

KNOWING GOD

Experience and Love Him

PAUL J. BUCKNELL

Books by Paul J. Bucknell

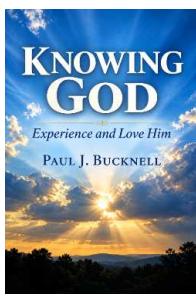
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KNOWING GOD

Experience and Love Him



Paul J. Bucknell

Book Information

Knowing God: *Experience and Love Him*

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Preface

Jesus began his teaching on prayer by telling his disciples: “Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” In a few words, Jesus dispels some of our greatest theological misconceptions. God is both near and distant, both friendly and holy.

This nearness of God invites us to know Him better. While increasing our knowledge of God matters greatly in a growing Christian life, knowledge has its limits. These grand truths about God must shape our thoughts of Him. And when our thoughts are shaped, so are our lives and service. It’s always better to think of this quest to know God as a journey.

Numerous books explore God’s attributes, such as A.W. Pink’s *Attributes of God* and, with more detail, J.I. Packer’s *Knowing God*. We want to take these truths about God and show how, through faith and obedience, they become integrated into our lives. God’s presence is the ultimate good; we want God’s heavenly kingdom to shape our very lives.

We have many questions about God. Some are basic, more about what He is like, but others go much deeper, trying to figure out how they interrelate with His other attributes. By knowing Him better, we can deepen our relationship with Him and find the rewards that come from knowing our Almighty God.

May the truth of God more deeply shape our whole lives so that, through Jesus Christ’s grace, we become more holy as He is holy.

Knowing God (1 John 1:3-4)

Our goal is to deepen our knowledge of God.

“I have enough trouble getting to know people. How can I get to know God? I can’t see Him. I can’t even hear Him. And even if I could meet Him, how would I know I would want to meet Him?”

Question: What is God like? Write down many adjectives that describe something about God.

Getting to Know God

God is so great. Can He really be known? Certainly, this is an insightful question. No one questions whether God is different from us. Elihu rightly reminded Job, “Behold, God is exalted, and we do not know Him; The number of His years is unsearchable” (Job 36:26).

We have a genuine sense that we cannot really know God, yet the Bible and God Himself challenge us to know Him. We conclude that we cannot know certain aspects of God, but we can know others.

But we need to be careful, because stating these things assumes several concepts about God and reality that are hotly contested.

Let us step back and observe what people believe about God.

Transcendent versus Immanent

Throughout human history, many different concepts of God have been proposed and deeply held. Perhaps it is helpful to begin with a contrast to better understand these differences on a larger scale.



Transcendent

Some suggest that God is primarily transcendent—high above and distinct from the world. Different beliefs express this in various ways. Some conceive of God as a distant or largely unknowable force or being. Islam, for example, strongly emphasizes God’s transcendence. Allah is not regarded as a Father in the intimate personal relationship with His people that Christianity teaches through Christ.

Christianity has had its distortions of transcendence too, such as deism. For the deist, God is like a clockmaker. He made the clock, set it going, and let it run on its own without getting involved in Earth’s affairs. God is not involved in Earth’s affairs.

In many of these views, God is not easily known. In some cases, God is conceived as distant; in others, as an impersonal force.

The danger here is that God is neither knowable nor involved in man’s immediate affairs. Some like this notion because it frees them from God’s influence. Atheism can become a practical extension of this belief, for denying God’s existence amounts to much the same as believing in a very distant God.

On the other hand, some believe that God is distant, but that man still lives under His general accountability, such as on Judgment Day. This belief brings fear and gives rise to all sorts of religions designed to pacify and rectify their lives in light of this understanding of God. Sacrifices, for example, are an ancient rite intended to pacify this unknown God.

Mankind's many religions and concepts of God, along with the associated fears, reveal the dangers of having a transcendent God one does not know.

Immanent

Others suggest that God is immanent, that is, He is involved in the affairs of earth. The spiritual force, whether personal or not, is nearby. This again has many diverse aspects.

Pantheism identifies God or the divine with the impersonal universe and everything within it. Rather than viewing God as a separate Creator present in His creation, pantheism sees the divine as expressed in or identical with nature itself, including both living and inanimate things, such as trees and rocks.¹

Idol worship holds that God can somehow be appeased by certain rites. In this view, through bells ringing in a temple, fasting, and sacrifices, people believe they can reach this god. Magic extends this view and is seen as controlling the deity or force through magic chants, sacrifices, or secret knowledge. The key point is that what man does can connect him with the great God. Through these means, the deity is brought near.

Certain monotheistic religions acknowledge God's involvement through other means, such as God's appearances. The main monotheistic religions—Judaism, Mohammedanism (Islam), and Christianity—all adopt this perspective, largely because they traditionally accept the Old Testament and accounts of God's appearances to people like Abraham.

Cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormonism use other sources but assume that God communicates with mankind.

¹Some environmentalists work out their environmental concerns from a pantheistic worldview.

The Bible also teaches another form of intervention through God's appearance in the incarnation (literally, God in human form), in which God, Jesus the Christ, was born as a man (cf. Philippians 2:3-8). His divine powers, demonstrated through miracles or signs, affirm Christ's claim.

Dangers

There are many dangers here. How does one know the appearance is genuine? Surely some of these claims are wrong!

One is astounded by the acceptance of idol worship, yet people are desperate to get along with life. When they are barren or sick, etc., they want to make sure they are doing things right. Unfortunately, they know of no other alternative and hope they are right.

I remember one couple desperate to find a solution to their crisis. They went from idol to idol. When one did not help, they turned to another. They weren't sure, but they hoped their actions could give them leverage with God and bring him closer so he would hear and respond.

Is God close enough for us to know Him? These are general categories to help us understand how people view God differently and how they connect with him.

Summary

In conclusion, the Bible presents both the transcendence and immanence of God. He is distant and beyond the creation He made, yet He is regularly involved in its affairs.

The Bible says

The Bible is the reliable ancient book given by our Creator to guard us from many false ideas and to help us come to know Him personally. He wants us to know Him and, through the Gospel, has made it possible.

So in this book, we will regularly use and depend on Scripture to help us grasp a more accurate and complete picture of God. Are we pretending that we can know all about Him? Absolutely not. We cannot fully appreciate all aspects of God here.

We can hardly grasp the scope of the universe. Why would we act as if we could understand the power of the One who put it together and holds it together? We should not, however, conclude that we cannot appreciate His power. This is true on many levels, which we will address in upcoming chapters.

