “cover” of His apparent absence, we would all be oppressed by the inescapable intrusion of His presence. Don’t believe me? Just imagine Jesus being fully and visibly present with you—all the time. Even in the shower. Even... well, let’s just say, it could get kind of embarrassing, not having any sense of privacy. But it would also feel very confining: you literally couldn’t have a thought of your own not immediately commented upon by Him. As it is, He gives us just enough sense of His presence to lead us on without overwhelming us. Best to leave that blend to Him.

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ...If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. Psalms 139:7-8, 11-12 ESV



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CHAPTER FIVE

God, Our Intimate Friend

The funny thing is how we are so bent on trying to be like God when it comes to being all-knowing, all-controlling, and everywhere at once in our own little worlds. We race past the true God-likeness waiting for us every day! At any moment we can enter into His divine nature, whenever we settle down and let Him be God in our place. As we abide in Him, the amazing transfer happens. When John writes that in heaven we will be like Him, this is what he means.

**Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Genesis 1:26
ESV**

Moses said, "Please show me your glory." Exodus 33:18 ESV

His Glorious Image

After the Red Sea crossing, while still at the foot of Mount Sinai, Moses asked the Lord if He would show him His glory. What God chose to reveal about Himself is surprising, even shocking. He showed Moses, not the ever-expanding glory the cosmic "heavens declare," not the glory-drenched cloud—the shekinah — that would one day fill Tabernacle and Temple, not the glory of His unique, mind-numbing traits of absolute deity, but the "more human" glory of His personal nature.



This glory seems more human to us, because these are qualities of being that He shares freely with us and which (in minor, debased doses) we take for granted. Taken in "full strength" it would have killed Moses to view them. So, hidden in a "cleft of the rock," Moses watches in awe as...

**The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. Exodus 34:6-8
ESV**

This divine "Self-portrait" is particularly appealing because it stands in stark contrast to the harsh, judgmental, angry God that so many people (mistakenly) believe stalks and storms His way through the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures. Yet, right here at the beginning—in the second book of the Bible—God hastens to show us what He is really like. It's as if He said to



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Moses, “I’m glad you asked that question. I know I’m going to get a lot of bad press in the future, so let me set the record straight before we get started.”

This is the image we have been created to bear. This is the likeness we are meant to display. Whenever we fall short of the glory of God, it is this glorious Nature we have failed to reflect. By supernatural design, whenever we “behold” these qualities in our God (by an active faith), our own hearts transform, lifting us closer to Him as we carry or “bear” His image within us. As we see abundance of mercy in Him, we become more merciful. As we see overflowing love in Him, we become more loving. This in turn “births” the out-flowing of our new creation nature, enabling us to walk in His Spirit. [Beholding, bearing, becoming](#). We call it “[Getting the Look](#)” that gives the shift. This life-transforming pattern began with Moses; let it continue with you!

There are other transferable qualities (knowledge, rationality, speech, truthfulness, wisdom...), but for now let’s go with these...

7 Transferable Attributes

1. Merciful

Merciful means that God shows mercy to those who don’t deserve His mercy. Do you have sins? God will always want to forgive you. That’s why He can make the promise that if you confess your sins (no matter what they are), He will forgive you and cleanse you of all unrighteousness (no matter how little you might deserve it). His mercy is grace-based. God loves to give His mercy away! Nevertheless, granting forgiveness is almost the end product of the Lord’s work of mercy in us and for us. His mercy has been with us from the beginning.

Mercy has always played a huge part in God’s plans for His creation. In mercy God chose to love us even when He foresaw that we would sin against Him. In mercy God “tasked” Jesus with being the Lamb who would be slain “from the foundation of the world.” In mercy God chose us to receive His salvation long before we were born. In mercy God inspired countless people before us to make the sacrifices that enabled Him to bring the gospel our way. In mercy God has been working with us since our birth to help us realize our need for Him and believe the good news of His salvation. That’s when we “woke up” to praise Him for the timeless flow of His mercy!

The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. Psalms 145:9
ESV

2. Gracious

Grace means that God helps those who don’t deserve His help. Do you have problems? God will always want to help you with them. That’s why He can make the promise that He will come to the rescue (no matter what the problem is) of anyone who calls on Him (whether they deserve His help or not). His help is grace-based. God loves to give His help away! Just as it is with His mercy, seeing a problem and asking for help is almost the end product of God’s grace for us. His grace has been with us from the beginning.



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Grace is like the air that surrounds us upon which all life depends. Yet, breathing is so all-pervasive that we hardly ever notice we are doing it. Our focus goes to other things we need and don't yet have—unless our boundless supply of air comes up short. Then we may instantly realize what a gift fresh air and good lungs truly are! In the same way our gracious God has been supplying all kinds of things to us, including life and person-hood, family and friends, talents and abilities, along with right desires and opportunities to explore them. When things go wrong, he works with us to help us overcome. All without ever “tipping His Hand” by making it obvious that we have Someone to thank.

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Matthew 5:44-45 ESV

3. Slow to Anger

For an infinite Being to say that He is slow to anger is not a small statement. Think how patiently the Lord worked over the eons to carve out the Grand Canyon using the Colorado River as His chisel, or—going back even further—to create the earth out of gathered dust from exploded stars. That's patience! He worked with Israel for centuries, seeking to cure their backsliding, before finally sending the chastisement of Jerusalem's destruction and the Babylonian captivity. Even then, He “quickly” reversed the effect of His own judgment and restored a faithful remnant of Israel to their land just 70 years later. That's a winsome combination: slow to anger, quick to mercy. Would that we were more like Him in this.

As it is, we easily confuse our impatience with that of God, mistakenly imagining that the Lord must surely be running out of patience with ourselves or some excuseless reprobate we can't stand. Having worked with addicts for years, I can testify to the Lord's seemingly endless patience. Although He clearly allows increased consequences to fall upon those who keep backsliding, He never reproaches them when they turn back to Him. By their report He is just as loving and patient with them as when they first believed. This should encourage us all—not to backslide! —but to take heart that His patient love for us will be just as enduring.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 ESV

4. Steadfast Love

“He loves me, he loves me not” is a game only humans can play. God set His heart on loving us from before He created the worlds and He insists that He isn't like us in changing His mind. He has been showing us steadfast love from the Big Beginning. The creation of the universe itself is a love-gift making our lives possible and dignifying our days with surroundings of exquisite beauty. That we were even brought to birth is the unsought love-gift which launched us all on this stupendous journey we call life. That He has prepared an eternal home in heaven for each one of us who seeks Him is an ever-lasting love-gift.