Let's get down to the basics. Again, remember that we are using only one verse. It does not give us a complete picture of God. However, by carefully contemplating what it suggests alongside many other Scriptures, it is sufficient to draw certain conclusions about God and His purposes. (Test them if you desire by reading other parts of the Bible and seeing whether they affirm the same message!)

The Basics: 1 John 1:3-4

“And indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete” (1 John 1:3-4).

As we explore knowing God, let us focus on three questions from 1 John 1:3-4. Each addresses a significant aspect of knowing God. (1) Can I know God? (2) Do I personally know God? (3) Does knowing God change my life?

(1) Can I know God?

“And indeed our fellowship is with the Father” (1 John 1:3-4).

The first important question to consider is whether man can actually come to know God. This would assume [God is knowable and that He reveals Himself to us.](#)

Fellowship

People familiar with the Bible and the church know the Greek word for fellowship, *koinonia*. It denotes deep, meaningful interaction with others. Although Elder John does not use the word ‘know’ here, he clearly implies a personal relationship with God through the term ‘fellowship.’

The word fellowship is the same word translated as fellowship in Acts 2:42, “And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

What is needed to have fellowship? Fellowship assumes personhood and meaningful communication. This kind of intimate relationship is not limited to people with one another but also describes God’s relationship with His people, the church. John wrote to a community of God’s people (the ‘our’ refers to them as believers). Part of being part of God’s people is having this meaningful relationship with God.

Just think for a second: how many people who profess to be part of Christianity in some way actually view their relationship with God as personal? In many cases, Christianity has become an empty shell of profession of the true God, without the relationship and the changes that come from a close relationship with God. This is why many people despise Christianity—rightly so. We need to return to Scripture to get a right perspective on what followers of Jesus are to experience.

Know God

Let’s expand our sense of the relationship we are to have with this great God by examining how John uses the phrase “knowing God.”

In the Gospel of John, John says the world does not know Him, “He (Jesus) was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him” (John 1:10).

Jesus throws a bigger challenge to the crowds: “And so they were saying to Him, ‘Where is Your Father?’” Jesus answered, “You know neither Me, nor My Father; **if you knew Me, you would know My Father** also” (John 8:19).

Although both verses refer to knowing Jesus, note how Jesus expands their understanding of God by calling Him ‘Father’ (which He also does in 1 John 1:3). Since the only way to know God is through Jesus, if they do not know Jesus, they do not know the Father, that is, God.

He said that if they know Him (Jesus), they know the Father. That is very intriguing. “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

Let’s make some brief conclusions.

God is personal and meant to be known personally. God is not merely a force or energy. All programs that teach of God as a force strip God of His personhood. So do those who assert a pantheistic concept of God.

God is all around, since He is Spirit, but He is also a person. He is not the same as what exists. He is greater than all that exists, but through Jesus He has entered this world and made a way to find peace with God.

God is both transcendent and immanent. Though God is great and glorious, He makes Himself intimately known through Jesus. The Bible lifts up characters who knew God, dialogued with Him, and worked with God by carrying out what God wanted. Closeness is not defined by a mystical feeling of presence but by becoming personally acquainted with God through a personal relationship.

Those who emphasize God’s power and sovereignty to the neglect of His personhood have wrongly described God. But so have those who speak of God as an intimate friend while

ignoring His fully glorious person (i.e., He is light). Our challenge is to desire to know Him rather than be held back by fear or distraction.

Others deny God's personhood by stripping the Lord of His will and focusing on vague feelings and sources of energy. One thing that distinguishes persons is their own desire and purpose, not merely a blur of existence. Atheists strongly deny God's influence in this world and go further by denying that any God exists.

Just as people can know things about others without personally knowing them, so they can easily draw wrong conclusions about God because they have not sufficiently come to know Him. We must grow in our relationship with God, largely through a good study of His Word, so we can better understand what God might do in a given circumstance.

Conclusion

The One who made us is the same One who makes it possible for us to have and enjoy a personal relationship with Him. God is simply great in this way. If one opens oneself to understanding God outside the Bible, all sorts of distortions necessarily arise. These, in turn, cause multiple problems in our daily lives.

*"And indeed **our fellowship is with the Father.**"*

**God's is both powerful and
personal (knowable)**

Instead, think of the Bible as God's personal journal, graciously given to us, through which we gain special insight into who He is, how He works, and why He does certain things.

Jesus, now alive, fully affirmed the Scriptures of old. We should confine our search to what those sacred pages reveal, and then begin a spiritual journey that never ends as we come

to know our glorious God more intimately, who welcomes us into His presence.

(2) Do I personally know God?

“And indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

The first question on our minds should be, “Do I know God?” We can refine this question further, and later we will, to “Do I rightly know and please the One who made and sustains me?”



Behind all our discussions, we must recognize that knowing God is not as straightforward as we might think. Sure, it is easy to think God is love and ignore the more difficult questions.

Getting to know God can feel like navigating a maze. For example, why does a person need to read a book that is thousands of years old to understand God? Why can't one simply look up at the sky or follow a beautiful creek and respond to what one feels?

Religions

Others are enthralled with their religion and hesitate to replace their good notions, feelings, and sense of comfort with what is found in the holy Scriptures. People are deeply insecure. Anyone contemplating change must be willing to face the possibility that what they now believe is untrue or untrustworthy.

Centuries of history clearly reveal the inadequacy of religion, including Christianity, as a social or personal force. Beware when religion and power join hands! The various systems of

understanding God, along with their treasured traditions, have not solved man's problems or brought renewal to one's life as Christ does.

We must go beyond religion to the basic problem of mankind. Let me highlight four points that explain why there are so many different conclusions about who God is and the various proposed answers for how we are to find peace with Him. At the same time, we will show how belief in Christ solves our most basic relationship problems with God.

Design – Started off great in the garden

The scene in Genesis 2-3 shows a genuine reason for man to aspire to a close relationship with God; it is not illusory. In the Garden of Eden, God walked and talked with man (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:8-13).² In this scene, which Jesus fully affirmed as trustworthy (Matthew 19:5), we see God walking with and conversing with man. God spoke with both Adam and Eve, and they responded to God, though irresponsibly.

This was not an accident. God created the universe and the Garden, then placed man and woman there, designed to commune with Him. This is the deep design behind it all.

Do you want to know your ultimate purpose? Without a deep relationship with God, life will be cheap. This is why people, seemingly unaware of the serious consequences of bad habits, seek alternatives to fill the void in their lives.

The good part is that God created man and woman in His image so they could relate to Him. We can watch an ant carry a blade of grass from one side of the yard to the other, but we can't get to know that ant.

² To be honest, we gain an even broader perspective on this when God rebuked Adam and Eve after their sinful act. But this too is a conversation. God did not need to explain what He was doing.

Give it all the directions in the world, and it will not make a difference because we were not made at the same level. We can name the ant and make a home for it, but we simply can't relate to it, nor can it relate to us.

The same is true of a dog. Some of us love dogs, but like Adam, we find that animals are on a whole different level of functioning and require a different level of communication. I remember once saying bad things to a dog, but with a very nice intonation. "You are a bad dog..." The dog, however, happily wagged his tail. He only understood the tone of my voice. The dog cannot enter our world, and we cannot enter his.

Summary

God made man to live in a close relationship with Him. Without this relationship, man seeks other things to fill the void.

Historic – The relationship was broken

The second critical point is that something happened to that relationship. All our confusion stems from this. Disobedience, whether from rebellion or ignorance, broke the relationship between God and man and negatively affected all relationships among people.

What happened many years ago in that garden fully explains what is wrong with our world and society today. God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit (i.e., the forbidden fruit), but they did.

Then the curse of death fell on man. Spiritual life departed. Peace with the world disappeared. The curse turned everything upside down. If things don't seem right in the world, it is because of the effects of the evil one's diabolical plan.

Not only is our relationship with God broken, but our whole inner being ends up in revolt against God. Yes, we see scant signs of His power and glory in His creation, but we seek al-

ternative ways to express our divine inclinations through the various religions—man’s attempts to achieve peace with God. By nature, we live in suspicion of God and His ways.

Reality – Man couldn’t fix it

None of the world’s religions, nor philosophical or psychological attempts to understand man, can repair man’s broken relationship with God. Man knows there is God (Romans 1) but fights against it.

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures” (Romans 1:20-23).

Religion is well defined as man’s attempt to find peace with God. But if man has offended God, there is no way for man to do this, even if he tries to be good, devoted, or sacrificial.

Man does not need another organization because it, too, becomes corrupted. Man needs a solution outside himself. At least that was God’s observation. If another way existed to bring peace between God and man, God would have spared His Son from the curse of the cross. Remember Jesus’ words, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matthew 26:39). There was no other way.

If we want to know how to resolve this terrible predicament man put himself in, we need to go back to the problem itself.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Man offended God and must die. As a result, man no longer had spiritual union with God, having aligned himself under Satan (Isaiah 59:2).

Update – God Himself solved the problem

The good news (i.e., the Gospel) is that a solution exists, but it does not come from man’s wisdom or highest pursuits. Man’s attempts, in fact, are best seen as arrogant efforts to resolve his inner peace or security issues rather than truly fixing our relationship with God.

God’s description of mankind’s stubbornness clearly reveals our rebellious hearts. True, most of these Scriptures concern the Jewish people whom God particularly reached out to, but their complete rebellion against God’s special grace is sad. Without this special grace from God, we are only more confused.

Inward corruption

Isaiah repeatedly highlights their inward corruption and inability to seek God (Isaiah 59:15-16; 63:10; 66:18).

“Yes, truth is lacking; And he who turns aside from evil makes himself a prey. Now the LORD saw, And it was displeasing in His sight that there was no justice. And He saw that there was no man, And was astonished that there was no one to intercede...” (Isaiah 59:15-16).

“But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; Therefore, He turned Himself to become their enemy; He fought against them” (Isaiah 63:10).

His call to seek Him

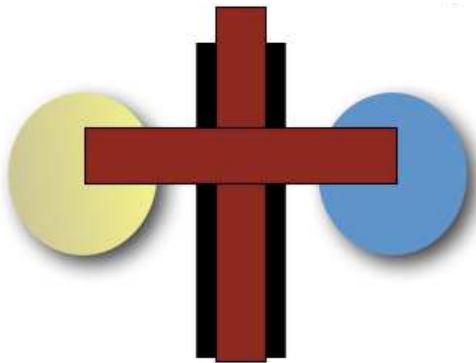
God's extraordinary grace is evident in His great patience and in the many ways He repeatedly called the people to seek and find Him (Isaiah 55:1; 60:1-3; 62:11; 65:1-2).

"Behold, the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth, Say to the daughter of Zion, "Lo, your salvation comes; Behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him." (Isaiah 62:11).

"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. 3 "Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you, According to the faithful mercies shown to David" (Isaiah 55:1-3).

His intervention to help

Most important, however, is God's intervention in this mess. This act of God reveals much about His person. He cared. He paid attention. He did something about it.



reconciliation

“And I looked, and there was no one to help, And I was astonished and there was no one to uphold; So My own arm brought salvation to Me; And My wrath upheld Me” (Isaiah 63:5).

“But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand” (Isaiah 53:10).

Conclusion

Many verses hint at and refer to the sending of a Messiah to make peace between God and man. If the offense is disobedience and the consequence is death, then man must die for his rebellion. God Himself came to earth in the person of His Son, who became man so He could serve as the perfect substitute for our sin.

Christ exchanged His life for ours and, through faith in Christ, thus opens the door to reconciliation with God and to possession of eternal life, that is, an unending, developing relationship with God our Creator.

Christ and His work on the cross accomplish two immediate, life-changing acts:

(1) Brings us into a relationship with God our Creator and

(2) Enables us to live a new life empowered by Christ in us.³

³ There is more to say. By His resurrection, Christ truly empowers us to live a new life.

Reflections

Man would not seek God (Romans 3:19-21), and even when he did, it was completely offensive to God (Isaiah 1:2-9).

God intervened. He descended from His glorious position and entered the realm of man. So our faith does not depend on religion, but on faith in Christ. We cannot, by any means, work our way to peace with God. Only faith in God's work for us is significant. Rejection of this work is a further display of rebellion.

Confidence in our giving, attendance, reading of the Scriptures, and devoted works can never restore our relationship with God. The penalty of death is upon us. Those acts demean God's justice and obscure our true offense. Religion is a poor bribe, a way for man to sneak out of his deserved judgment through shoddy gifts.

There is one way to find peace with God. It is not to join a church but to believe in Jesus Christ and understand that God will bring forgiveness and restore our relationship with Him through our faith in Christ.