Perhaps greatest of all, however, is the love-gift of Jesus' sacrifice for us, for without it all of the other gifts would have been robbed from us by our sins. There is an irony in this: Although it is



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through the forgiveness of our sins that God's love for us is most fully demonstrated, it is also because of our on-going sinfulness that we most question His willingness to remain steadfast at loving us. Fortunately, His love is truly steadfast. No matter how much we doubt, no matter how many times we fall, or drift away or turn against Him, His love never fails. As long as we stay steadfast at seeking His love and mercy (we are being schooled in His likeness after all), He will keep showering it upon us. Eventually, we will surely get the hang of it!

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!
1 Chronicles 16:34 ESV

5. Faithful

There is a lovely Hebrew word that describes the faithfulness of the Lord: *chesed*. It means "covenant loyalty" and it describes both God's ways of being faithful to Israel and Israel's expected ways of being faithful to God. The mutual faithfulness intended includes the qualities of mercy and loving kindness, terms by which *chesed* is often translated. This aspect of the Lord's beautiful nature almost always bowls us over. As surprising as His mercy can be, even more surprising is how He continues to be merciful to us even when we are unfaithful to Him. Even more surprising still is how He seems to "store up" loving kindness, which He (apparently) delights in suddenly revealing to us long after we had given up actively hoping that He would intervene on our behalf.

Because He is infinitely faithful and patient, He can plan for how He is going to bless us, or rescue us, long years in advance. His grace and mercy to us have nothing to do, really, with our faithfulness, but with His. He knows that He is still going to be "in the mood" to show loving-kindness to us even after we have behaved abominably, so He makes His plans accordingly. Naturally, this takes us by surprise, because no one else we know could put up with so much and still hang in there with us as He does. But then, He has already "hung in there" for us when it hurt the most. Bearing with us now must almost seem easy by comparison. Still, it is a marvel and a praise to Him that He does!

Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever; to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever. Psalms 136:3-4 ESV

6. Forgiving

What a wonderful thing it is that our God is infinitely forgiving. You and I may set limits on our mercy, but God always holds His heart open to anyone who turns to Him, no matter how many times they turn. Think about it: at the cross Father forgave ALL sins that would ever be committed by you, me, or anyone else. We know that it was unimaginably painful for Jesus to bear the punishment; it may have been immensely difficult for the Father to carry it out. But it is done! There is absolutely nothing left for God to forgive: He has foreseen all sin, been wounded by all sin; and has forgiven all sin.

The Father's unbending desire was to make a way for us to be restored to Him. Now, out of what is called "Christ's merits," He has an endless treasure trove of mercy available for everyone. The only problem left is getting us to believe it. No doubt we stagger at trusting in God's forgiving heart for many reasons, but one in particular has to do with the issue of our



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likeness: we also can and do forgive others. However, the great difference between our forgiveness and God's—apart from the scale of it—is that His is mercy-based, while ours is usually justice-based. We forgive because a person apologized, we forgive because someone changed, we forgive because they made amends. But if a person in any way deserves to be forgiven, that's not God's kind of forgiveness! He has forgiven all of us long before we apologized, repented, changed or made amends. Aren't you glad?

It was God [personally present] in Christ, reconciling and restoring the world to favor with Himself, not counting up and holding against [men] their trespasses [but cancelling them], and committing to us the message of reconciliation (of the restoration to favor). 2 Corinthians 5:19 AMP

7. Just

This one gets us into the most trouble. Ironically, the trouble doesn't come from God being just, but from our desire to imitate Him. Our graceless efforts to correct others, our predilection to judge and condemn them, our headstrong attempts to change the world by enforcing our own vision of justice—these have caused unimaginable sorrow to individuals and nations. Seeking justice against injustice easily turns into vengeance. Seeking justice against social oppression easily turns into coercion and new forms of oppression. Seeking just or right behavior, even if only from ourselves, easily turns into pride and self-righteousness. Does this mean we should cease our efforts to “do justice”? Certainly not. But we should also walk humbly and love mercy, as He does.

Sometimes Christians will say that it is a good thing God is merciful with us, rather than just. There is a truth in this—we desperately need mercy—but it paints a dark picture of God's justice, as if justice were a thing we should never want to receive from God. In fact all of creation is dependent upon the justice of God; otherwise, chaos and spiritual darkness would rule supreme. Not only that, but because God is just He gives to everyone as they deserve, making it possible for us to be confident that everything we do for Him will be rewarded (in this life or the next). By a wonderful quirk of salvation blessing, we can also be confident that if we repent from what we do wrong, God will be “faithful and just” to forgive us.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you. Psalms 89:14 ESV



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CHAPTER SIX

God, the Three in One

Get ready for Enigma, Riddle and Paradox. These aren't exactly Biblical names for God, but they might as well be. Solomon wrote that it is the glory of God to conceal things and the glory of kings to search them out. In seeking to know our God better we all hope to be "crowned" with true understanding of all the "hidden" things about Him. Be forewarned: just as often as you may feel that crown upon your head, you will want to throw it down at His feet in humble submission to Someone you really don't know as well as you think you do. Now multiply that Mystery by Three...

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." John 14:25-27 ESV

A Simple Analogy

Let's not make this any more difficult than it has to be. Imagine for a moment a man and a woman whose thoughts, feelings and desires are so much in synch that they experience perfect harmony. Maybe you have never seen in or experienced it, but you have caught glimpses of it as a possibility. Of course, for us this can never last very long since we are all so tragically self-centered and off-center that we can't *stay* centered with anyone else.



God just doesn't have our problems. We are told in scripture about an amazing love story between a Father and His Son that has been endlessly (and beginning-lessly) going on. In perfect harmony. A divine dance of love in which neither ever misses a step—so perfectly attuned are their great hearts to all that is good, beautiful and true.

Naturally it only gets more complicated. Do you remember when you first tried your hand at juggling oranges? (Let's hope it wasn't glasses or light bulbs.) At first you were doing reasonably well with only two. But that couldn't last. You knew you had to add in at least one more to honestly call it juggling. Then things really got out of hand! Again, some things are hard, even impossible for us, but not so with God. As hard as it is to juggle the idea of endless harmony between the Father and Son, we have to add in the Holy Spirit to get the complete picture. Why? Because both the Father and the Son speak of the Spirit as somehow different or separate from themselves. Now you are hopelessly confused!