(3) Does knowing God bring a change in my life?

"These things we write, so that our joy may be made complete" (1 John 1:3-4).

What do we see here but that God's people are changed by His presence? The closer to God, the more joyful His people will be. A simple listing of the fruit of the Spirit reminds us of God's glorious work in our lives. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace ..." (Gal 5:22-23).

One of God's great promises is to establish a new covenant by which we can openly know God.

“They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:10-12).

How different this was from the Old Testament law, which no one could ever fulfill! The privilege of knowing God means we can live in His presence and share His holiness.

Despising Christianity

One reason some people despise Christianity in countries where the Gospel has been proclaimed is the inconsistency they see between Christian profession and practice. People who do not know God yet claim to be associated with Christianity stain the world.

People are hoping for more from Christianity. When it functions merely as a religion devoid of God’s Spirit, its adherents clearly do not know God, and the religion becomes superficial and repugnant. It becomes just another disappointing act in mankind’s plays.

Why do they look down on those who profess faith in Christ? You probably know why. They call them hypocrites. A person professes one thing yet lives another way. What can we expect from someone who does not personally know God? They are from the world, wolves wearing sheepskin.

How shall we deal with this problem?

Jesus warned that many tares would be brought in with the wheat. In other words, many professing believers are associated with genuine believers (Mat 13:24-43). They might think they are truly believers, but they are not.

“Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn”” (Matthew 13:30).

It is not the believer’s duty to examine the lives of others, but it is our duty and the sensible course to examine our own lives (2 Corinthians 13:5). The point is that if God truly dwells in our lives, shouldn’t there be a change in our hearts and lives? Let’s make some observations.

Knowing God brings change

Jesus warned us again and again to be careful about whom we listen. The principle is simple: “Judge by the fruit one sees.”

“You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit” (Mat 7:16-17).

The lack of change suggests at least a superficial relationship with God, and probably no real one. The consequences can be serious. Jesus says the tares will be burned up on the last day.

We need to wake up to what it means to follow Christ. A believer is not merely joining a church and finding a great group of people to hang out with. We get to live in the presence of God, and, like Moses, time with God radically changes us.

Don’t be superficial and confused by religion

We need to examine our lives. It is foolish to go through life without rightly discerning our lack of a spiritual life. Surely, Judgment Day is not the time to discover that we never knew Christ, because there will be no more time to change our lives as there is now, while we are on earth.

Don't let any religion fool you into thinking all is well, for the basic problem remains unresolved by man's religions. We can only cling to God's offer of forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

It is clear that God expects all of us to know and obey Him, even though many of us do not know Him and instead believe in other things. Only through Christ can we know God. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7). Knowing God is a gift to us, the gift of eternal life.

Our life's quest is to better understand what this 'knowing God' means and to grow in our appreciation of who He is.

Meditations on genuine change

Worship

Worship must move beyond admiration into personal devotion. A beautiful sunset stuns us with its glory, yet God is drawing us further along. As He reveals His ways, He also displays His beauty and glory, so that our hearts may be drawn to adore Him.

Obedience

Observing moral laws protects and benefits societies, families, and individuals. But the moral law implanted in us has even greater significance. It provides an inward inclination and a reminder of our obligation to carry out these laws. God has established them within us so that we might pay close attention to them and respond to Him by loving Him with all our hearts, might, and being. Obedience, like a temperature gauge, shows how enthralled we are with knowing Him.

Relationship

Our lives are centered on God – His person, desires, and purpose. We listen as He faithfully coaches us in what is good

and lovely. No picture of a general coldly pushing his soldiers about like pebbles on the ground. God values not only what we do but also how we do it with Him, so that we can delight in His ways with us.

Summary

It is totally inadequate if we deal only with the more metaphysical questions of whether one can know God and never reach the point where one can say, “I know God!” and where one’s inherited curse of death is completely dealt with by belief in Christ on the cross.



- Man can know God because he is made in God’s image.
- Man is to share in God’s holiness (1 Peter 1:14-16). (This is a communicable trait that both God and man can share.)
- Man should fundamentally seek the Lord as the main purpose of life—to know and love God, which is the most basic level of confidence.
- It is crucial to distinguish religion from a personal relationship with God so that we can share the Gospel of Christ with others rather than thinking their religion is adequate to save them.
- Every aspect of our lives is touched by the majesty and power of God. We cannot escape His presence. We are made in God’s image. In Him we live, move, and exist (Acts 17:24-28). We live to accomplish His purposes, whether we like it or not.

Concluding challenge

The day was unforgettable. After finishing the temple, Solomon brought the ark into the holy temple, and the glory of

the LORD filled the temple. This inspired him to pray for the people. These verses mark the end of his prayer.

“And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, as each day requires, 60 so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no one else. 61 “Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day.” (1 Kings 8:59-61).

- Scan chapter 8 and become familiar with Solomon’s prayer. What did Solomon seek in his prayer?
- What does it mean to ‘know the Lord’ here? Is this positive or negative?
- What could we say to a friend who wants to get to know God? Why would we say these things?
- Perhaps we ‘know’ God but don’t know Him well. How can we get to know God better?

Other Questions

- Do you know God? How do you know for sure?
- Superficial knowledge betrays itself in our inferior actions. The one who says he knows God is holy but does not seek holiness himself lies. The person who claims he knows God is good but constantly complains denies God’s goodness. So do you live a holy life? Do you complain?
- What kinds of beliefs do the people around you hold?
- Would you say the purpose of life has to do with knowing God? Why or why not?

- Why is sincerely following a religion not the same as knowing and loving God?
- Why does genuine knowledge of God and His works always lead to worship and obedience?
- What areas of your life should change more because you know God?

The Revelatory God (Exodus 33-34:6-7)

Our goal is to deepen our knowledge of God.

“Are all religions the same?” “Do all religions lead to the same goal?” God interrupts this line of thinking by giving us a clear picture of who He is and revealing His distinctive characteristics. We should be glad He is who He says He is and seek His grace while we can.

Our goal is to know God more deeply and, as a result of that growing relationship, to better reflect His glorious person. In this chapter, we show that our understanding of relationships with others can help us understand how He wants to interact with us in our own lives.

The Way to Know God

You know me, and I know you!

Social media makes it easy to keep up with friends and family who live far away. We may not be able to walk outside and talk with them face-to-face, but messages and pictures let us share in each other’s lives.

One of our sisters moved to Texas and got married. They now have a cute baby. We can still get a glimpse of their lives through the pictures they share on social media.

Question: List five things that build a relationship and five fun aspects of good relationships.

God Makes Himself Known

God reveals Himself through various means, including the created world (Romans 1:19-20), our consciences (Romans

2:14-15), and God's Word (Psalm 19). Get the hint? God wants us to know and be influenced by Him, not just a little, but a lot.

Why not eagerly seek God as you do your close friends? You can trust Him. He regularly communicates with you, but you do not always respond. Think of your private devotional times and walks in the woods as moments when God is speaking to you. He is gaining your attention. He doesn't want you to merely read the Bible or admire the woods.

Instead, He wants you to connect the dots. You like the woods? Thank Him. He designed them with you in mind. When you read the Word, don't treat it as a ritual, but as a special time when God reveals something about Himself or His plans—just as a friend shares something from their heart with you. Prayer, praise, and thanksgiving are ways we respond to Him. We tell Him we appreciate it.

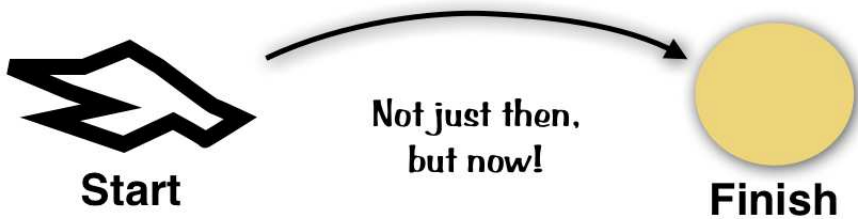
Close friendships and spiritual progress

Our relationship with God is like a friendship. Friendships grow when both sides are eager to meet. Right now, our relationship with God is mysterious, with many factors shaping its development, much like our relationships with those around us.

By spending time with God, we become more like Him. As a result, our spiritual lives depend on how much we know God. Some of us think that getting to know God is a spiritual or heavenly matter—for the future. Once in heaven, all will be cared for. This is true in a certain sense. When Jesus returns, John says that we will be like Him.

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on

Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3 - NASB).



This perspective, however, overlooks what happens now, before God is fully revealed to us. We are to draw closer and closer to Him, so we can come to know who He is and what pleases Him.

One of my daughters has a boyfriend. She likes being with him so much that on Saturday morning she went over to his office to spend time with him as he finished some work. That kind of devotion goes a long way toward developing a relationship with God.

Understanding the purpose of life on earth

God has a reason for leaving us on earth. It was not to hang around with holy people. We are far from that. Think of how many terrible decisions we have made, often displeasing to Him. He, however, still puts up with us. He could have avoided this whole scenario if, after saving us, He had immediately changed us or zipped us right into His presence.

God is not using us as pawns in His universal chess set but is fostering a relationship with us. This takes time and many points of personal interaction. Right now, our relationship is a mystery, but once God reveals His full glory in heaven, the relationship will develop on a completely different level.

Right now, He is giving us many opportunities to please Him. He desires our love and devotion. As He reveals Himself, our Lord wants us to respond. When we do not respond, He patiently continues to work in our lives, drawing our attention and our hearts back to Him.

Think about friendship. Friendship grows when both sides are eager to meet. Some couples are hard to separate. I remember my Mom wondering how long I would be on the phone with my girlfriend (now my wife), but I was usually on the phone.

Regarding our relationship with God, it is comforting to know that you can count on God always being excited to meet you.

If you want to understand spiritual growth, the problem is never on God's side but ours. There are complicating factors like temptation, misunderstandings, and Satan's attacks, but as much as we might end up doubting or even despising Him, He is always there, waiting for us. God is patient. He can wait years, even decades. But we miss out if we don't deliberately embark on this journey with an open desire to know Him.

The distortion of good works

Although good works are important, people often consider them out of context. This is partly because of expectations society, family, school, or even our conscience instill in us. This drive is not bad, but it is inadequate.

God looks at good works through the lens of relationship. We do things He wants because He likes them. The girlfriend knows her boyfriend likes a certain snack, so she prepares it for him even when he does not ask for it.

Good works are also defined by how we do things with Him. We will soon discover that there are many things in life on our own. He gives us opportunities to do these things consciously with Him.

Your first tendency might be to worry, fear, lie, or be jealous. Remember, God is on this journey with us. That is how Jesus lived, and how we must live as His disciples.

Perhaps you want to help a sick friend but do not know how. So you pray, seek the Lord, and seek wisdom from His Word. The Lord then responds by giving you ideas to follow up on. I recently talked with my wife and pointed out how God brings people to her mind when she is at the sink (she sometimes tells me about this), and then she prays for them. She is responding to the Lord's prompting.

But all these good works can be done without really taking the Lord into consideration. Good works, then, are not impersonal things we do in life to please some cosmic force, but personal ways we reflect our desire to please God and be more like Him.

Assignment

Evaluate your devotional times. What do they primarily reflect: personal time with God, an intellectual pursuit, a religious habit, or something else?

Spiritual Development

One of the church's greatest flaws is treating giving people eternal life as what God most seeks. We emphasize getting people saved. This has been a serious weakness in much evangelical ministry: we emphasize getting people saved but can neglect their subsequent spiritual growth. The church is often like a mom who struggled so hard to have a baby, named her, took pictures, showed her off, and then no longer cared for her.

God's purpose in giving us new life is to bring us into His family. He wants to grow us in our relationship with Him. That is where all the joy in Christianity comes from. In the diagram

below, you will see three stages of Christian growth often referred to in Scripture. This image comes from 1 John 2:12-14.



After spiritual rebirth, we can grow in our relationship with God. Like a child in a family, we see that individual and that individual's way of relating to others develop. John mentions the infant, teen, and adult.

At each stage, we acquire different skills and knowledge of God's Word, but there is more to it. Spiritual growth primarily involves deepening our love and trust for God. The third stage is not a dull time of existence but one of consistent, persistent growth in our relationship with God. John says, "I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning" (1 John 2:13).

Notice how John, the closest disciple to Jesus, describes God here: "Him who has been from the beginning." He omits all the adjectives that would describe God. He does not mean God evolves or changes, but that our understanding of Him grows and matures. Christian growth largely involves getting to know God more and allowing that knowledge and His purposes to shape our lives.

This study of knowing God will hopefully spur us on in the right direction. We must regularly check ourselves, though. Ask, "Am I just learning things about God, or am I more deeply appreciating God because of what I am learning about Him?"