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Fortunately for us they answer to all three Names. Because they are God, all Three are present with us at all times. Because they are a Unity, they are each One inside the Other. Still, it can be difficult to recognize and relate to Them whenever They are not making a clear manifestation of Who it is we are encountering at the time. Don't worry about that. For now, just take it in faith (we have to do this a lot) that God will be delighted however you relate to Him. If you have most recently encountered Jesus, go with Him! It is always wise to keep our inner focus on Jesus. Just know that there is much more for you to grow into in the future and stay open to being taught and guided. Jesus won't steer you wrong!

Previews of Plurality in God

Naturally enough, God didn't suddenly split into Father, Son and Holy Spirit just as the New Testament opens. Even to think of a division occurring is to let our thoughts go in the wrong direction. Any such division would be an unthinkable catastrophe for "Them" and for their creation. The Three in One are seamlessly united in a perfect harmony. That unity in God was apparently the first thought that the Lord wanted to get across to us.

The paganism which surrounded Israel—whether of Greece or Rome, Egypt or Babylon—thoroughly believed in a plurality of gods. What they rarely conceived was the idea that there might be only one God and that that one God was thoroughly good. Hence, Israel was instructed repeatedly that the holy God is one God. As carriers of this revelation they were "set apart" from the pagan world. In the form of the Shema, this became their national statement both of God's identity and of themselves as God's chosen children.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Deuteronomy 6:4 ESV

Evidently, the Lord didn't want to leave it at that. All throughout the Old Testament our God scattered hints or glimpses that are highly suggestive of a plurality in God. Looking back, it is easy to see this as a trail of "bread crumbs" leading to the fuller revelation of the Three in One that would come to us. These precursors greatly enhance our faith, but if Israel was meant to read the signs, that just didn't happen. When Jesus announced that He and the Father were "one," He signed His own death warrant, so to speak, since every faithful Jewish ruler "knew" that God was only one God. But was He? If they could have connected the dots...

Six Suggestive Signs

1) "Elohim"

The first name given for God in scripture is *elohim*. As it happens *elohim* is the plural form of the word for God. It is used over 4000 times in the Bible and it rarely ever occurs in plural form anywhere else. It is a description of God unique to scripture. Accordingly, a more accurate translation of the first verse of the Bible would be "in the beginning Gods created."

In the beginning, God [*elohim* = Gods] created the heavens and the earth.
Genesis 1:1 ESV



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2) "Let us"

The unexpected appearance of plural pronouns is also a clue. This occurs in four separate verses. Clearly, a plurality is being revealed, but how many are included in the "us" and "our"? None of these six precursors can be pinned down as describing a Triune God, but they certainly point to a plurality in God.

Then God [*elohim* = Gods] said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Genesis 1:26 ESV

3) "Ehad"

Even the Shema carries a hint of something more going on than meets the unschooled eye. The Hebrew word, *echad*, which is translated as "one" often indicates a plurality held together in unity: a composite unity.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God [*elohim* again], the Lord is one [*ehad*]. Deuteronomy 6:4 ESV

4) "The Angel of the LORD"

The Angel of the LORD shows up fairly often as being Someone other than a normal angel from the LORD. This intriguing Being is consistently portrayed as an agent for the LORD, as the LORD, and as interacting with the LORD. Such distinctions and interactions make sense only if there is a plurality in God.

And [the Angel of God declared] a blessing on [Jacob] there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel [the face of God], saying, For I have seen God face to face, and my life is spared and not snatched away. Genesis 32:30 AMP

5) The Spirit of God

Numerous passages display some sort of distinction between God and His Spirit. God is shown as sending, putting, withdrawing, and giving His Spirit.

Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Psalms 51:11 ESV

6) The Messiah

Unquestionably, the Messiah was understood to be sent from God in order to rule for God, but the common expectation—based on the scriptures—was that Messiah would be more than a mere mortal. The Messiah was clearly depicted as being distinct from God and yet declared to be divine Himself.

Behold, I send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me. And the Lord [the Messiah], Whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple;



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the Messenger or Angel of the covenant, Whom you desire, behold, He shall come, says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:1 AMP

Isaiah goes even further, giving evidence—from our Christian perspective—of the Father ("Lord God"), the Son (the Messiah who would be sent) and the Holy Spirit who would be upon the "anointed one" (Messiah). In Daniel we are shown the Father ("the Ancient of Days") and Jesus ("one like the Son of Man"). Both of these passages have their counterparts in the New Testament: the Isaiah passage with Jesus' baptism (the Father's delight in Jesus; the Spirit's descent upon Jesus) and the Daniel passage with John's vision of this same scene in heaven while he was at Patmos (Revelation 5).

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.
Isaiah 42:1 ESV

As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days took his seat... I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7:9; 13-14 ESV

The Best Reason of All

What is the main reason why we believe in the Three in One? Because Jesus did!

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
Matthew 28:19-20 ESV

"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me." John 15:26-27 ESV



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CHAPTER SEVEN

Passover, Pentecost and Booths

What do the three great pilgrimage festivals of ancient Israel have to do with our Triune God? Plenty! Seeing their relevance even for us today, it's no wonder that the Lord commanded His believing people to "present" themselves before Him three times a year in Jerusalem. Two of these festivals have already been enacted for the Body of Christ as a whole. The third is soon to come to the world stage. What's more: we are all invited to experience our own individual re-enactment. These are feasts of divine Presence you don't want to miss.

"Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths." Deuteronomy 16:16 ESV

Multiple Required Pilgrimages

The obvious, divinely-dropped hint that we should be paying close attention to these three required pilgrimage festivals is that the two most important events which launched the Early Church took place on the exact dates that the first two festivals were being celebrated. Jesus' death and resurrection occurred during Passover; the outpouring of the Holy Spirit transpired on the Day of Pentecost.

The timing of this "coincidence" had the terrific advantage of making these two salvation events much more widely known than if they had occurred at any other time of the year. Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims flooded into Jerusalem for Passover and Pentecost from Israel and all corners of the ancient world—just as scripture commanded them. If the Father wanted to publicize the events of His Son's sacrifice and the giving of His Spirit, no better times could have been chosen. Could that have been the reason?