Assignment

Why are you studying to know God? Name at least one way you have allowed what you are learning to deepen your appreciation of His work in your life.

The Quest to Know God

Many religions and philosophies seek to understand the mystery of the universe, the meaning of life, the perplexity of suffering, and the inner tension of guilt.

Gautama spent much of his life trying to understand suffering, especially why people endure great disappointment. He sought insight from gurus in northeast India but found no explanation. He later practiced severe asceticism, nearly starving himself. Images of the emaciated Buddha reflect this period of his search.

It is unfortunate that he did not have the Scriptures available to him, for they explain both human suffering and mankind's deeper spiritual problem. Instead, we have Buddhism, in its many forms, misleading millions of adherents, many of whom worship him. Gautama himself taught that he was no god and should not be worshipped.

Life's explanations come from understanding God and His purposes. Without knowing Him, we cannot understand His works.

Our Desire to Know God (Exodus 33)

Around 1500 BC, God revealed Himself to one He could trust, Moses. He made Himself known to His people (Moses would write it down to communicate it to all of us).

How could He trust Moses? Read Exodus 33 carefully and see if you can discern what God is looking for by answering the questions below.

“Then Moses said to the LORD, “See, Thou dost say to me, ‘Bring up this people!’ But Thou Thyself hast not let

me know whom Thou wilt send with me. Moreover, Thou hast said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.' Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found favor in Thy sight, let me know Thy ways, that I may know Thee, so that I may find favor in Thy sight. Consider too, that this nation is Thy people" (Exodus 33:12-13).

- What did God want of Moses?
- What did Moses want?
- What was he frustrated about?
- What did Moses think the solution was?

Meaningful communication

Be careful to observe what is happening here. Exodus 33-34 gives us great insight into what made Moses the most humble person on earth (Numbers 12:3). Moses is dialoguing with God, and God's character is reflected in this conversation. God even lets Moses keep talking about his own troubles. This differs from how most people think about God.

This pattern of communication should also happen in our lives. We should take our concerns to the Lord and talk to Him about them, not in fear, but with confidence that God wants to hear us speak from our hearts. It is as if God were just waiting for us to get honest with Him (and ourselves).

This is how we approach meeting with God. It is relaxed because we are fully accepted in Christ. If we have unconfessed sin, however, we cannot have this intimacy. Sin will hold us back in our spiritual development because it will estrange our relationship. Repentance and confession of sin, however, bring us to the Lord and foster growth in our relationship.

Significant words

Besides approaching God this way, we should also consider what Moses is saying. Moses is very concerned with “Let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight” (Exodus 33:13). More is said in these verses, but let us focus on this one.

Moses wants to know God’s ways so he can know God better. He seems to be wrestling with a past promise from God to reveal more of Himself to him, yet for some reason this has been delayed.

The word “know” has many meanings in Scripture. It is similar to our English word, but it can also refer to being deeply acquainted with someone, even in the sexual sense. In a non-sexual way, it can convey transparency: our lives are open to each other.

Moses wanted more. He had gone far in his relationship with God, but not far enough. One might think God would not want this, but the exact opposite is true. God seeks this desire in our lives so He can more fully reveal Himself to us and shape us further through this knowledge of the Eternal One.

Questions

1. Do you personally know God?
2. Have you grown in your relationship with God? If so, in what ways?
3. In what ways do you want to know Him and His ways more? Why?
4. How important is this to you?

Calling Upon the Name of the Lord (Exodus 34:5)

One key incident follows the previous communication, in which God further reveals His true nature to Moses. Please note that God reveals this to him so that it can be revealed to us. The Lord reveals Himself so that, through faith, we can trust Him deeply, know Him more fully, and respond to Him.

“And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he (Moses) called upon the name of the LORD” (Exodus 34:5).

Proper theology

Let’s remember this about theology. A person can master the wonderful things about God in these few verses yet not know God any more intimately. This is the crisis in theology. Knowledge about God is not the same as truly knowing God.

Knowing God is always life-transforming. We can be satisfied with knowing about God without truly knowing Him. But why are so many people content with the superficial rather than stepping up to know God?

After this study on knowing God, you might feel you know more about Him. You might be right, but remember that this is different from knowing Him. Instead, you want this study to touch your heart so that you, like Moses, cry out to know Him! “And the LORD descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he (Moses) called upon the name of the LORD” (Exodus 34:5).

The Transformation from Knowing God

Moses wrote these things down, but something else was happening as God spoke these words to him. Moses experienced God through these words. Each word rang out, revealing more of God’s holy and awesome nature. When God spoke,

He created the trees, bushes, and grasses. In the same way, God's divine Word imparts life, hope, joy, and cleansing to His servants when He speaks to them.

With each word, conviction, understanding, and faith deepened Moses' grasp of who the Lord Yahweh God was. Theology books cannot convey intimacy with God. We need the Spirit of God to stir our hearts and minds to know the Eternal One.

The battle between intellect and experience continues today. Under the influence of the world's educational methods and standards, it is hard for Christian Bible colleges and seminaries to remain unaffected. This is evident in the tendency of once-great Christian schools like Harvard, Princeton, and Yale to lose their spiritual mission and life.

We can assert that God is merciful because Scripture says so. We are right, but deep inside us we must insist on meeting this merciful God. If mere knowledge of this truth satisfies our inquiry, we will not press on to experience the God of mercy. We want the genuine fountain of mercy to spring forth and touch our lives. May the Living God be alive in our lives today!

I love the Book of Genesis because it, time and again, recounts how God reveals Himself through personal encounters. Abraham heard God speak to him and responded to what God said (Genesis 12:4). Jacob received a limp after wrestling with God (Genesis 32:24-32).

Knowledge of God is merely an appetizer. There is more to come if we truly seek it. God is using this to test whether we really want to know Him. If we are content with merely knowing about Him, we will discover no more. However, when, like Moses, we take that step to know more of God and His ways, the Lord God will reveal Himself to us in creative ways.

God's Self-Revelation (Exodus 34:6-7)

God's holy person is best seen through His own introduction. The world's religions are a poor guessing game about who God is and how He actually influences them.

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

Questions on Exodus 34:6-7

1. Let's first ask some questions from this passage.
2. Who is speaking in Exodus 34:6-7? How does He name or identify Himself?
3. What adjectives does the Lord use to describe God in verse 6?
4. How does the Lord further describe Himself in verse 7?
5. Try grouping these descriptions into two or three categories. What do you learn from this list?