In reality, there exists an intrinsic connection between all three of the Jewish pilgrimage festivals—Passover, Pentecost and Booths—and their Messianic or Christian counterparts. The dates had been chosen long before Jesus came to earth; indeed, they were an important part of the Father's preparations for His Son's mission. From the Jewish perspective these three festivals had been commanded by God to commemorate special moments in their life with Him. From our perspective, those same Jewish events were prophetic signs pointing towards their true fulfillment that would come to us through Jesus Christ.



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The Purpose of Pilgrimage

Before we probe the layers of meanings that the first two events contain and search out the third festival towards which they point, let's pause to note the special character of these festivals: they necessitated a pilgrimage, they were required, the worshippers were to "appear before the Lord" and they were festivals held in Jerusalem. The Lord dwelt in the Temple at Jerusalem; His glory rested upon the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies. Though only the high priest was allowed entrance into the holiest place, "all Israel" (all male Israelites) could gather in the court immediately in front of the Temple. This was their privilege and their high calling — to draw near their God through sacrifice.

Ancient Israelites were primarily farmers and herders. Like other agrarian people throughout history, they would rarely travel from their homes beyond a day's journey in the course of their lifetime. Yet, these festivals required all males to make the journey three times a year, regardless of how many days that would have taken. Why? Certainly, it would have had the effect of bolstering their national identity and solidarity, but that is not the reason we are given. The men were to "appear before the Lord" — their God wanted to "see" them as personally presenting themselves to Him, despite whatever it cost of effort or expense. This meant moving beyond the comfortable and familiar environs of home, as they intentionally set out to draw near their God. The pilgrimage trained the Israelites to understand that their God expected them to seek Him.

The meaning of this is clear: The Lord desires to be intimately and personally known by His people and He expects us to go to the "trouble" of seeking His presence. Not only that, but these were not intended to be joyless duties. They were festivals. The Lord commanded His people to gather in celebration of their unique blessing of having Him for their God. Other holy days were expected to be solemn assemblies, requiring sacrifices for sin. Not these! These were feasts, as if the Lord were saying, "Take the day(s) off. Eat up! Enjoy!"

Passover (*Pesach*)

Passover celebrates the deliverance of Israel from their Egyptian bondage. The angel of death "passed over" the households of the Israelites where the blood of a freshly slain lamb had been applied to the doorposts, as he carried out the Lord's vengeance upon every first born of Egypt. This final divine intervention won them their freedom from slavery; indeed, they left Egypt carrying away spoils like victors after a battle. Later, when Passover was celebrated in Israel, an agricultural festival always followed it. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, lasting seven days, commemorated the first harvest of the year, the barley harvest.

Jesus is our Passover Lamb, sacrificed for us that death may pass us over. He is also our ongoing feast of unleavened Bread from heaven, the Living Word who declares life-giving truth to us.

Pentecost (*Shavuoth*)

Pentecost takes its name from the 50 days by which it follows Passover. Its connection to Israel's salvation history is unclear, though it eventually grew to commemorate the giving of the Law, due to speculation by the rabbis that the 50 days marked the time it took for Israel to journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai where the Law was given. Once in the Land, it celebrated the



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first great harvest of the new season, the wheat harvest, being also known as The Feast of the Harvest or First Fruits.

That the Holy Spirit came down on Pentecost is a sign that the Law written on stone tablets at Sinai is now being written in our hearts by the life-giving Spirit. The out-pouring that day didn't give birth to the church as some suppose, but it did empower the "infant" church's first harvest. About three thousand souls were added through Peter's first sermon to those who already formed the new community of faith "birthed" by Jesus on the evening of His resurrection.

Tabernacles (*Succoth*)

Tabernacles commemorates the 40 years Israel "tabernacled" with the Lord. Ironically, the wilderness period was a time of severe discipline for the generation that left Egypt with Moses but rebelled against entering the Promised Land. All of them died as punishment for their unbelief. However, for the younger generation it was a season of remembered closeness with their God, as Moses and the Lord prepared them for what would become their victorious entrance into the Land. Once Israel came into the Land, Tabernacles (also called Booths) became associated with the harvest festival, The Feast of Ingathering, which followed the summer growing season.

The church has continued to grow ever since it was planted in the world through Passover and Pentecost. Now, the time for the final harvest is rapidly approaching. Many signs already give incontrovertible evidence that the earth is being prepared for the last great event of salvation: the Second Coming of Jesus and the final harvest. When our Lord returns God will indeed "tabernacle" with His people and all the redeemed will rejoice in the great harvest festival at the end of the age. The heavenly Jerusalem will come down. Heaven and earth will be united at last. The Father will be dwelling once again in the midst of His people. May you and your loved ones be among us there! May you labor faithfully with the Lord to bring in many more!

Multi-Layered Revelations

Just as Passover relates to Jesus and Pentecost to the Holy Spirit, so Tabernacles points us to Father God. Each one of the Festivals, however, also invites us to celebrate Jesus who is our sin-bearing Savior (the true Passover Lamb), our mighty Lord (anointing us with the power of His Spirit) and our Bridegroom (returning for the Marriage Feast). These layers of meaning, in turn, beckon us to embark on our own pilgrimages to know our Lord more intimately, even as God has restored them to the church.

1) Church "Restoration" Pilgrimages.

Seen from the long perspective of history, it seems as if the Father had to re-ignite the Church with a clearer focus on the grace that flows to us from the sacrifice of His Son. This was the great task of the Reformation in the 16th century: re-establishing the Lord's requirement that we be "born again" into a life-saving relationship with Jesus. The Reformers' message of "salvation by grace alone through faith alone by Christ alone" led to a harvest of conversions that is still going on today.

Then, at the beginning of the 20th century, early Pentecostalism recovered the power that the Church had lost through its historic neglect of what Jesus commanded His

disciples to pray for and expect: the baptism in the Spirit. Signs and wonders were restored and are still sweeping through the harvest fields, especially in the Third World. Towards the close of the 20th century, unprecedented out-pourings of revival ushered in an emphasis on the Father's heart of love, restoring a focus on the unconditional love of the Father for His people. God will likely do more before His Son's return, but these church-wide restorations have been truly amazing.

2) Our Individual Pilgrimages.

Those who desire to know the Lord intimately have the journey outlined by these pilgrimage festivals. Passover commemorates the birth of saving faith in us through the life-giving revelation of our Risen Lord. Then, following the example of the first believers, we can pray to the Lord for a Pentecost of empowerment, seeking to be baptized by Him with power in the Holy Spirit.

These two experiences will bring anyone who desires it into an intimate relationship with both Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It doesn't have to end there! Press in to know the Father. Seek His will. Seek His heart. Seek His presence. It remains our Lord's delight to reveal His Father to us. Many have already discovered this to be gloriously true.



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CHAPTER EIGHT

God, Our Father in Heaven

Someone has to be in charge and we couldn't hope for a more loving, joyful or completely competent Being to take the reins. God our Father has never failed to love or to govern wisely—it is impossible for Him to make a mistake or commit a moral failure in anyone's life. Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit apparently defer to the Father's leadership to say nothing of the unnumbered hosts who serve Him night and day. Yet, Satan rebelled, as did the entire kingdom of darkness and they have seduced humanity into thinking that their Enemy is somehow our enemy... Let's set the record straight!

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. James 1:17
ESV

First Things First

Trying to understand the issues raised by God's sovereignty, righteousness and judgment can be difficult and troubling, if we don't begin at the beginning. The first thing to establish as an unalterable FACT is our Father's essential and unchanging Goodness, made gloriously visible to us in both Creation and Redemption. Many of us have tried to go about it the other way. That only spreads confusion!

We may accept that our Father in heaven is the sovereign Ruler and final Judge, but then cannot figure out how to reconcile the awful state of the world (and our lives) with the idea of God being completely good. (For help with this see [Truth or Consequences](#)). How can a good God allow this or that? Is He not as interested in justice as we are? Is He well-meaning, but negligent, incompetent, or powerless? Does He play favorites? Doesn't He care? Turn this all the way around! First, be certain of His goodness, then work at understanding His way of being sovereign and just.



What Jesus Came to Reveal

Perhaps you've noticed that there is a smear campaign being waged on planet earth against our God. His very Name is the favorite first half of the most common swear word uttered by an exasperated and bedeviled humanity. Profaning God's Name, even cursing God, is but the tip of the iceberg. All of us were born "in the dark"—blinded by the god of this world (through Adam's sin) from knowing our glorious Lord. Into that fateful darkness the whispered lies of the enemy stain our Father as the cause of our ills, rather than their only Cure. To this day Adam's children



run from their Creator in fear and shame, hiding their true selves behind fig leaves, while casting about for fresh ways to accuse God of their calamities.

Jesus came, among other things, to set the record straight. He used every waking moment to reveal the Father in all His infinite and matchless Goodness. He didn't come as a front man for some dubious Enterprise unworthy of our trust. No, in everything that He did He Himself declared that He was only seeking to do what the Father desired to be done. Jesus' entire life was such an unequaled display of goodness that even enemies of Christianity "can find no fault" in Him. In this we cannot help but see Jesus as our champion—one of us who got it right and rose to every occasion, showing forth the true goodness we know we are capable of achieving. That's not how Jesus saw it:

And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." Mark 10:17-18 ESV

Our Father's Unparalleled Goodness

This seems like an appropriate question, the kind most teachers love, yet Jesus turns it against the questioner. Why? Jesus knows our hearts: we habitually think too much of our goodness and too little of God's. The gift of eternal life flows to humanity entirely from God's goodness, not because of our own. We cannot earn or deserve the gift. Even Jesus is not "doing" something "good" to inherit eternal life for Himself. So, the question cannot be phrased, what must I do to deserve it (for that is impossible), but how can I believe in God's goodness (that I might receive it)? Faith enables us to receive what God desires to give. But we have such a terrible time trusting God! That's why Jesus said on another occasion that the real work we should be doing is to "believe in him whom he has sent." Believing in Jesus opens the way for us to believe in God and His goodness.

Once we see God's goodness towards us by the light of the gospel, we see so much else with growing clarity. Our Father in heaven created everything good. Therefore, all that is not good in our lives or in our world, cannot be God's doing. Everything not good is either the direct result of our own sins and sinfulness (and those of others), or the indirect result of having let the enemy and his evil kingdom loose on the planet we were meant to subdue. God in His goodness is saving us anyway. Why? Because in His goodness He loves us with a ceaseless, unending purity of heart. He is love. There is no darkness in Him, not even a "shadow" of turning off the mark of His own perfect, uncreated goodness.

Our Father's Goodness in Creation

The whole creation proclaims the glory of God as Creator. Creation was so good that even God joined in the angelic chorus, declaring, day after day, that what He was creating was good. Once Adam and Eve were brought forth, God's creative activity reached the highest level: "very good." We see by this that our Father can be lavish in His works and economical with His words. The thing we don't want to miss is the absolute miracle of it all. God created everything good—from the standpoint of Perfection Himself—and He created all that stunning goodness out of nothing at all! His Word alone brought everything into existence, including time and space.



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This should astonish us more that it does. We have grown up with the obvious reality of creation surrounding us. We accept it as a given. Not only that, it is hard for us to imagine sheer unbounded nothingness and timelessness, creatures as we are of time and space. Though we have been made in His image with “creativity” and imagination being among our likenesses, there is not a one among us who can either imagine or create anything without having something to go by or work upon. God is “very good” as a Creator and His goodness infuses all that He has created—leaving nothing out.

Where then did evil come from? The Bible simply states of the evil one that “iniquity was found in him.” The one “creative” act of the enemy was to invent something that had never existed before: evil. Even so, God had previously created something so radically good that it allowed the opportunity for evil to enter into existence: freedom. Apparently, with God freedom is so important that the risk of its misuse—by the angels and by us—had to be allowed. As terrible as the suffering and tragedies are that cover the earth, it would have been far worse had we not been given freedom. Just imagine how tremendous it will be for ourselves and all of creation when our true liberty is restored. This is what God is after.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Romans 8:20-21 NKJV

Our Father's Goodness in Redemption

Salvation begins as a colossal work of restoration. We lost our relationship with God; this is restored through faith in Christ. We lost the capacity to reveal His true Image; this is restored through our growth into Christ-likeness. We lost our freedom to live in joy, peace and creativity; this is restored through the Holy Spirit's anointing and presence. But God is not simply taking us “back to the Garden” by restoring what was lost. He has added in an entirely new dimension. Where Adam and Eve walked with God reflecting His glory, we now have God living in us, leading us towards our ultimate glorification in Him. God's goodness as a Redeemer, goes beyond His goodness as Creator.