God's glorious person

If we were to introduce ourselves, we would probably speak of our accomplishments in terms of our studies, where we lived, how we traveled, our family, and our work. We tend to point to what we have productively done rather than the time we wasted. God does not take that line.

The Lord briefly but powerfully explains His person, attribute by attribute (much like this book's approach). Instead of speaking about His works, He speaks of His person. God's

holy person stands behind all His works. Ultimately, who a person is says more about that person than his works. Let me give you an example.

The Lord the Creator

Take God as Creator. His creation speaks much about His power (notice that the Lord did not mention this; perhaps Moses was already convinced). More important than this creative ability, however, is what God will do with creation.

This is the problem we face in ethics today. Man has made remarkable advances in technology, but history repeatedly teaches that knowledge and power can be used for evil when separated from concern for mankind.

- Digital capability. Images and video can inform and bless, but they can also be manipulated to deceive or corrupt.
- Genetic capability. Advances in genetics and biotechnology can bring great benefits, but they also raise serious ethical questions about how far man should go in altering life.
- Surveillance capability. Technology can protect people, but it can also intrude upon and control them.
- Biological and military capability. Scientific knowledge can preserve life, but it can also be turned toward destructive purposes.
- Should we really trust man simply because he possesses greater knowledge and power? No. History has repeatedly demonstrated the weakness of human character.

Character is more revealing

Character is more important than productivity because it shapes a person's abilities and resources. Because of inconsistent character, or the lack of it, a person cannot be trusted. Power must be limited.

God reveals aspects of His person that help us understand how He uses His knowledge, power, eternity, and other attributes. This knowledge of God is not magic by which one gains control over other forces. It is relationship knowledge. I know God and what He is like; therefore, I can approach Him on certain matters. Expand your thinking about how God works with people by considering how a couple works together in making decisions.

A great example of this is when the Lord hinted at what He would do at Sodom. It was an invitation to Abraham to work with the Lord there. This same desire of God to work with us led Jesus to offer us the opportunity to ask whatever we wish.

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (John 15:7).

This may seem remarkable: God Almighty enables us to bring our requests before Him. He enables us to know Him so we can confidently present our requests before Him and increasingly pray in accordance with His character and will. This is all grounded in relationship: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you.” God’s revelation of His true person enables and encourages us to bring specific requests before Him in faith. God has always wanted His people to work alongside Him in this way.

Questions

1. Modern education pledges to provide knowledge without the touch of religion (think: moral guidance). What ramifications has this had, and what ramifications will it have, on our world? This question has a huge answer, but share a few examples from your experience.
2. What character attributes do you live by? How consistent are you?

3. When does inconsistency in displaying an attribute no longer become an attribute? (For example, what if God was 95% faithful. Would He still be considered faithful?)

A Closer Look at God's Character

A person's character will shape their decisions. From this revelation of God's character in Exodus 34:6-7, we can begin to understand God's character. Here is the list.

- Compassionate
- Gracious
- Slow to anger
- Abounding in lovingkindness
- Abounding in truth
- Keeps lovingkindness for thousands
- Forgives iniquity, transgression and sin

By no means leaves the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations

We will not expound on each item, though this is tempting. Later chapters will do so! Instead, let us try to get a general grasp of how God presents Himself.

The Lord leaves a lot out

The many things God could have said could go on for miles and miles. He does not talk about His creative or sustaining power. God does not mention His wisdom or knowledge. Nor does God speak about His works, whether redemptive or otherwise. Nor does the Lord speak of Himself as spirit, omnipresent (everywhere at once), or triune.

We should be careful not to conclude that God lacks these attributes. Scripture amply shows that God is mighty, wise,

and much more. These things will be examined in later chapters. They are secondary here, however, to what God especially reveals about Himself in this passage. All of His attributes are perfectly united in His wonderful person.

What God describes Himself to be

As we look at this list, we will see that many of the terms are closely related. One who is compassionate is often also gracious. To be compassionate, one must be slow to anger.

Other terms, like lovingkindness, are somewhat vague because they are distinctly Hebrew and have no exact English equivalent. This is God's special covenant love. It combines two English words, and so some older translations used a new English word composed of two English words: loving and kind.

God interestingly tells us that He is forgiving. This is different from simply telling us that He is compassionate. The phrase affirms that God is willing to commune with sinners. In other words, we have hope that God will work with us despite our sin.

God also carries out judgment

The last item, expanded by its description, reminds us that though God is forgiving, He is also just. That is, God will certainly judge sinners. God is essentially that way. Unlike us, who may struggle to reconcile compassion with judgment and with the consequences of sin that extend through generations, God sees no inconsistency between His mercy and His justice.

These are things we need to understand rightly if we are going to commune with God. They are at the heart of what we call salvation or redemption. Hopefully, the chapters ahead will explain many of these further.

Questions

- Define or describe each term.
- Which one stands out the most to you?
- Which attribute means the most to you? Why?
- Many have a hard time understanding the last description. Do you? How do you resolve it?

God and other gods

God is awesome. He is not concerned whether some other god might appear more attractive or worthy of worship than He is. Because of our limited faith and grasp of the truth about God, our churches are making many poor choices.

Man-focused

Many changes in today's worship services focus on attendees' convenience rather than on God. Our expectations and standards are lowered so people can fit the 'worship' of some god into their schedules.

Apologetic

Churches are hesitant to present who God is. In many cases, they stop speaking about God's wrath and judgment. Hell (H —) has become a four-letter word to some.

Unbelieving

God is not shy about who He is. If we are embarrassed about anything, it should not be about God's true identity but about our poor ability to believe in Him or to describe Him in His glory.

Other religions

Are other religions the same? Are they all simply different ways of reaching God? If you understand the Lord's self-de-

scription in Exodus, you will quickly realize that religions differ greatly from God as He presents Himself.

(1) God is real, while other religions worship what is not real or a distant reflection of how God presents Himself. Why does man repeatedly assert that God is the same when each religion clearly denies this? God is the true God and resents the claim that these other gods coexist with Him.

(2) Others assert that it does not make much difference which God one worships. This is clearly man's perspective. God does care. In fact, when we do not rightly worship our Creator God, we are guilty and will be judged. To miss this fact is serious. It is foolish to say that all religions are equally "cool."