It is one thing to create good out of nothing. It is another thing entirely to bring good out of evil. We cannot do either. We certainly cannot create out of nothing and we have been stymied countless times at trying to make up for the evil we do. Yet, this is exactly what God intends to do; indeed, He is already doing it. All of creation and all of redeemed humanity will somehow wind up in better shape than if the fall had never happened. That is a mind-numbing thought. But if we could just believe it, what a heart-exhilarating truth it would be.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 WEB

It is as simple as this. In His love for us and for His Son, the Father is not about to let anything the devil (and our own sins) has done to diminish the joy of heaven and of the earth's restoration. God's goodness as a Redeemer means that He will pursue the curse wherever it has gone and reverse its punishing effects with a greater good. The dark passage that the earth and the redeemed are being forced to go through due to our Fall will be more than worth it—beyond compare!

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18 ESV

The Focus of Our Faith

In our individual faith-journeys towards that promised future it will make all the difference in the world if we fight to believe that God is able to do what He says. Every set back, every weakness, every sin will be overturned by a work of God that transforms all that is placed into His hands. As we yield our lives to him and cast our cares on Him, He will work all things towards that greater good He is determined to bring us in this life and the next.

How can God, who is only and entirely good, bring good out of evil? Our Father in heaven brought the greatest good, our salvation, out of the greatest evil, the judicial murder of the only truly sinless human. At the cross Jesus not only died for our sins, He was made to be sin. He became one with every sin that has ever defaced creation, then absorbed the dreadful punishment sin deserved. By raising Jesus from the dead, God has proven to us He has the ability and the right to reverse the effect of every sin anyone has ever sinned. He not only is good, He is good at what He does. What seems impossible to us, He can do for everyone who is "in Christ" through faith.



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CHAPTER NINE

The Father as Seen in Scripture

The Lord told Moses that no one could see Him and live. Fortunately, it seems that God is able to break His own rules, or else He meant something by this one that we don't fully understand. The truth is that many people have seen God "face to face" with no negative side effects. These close encounters with our heavenly Father give us tantalizing pictures of the One who sits on the Throne.

Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.
Exodus 33:11 ESV

"But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."
Exodus 33:20 ESV

Lost Vision; False Images

If you were the Invisible Man you would need someone to speak up for you, right? Imagine how it is with God the Father. Under ordinary conditions we can't see, taste, touch, smell or hear Him. He lives in a realm beyond all of our senses, almost beyond our imagination. Try to sketch what He looks like and you might draw a blank. He's invisible! Well, not exactly. It is we who are blind.

The Fall into sin cast a veil over all our eyes. We lost the Vision of God whose Image we were eternally meant to bear, cherished in the very center of our hearts. Jesus has come to restore that lost Vision and recover our lost relationship with His Father and ours. But in the meantime, there has been plenty of opportunity for the deceiver to sow false images into the void.



Of the many misconceptions about God the Father out there, two have proven to be especially beguiling (and damaging) in our day: the idea of God as an angry judge and that of God as a disembodied spirit, a non-personal "force." Both make it difficult to love God in any meaningful way, which is His primary command to us. Worse, they make it hard to draw close: How can you "cozy up" to a God that you fear is angry with you? Better to stay at a safe distance! Or who seems soulless and devoid of personality? Might as well try to embrace the wind!

A misguided reading of scripture feeds these false images; a balanced understanding of the gospel utterly destroys them. Just as the Lord cast down the false image (idol) of Dagon before the Ark in the day of the Judges, so now He desires to cast down all false images of the Father



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that have crept into our hearts. See [The Father's Love](#) for help defeating the first false image; keep reading for help with the second.

Regaining Our Sight

Jesus said flat out that He came to reveal the Father and seemed shocked at the Last Supper that His disciples failed to pick up on that part of His assignment. For us Jesus immediately begins revealing the Father through our faith-conversion. We learn from the gospel that against all fearful expectation to the contrary, God doesn't hate us or want to punish us; He actually loves us and sent Jesus to the rescue. We begin to "see" the Father by looking at the cross for it is there that we see the unimaginable love which led God to punish His own Son in our place.

As we grow in the Lord, His Word is there to open our spiritual eyes to see the Father's Hand upon our life, guiding us through circumstances and working all things for our good. Most revealing of all is the Person of Jesus. The more we behold Him by faith, the more we gain eyes to see that He and the Father are One. The Father is just like Jesus!

But is He "embodied" as Jesus is? Does He have personality as Jesus does? Will we see Him? Can we see Him? It is at this point that even seasoned Christians stumble. Many scriptures declare that God cannot be seen. God, Himself, told Moses that "no one can see me and live." Those who know these scriptures are sometimes stopped dead in their tracks. Is this where the trail ends? Bereft of vision? Unable to embrace?

To make any headway with these mind-numbing questions, we will have to knock down two commonplace myths: the myth of the Father as a spiritual "force" and the myth that He cannot be seen.

Myth 1: A Spiritual "Force"

When Jesus said that God is Spirit, He could not have meant the limitations which we ordinarily place upon that term, for Jesus is Himself God and therefore fully Spirit. Certainly, God the Father doesn't have a physical body—for Jesus alone took on our flesh—but that doesn't mean that He lacks spiritual form and substance which can be seen (as we will see in the next section). The difficulty for us here is what is meant by spirit. I suspect that our unconscious thought about God as spirit tends to summon up images of invisible forces and intangible associations. We are, after all, creatures of our culture.

The ancients didn't suffer from our cultural limitations. They lived in an imaginative universe populated with exotic pantheons of celestial beings, positively overflowing with personality (and attitude). They had their own errors, obviously, but they wouldn't have had any trouble understanding spirit as meaning "spirited" in the sense of lively and full of life! Our universe, on the other hand, is as devoid of the personal as it is of life—nothing we know of as life can live in interstellar space. It is filled instead with invisible fields of impersonal forces: electrical, nuclear, gravitational, magnetic, radioactive, etc.

This strictly scientific view — correct in so far as material things are concerned—is what we've been raised on. The Biblical world view shatters this truncated version of reality, though it takes time for the truth to sink in and the realization to dawn that everything in our universe is somehow also alive: the very stones will praise Him, trees clap their hands, the stars sing, and



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all creation eagerly longs for us to emerge from our captivity. Most alive of all is our God. Where He sits upon His throne is not some black hole in space, but the blazing source of all light and life! Nothing about Him is hidden in darkness, only hidden from darkness.

Our God has emotion, intellect and will, not in any fallen way, but heightened by perfection and filled with glory. He who made us in His Image and gives life to each one of us, cannot be less than we are. Whatever it is that we mean by soul, personhood and personality, God is that and more. In Mere Christianity C. S. Lewis addressed this gap in our perceptions.

A good many people nowadays say, "I believe in a God, but not in a personal God." They feel that the mysterious something which is behind all other things must be more than a person. Now the Christians quite agree. But the Christians are the only people who offer any idea of what a being that is beyond personality could be like. All the other people, though they say that God is beyond personality, really think of Him as something impersonal: that is, as something less than personal.

Myth 2: Impossible to Be Seen

There seems to have been a belief held by the Israelites with an absolute certainty throughout the Old Testament period that if anyone saw God they would die. No doubt this is true—at one level. As sin-filled as we have become through the Fall, we would all perish, if we were to look upon the pure, undefiled glory of the Holy God without a covering. Even the angels around His throne cover their eyes—or at least some do. How much greater is our need! But the truth is we have a covering, making it possible for us to approach the throne of grace, not with fear and trembling, but with grace-empowered "boldness." Nothing less than the Blood of Jesus gives us direct access to the Father of Lights; nothing more is required.

From our vantage point we now know that Jesus has always been the Lamb slain from the "foundation of the world." In some mysterious way He has always been the Covering our sins and sin nature would require. Does this explain how God could have an angel carry a burning coal from the altar in heaven to purify Isaiah in His presence? Isaiah says that he "saw" the Lord enthroned in glory surrounded by angels who covered their faces, yet his face wasn't covered and he didn't die. Nevertheless, it was the Lord who said to Moses that "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." That should settle the issue, except that the scriptures also record that "the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." What are we to make of these apparent contradictions?

Sometimes (many times) it is wisest to bow before the mystery, rather than reach beyond revelation in a vain attempt to comprehend it. Our initial task was not to explain how it is that we can see God, but to demonstrate that our Father can definitely be seen, even by the likes of us! For that we have Moses and Isaiah as outstanding witnesses already cited. To them may be added the spectacular combined witness of Daniel in Babylon and John on Patmos. Both of these men in exile saw the same scene in heaven, although they lived five centuries apart. Not only that, but what they saw hasn't even taken place yet by earth time!

Unquestionably, Daniel and John saw the Father, because in both scenes Jesus enters from "offstage" and approaches the "one seated on the throne" (so that One isn't Jesus). Daniel and John saw it all and lived to tell about it. It makes fascinating reading though we could certainly wish that they had added more to their descriptions. What we do have, however, is enough to



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forever shatter both myths: that God is some kind of ethereal, nonpersonal "force" or a spiritual being who cannot be seen. Please take the time to look up the extended account in your Bible.

As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. Daniel 7:9 ESV

At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Revelation 4:2-3 ESV



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CHAPTER TEN

The Father's Heart of Love

We become like the image we bear—the image carried deep inside. For many of us the Father's image has been distorted by Adam's nature, earthly parents, and misguided church teachings. Jesus came to reveal what the Father is really like. A father's love.

Here is a genuine marvel: Jesus, because He is fully human and fully divine, restores to us a true Image of who we are and of what our Father is really like. All false images of ourselves and of our God are alike demolished and replaced by looking to Jesus! It is an incredible thing that God can restore these two glorious images, once lost and broken through the Fall, by means of revealing the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Danger of a Distorted Image

We have been created in God's Image to be *bearers* of His Image - not just reflect His Image. Image is everything in the spiritual life. Not the image we can recite, but the image we "bear" or carry deep within our heart.

The image we hold of God the Father hidden away in our heart of hearts will determine:

- 1) How we will seek the Father
- 2) How we will respond to what He allows in our lives
- 3) How we will act towards others.



Jesus kept His spiritual eyes constantly upon a true vision of the Father's heart of love for Him and for us. All that He did flowed out of that ongoing faith connection. This is the all-essential matter of keeping the heart rightly set. Unfortunately, the idea we have of Father God is often misshaped by Adam's nature, earthly fathers and church tradition. It can be a fallen image buried in our heart distorting the true Image.

Consider the powerful influence of these three image-shapers:

- 1) **Adam's nature** is in us, still seeking to hide from God in guilt and fear of punishment, ashamed of our sinful "nakedness."
- 2) **Our birth fathers** (and mothers) may have been uncaring, distant, over-bearing, unaffectionate, abusive, threatening, harsh in discipline, angry in punishment, and sinful - creating powerful, but false impressions of what God the Father is like.



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3) Our spiritual fathers (and mothers), even beloved pastors and teachers may have planted wrong images of the Father as being different from Jesus in His ways with us - less loving, more judgmental, easily offended, stern and strict.

None of these distorted images reveal the Father's heart of love. They actually resemble the enemy's 'dark heart' instead. These false images must be cast down! We cast them down first by forgiving the ones who sowed distorted images in us, and then by renouncing the lies that were planted and confessing the truth in their place.

The Image Formed by Family

Our fathers (and mothers) can contribute to a distorted image of Father God because they are as a god to us when we are little - teaching us right from wrong and exercising power over us. As children we are looking to see God in our fathers - all the more so since our hearts are blocked from knowing the heavenly Father's love and Presence by the sin nature.

No earthly father entirely measures up, but a solid foundation of affection, love and proper discipline makes a huge difference in forming who we will become. The lack of this solid foundation leaves a void, often a hurting wound, which the enemy has many ways of poisoning.

There are crucial things we all needed our fathers to say to us, but which many of us never heard:

*I love you.
I'm proud of you.
You're a good child.
I'm glad you were born.*



Every home needs a godly father. Godly order in scripture shows us that the head of the woman is the man; the head of the man is Christ; the head of Christ is the Father. The father sets the emotional tone of a household and provides the moral framework for living in the family. The first word babies often say is "dada." Children are left as "spiritual orphans" when fathers are not covering their families with godly love and discipline.

Statistics give us a sense for the emotional and societal damage caused by failed fathering. In the USA over 90% of prisoners are males; 95% of those on death row hated their fathers. Many prisoners don't even know who their fathers were.

The "father wound" is pervasive and deadly. We all carry the "first father wound" stemming from Adam's sin. Many of us also bear the "birth father wound" from our parents, a "father in God wound" from our religious upbringing and a "father impostor wound" from the enemy's direct working.

The "father wound" carries a societal curse - a heavy consequence "in the land." Small wonder that so much restoration is needed in our own day.



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Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.
Malachi 4:5-6 WEB

Clarifying Our Image of the Father

People often think they begin with knowing God the Father. Actually, we only know about Him by name as Father God but relate to Him more as "the great high God" - distant and unknowable until a living faith through Christ is birthed in us. Jesus came to reveal the Father personally and much more intimately as Abba, just as He also came to baptize us with the Holy Spirit.

The order of the three great pilgrimage festivals that Israel was commanded to observe reveals spiritual realities about our new life in Christ which are very interesting. Passover came first in early spring, prefiguring Jesus the true Passover Lamb. Next came Pentecost in late spring, a celebration of the "early harvest," which exactly coincided with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Early Church. Finally, Tabernacles, the great Feast of Harvest, arrived at the end of summer after a long growth period.

Drawing a trinitarian analogy to the Festivals, Tabernacles, therefore, relates to the Father. An intimate relationship with the Father is not automatic - it often comes only after a long period of growth (if at all), but it is absolutely necessary for establishing our hearts in sufficient grace that we may dwell (tabernacle) with our God.

Our Father's Glorious Grace

The revelation of the Father's glorious grace began in the Old Testament. God the Father revealed His glory - the glorious nature of His grace-filled Being - to Moses.

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.'
Exodus 34:6 ESV

This is what Paul refers to when he tells us that our sins consist in falling short of God's glory. Our selfish and unloving choices in no way reflect our Father's glorious ability to shower love and mercy, grace and goodness, upon the whole of His creation.

So great is His glorious grace that our Father in heaven does not even hold our sins against us. He hates our sins and in His goodness, will patiently work to bring us to repentance so that we can be separated from them, all the while maintaining a Spirit of reconciliation towards us in His Great Heart.

It was God [personally present] in Christ, reconciling and restoring the world to favor with Himself, not counting up and holding against [men] their trespasses [but cancelling them], and committing to us the message of reconciliation (of the restoration to favor). 2 Corinthians 5:19 AMP

Our Father's Amazing Love

Our grace-filled Father affirmed His only begotten Son by expressing His love for Jesus in public displays of affection. There are three audible words of God which Jesus heard that are recorded for us in scripture. In all of them the true Father affirmed His Son: at His baptism, on the mount of transfiguration and before the cross.

Astoundingly, the Father has the same love for all who are in Christ by faith. If you are a believer, Father God desires to affirm and express His love to you. There is no one He loves more than you. There is no one He loves less than you - He doesn't play favorites. He loves us all as much as He loves Jesus!

If this scripture fails to move your heart, pray for fresh grace to be amazed by the stunning implications of what Jesus is saying about the Father's love for you.

I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. John 17:23 ESV

This Is What Our Gracious Father Is Really Like:

The Father delights to give us the Kingdom.

The Father has no darkness about Him.

He is the giver of every good gift.

The Father disciplines only in love.

It is His goodness that draws us to repent.

The Father is unconditional love.

The Father completely accepts us.

He is reconciled to us the way we are.

He favors us with right standing in His sight.

Your Father has never been angry with you.

Let Jesus Reveal the Father to You

Jesus came on a mission to reveal the Father and restore His true image to us. Both by His life and by His death His stated intention was to reveal the Father.

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?



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Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" John 14:8-10 ESV

Here is the idea made simple: The Father is just like Jesus! The New Testament not only gives us permission, it makes it a requirement of faith that we cast down every image of the Father we may have been given that does not match up with Jesus.

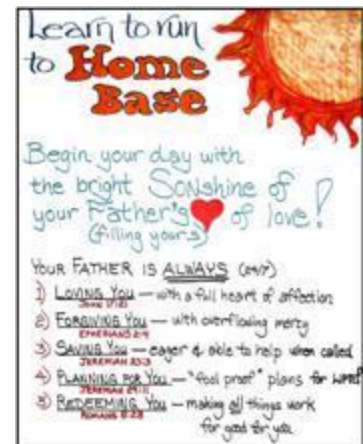
I and the Father are one. John 10:30 ESV

If this is who God really is to you and for you (and it is), then actually knowing and believing it will produce joy and peace in you and love through you in any moment of your life in which you touch this living reality by faith. Active, believing faith always has that kind of power. Faith is what puts us in touch with reality. Not to live in a faith like this is to live a bad dream from which One Day we will all be awakened in His Presence. Why not awaken now?

As we behold the true image of the Father our hearts become established. So let us learn to run to "Home Base." Begin each day intentionally checking to see if your heart really believes these five great liberating truths about God the Father.

Your Father Is Always:

- 1) Loving you - with full warmth of affection (John 17:23).
- 2) Forgiving you - with overflowing mercy (Hebrews 4:16).
- 3) Saving you - eager to help when called (Jeremiah 33.3).
- 4) Planning for you - for a hope-filled future (Jeremiah 29:11).
- 5) Redeeming you - all things working for good (Romans 8:28).



If your heart doesn't believe these truths, then it's time to roll up your spiritual sleeves and go to work, attaching your faith to His scriptures. Jesus said that believing the truth about God is our most important work. Repentance is turning back to the love that never turns away from you.

The Way of Restoration

Having our hearts restored to a condition of deeply trusting our Father to never fail us or forsake us will require recognizing the moments when we begin "serving" a lesser image of God: Feeling unworthy, anxious or driven to perform are clues we need to heed.

- 1) Pray for the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to see any distorted images of the Father that you may be carrying: Forgive the ones who planted them; repent, renounce those fallen images.



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2) Pray for Jesus to more fully reveal the Father to you: Repent, renounce all unbelief; confess the truth of His perfect love, abundant mercy, saving help, great plans and total redemption.

3) Turn to the Father and release gratitude for His never-ending love and grace-based way of saving You!

Prayer

Father, I confess that I have let the enemy and my own life experiences build up false images about You that have kept me from running to You. But those days are ending now! From now on I will fight to believe in the truth about You that Jesus is revealing to me. I will fight to run to You when I am tempted or in need. I will seek Your grace even in my places of deepest disgrace. Let Your perfect love cast out all of my fears!

Don't make Father do all the running - learn to run to Him!



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