The world has many false religions. We can see that the God they worship is quite different from the God who reveals Himself. Islam speaks of God's judgment, while traditional Buddhism focuses on mercy. God presents Himself as both merciful and just. Neither excludes the other.

When Jesus came to earth, it is said of Him that He was full of grace and truth. While man is willing to overlook various offenses, God is not.

"Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness" (Romans 11:22).

Instead of joining others in unbelief, whether professing believers or unbelievers, we should, like Moses, seek the Living God. God does not conform to our thoughts of Him, but each of us will be held accountable to our amazing God.

Concluding challenge

Here is a suggested pathway.

- **Getting to Know God: Friendship**
- **Our Desire to Know God: Quest**
- **God's Self-revelation: Come**

Other Suggestions

- In what ways would you like to know Him and His ways more deeply? Why? How important is this to you?
- List three things that develop a relationship and three things that are fun about good relationships.

Developing Relationships

- Things in common
- Trust
- Communication
- Time spent together
- Shared adversity
- Kind attitude

Fun About Relationships

- Learning about others
- Mutual affirmation
- Honesty - comfortable
- Companionship
- Rub off (become more like the other)
- Sharing interests

The Goodness of God

Assured that all our Lord's requests and plans are good.

(Psalm 31:19)

God is always good. This is His nature. When we question our Lord's goodness because of personal difficulties or the blatant evil around us, we are singing the evil one's tune. Instead, trust in God's goodness, and your heart will not be troubled.

Growing in our Relationship with God

God is knowable not just in a general sense of knowing things about Him, but through Jesus Christ, we can have a personal relationship with Him. We are not only learning about God but also knowing and treasuring Him more deeply. All that we learn will necessarily be based on these assumptions. This is not an intellectual study, but one that should greatly affect our spiritual growth by increasing our understanding and faith in this God.

Two significant questions

This clearly relates to two of life's most important questions that most of us ask at some point:

“Who am I?”

“For what purpose am I here?”

Our attempted solutions depend on our worldview. The only real way to discover the answers to these questions, however, is to return to the Bible, where we learn about our God and the relationship He establishes with us by sending His Anointed One, Jesus Christ, into the world.

1) Who am I?

In the scriptures, we discover exactly who we are. We are not a random mixture of chemicals. Nor are we part of a world that has always existed. We are told we are His creatures, holding a special place [in the universe](#) He made.

We are God's creatures, servants designed to fulfill His will. As those made in His image, we can relate to Him and even enjoy a relationship with the Lord. As we come to know Jesus as our Savior and Lord, our relationship with Him is restored. We become His child, part of God's great family, known as the true believers who compose the church.

This study of God's attributes, then, becomes a quest to know Him so we can better please Him. We find inner satisfaction in doing what delights our Master, our Heavenly Father. I am His, and so I want to know more about what He is like so that I can better please Him ([see our resources on intimacy in marriage](#)).

2) Why am I here?

As we read the scriptures, we quickly discover that God causes all things. Because of this, He has purposes for what He does, especially in what He has made. He made things the way He did for a reason.

This purpose traces back to the specific purposes for which He made you and me. Our responsibility in life is not simply to get by, but to discover what He wants of us and, by His grace, accomplish it.

God made me for a particular purpose, which I come to know by knowing and trusting Him better.

Our Task

Our task in this larger study is to take these attributes of God and ensure they help us relate to our Lord. Therefore, we

must ensure that each study of an attribute of God applies to how we relate to God. This chapter includes two worldview studies on God's goodness.

God is Good

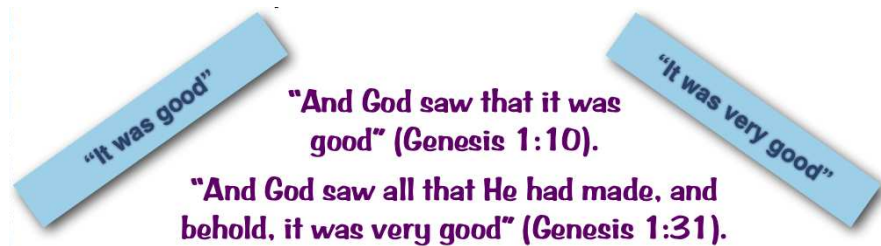
As we draw close to the Lord, we better understand His purposes for our lives rather than getting caught up in the world. As we pause before Him, we can discover what God wants to do through our lives.

The purposes He has for us are largely shaped by His person and desires. Our chief drive in life, then, becomes a quest to know God so we can know and accomplish what He wants from our lives. My deepest joys come from knowing Him.

This study of God's character is our small attempt to catch a glimpse of what Moses saw and knew when he was called up to the top of Mount Sinai. Having seen God, we then know how to better please Him (also see the chapter "The Revelatory God").

A Genesis study

Genesis is our first place to discover what God says about Himself. What main lessons do we learn about God in the first chapter of Genesis?



When the Lord designed the world, it was good. He kept repeating the phrase, 'It was good. And when He came to the creation of man and woman, He said, "It was very good."

What can we learn from this? God wants us to understand from His works that He is truly good. He gives us many opportunities to discover His goodness in the things He made around us. Even though sin has marred the created world, we still marvel at its glorious scenes. Don't we thoroughly enjoy a walk by a creek?

How does God's introduction in Genesis 1 differ from how you think God should introduce Himself? Note that He did not say He was loving, kind, wrathful, powerful, omnipresent, etc. These are often in our minds when we think of God, but He emphasized that everything was good, showing that He intended to bring blessing into our lives.

His power was certainly implicit in His ability to create the world, but God clearly did not want us to miss this message. This may be because later in chapter 3 we find Satan already tinkering with the human mind and undermining people's faith and trust in the goodness of God.

A Psalms study

The goodness of God appears throughout Scripture. Let's first look at a select number of passages that show how closely the Lord ties 'goodness' to His own name.

"O taste and see that the **LORD is good** (hwhy bwj); how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!" (Psalm 34:8).

"For the **LORD is good**; His lovingkindness is everlasting, and His faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

"Praise the LORD, for the **LORD is good**; sing praises to His name, for it is lovely" (Psalm 135:3).

"Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart!" (Psalm 73:1).

“The LORD is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works” (Psalm 145:9).

God is repeatedly declared to be good. “The LORD is good” is literally “good Yahweh” in the original Hebrew. The two words appear side by side. In English, we need to use an equative verb like ‘is’ between the two words to make sense, but the meaning is the same.

LORD is good * טוב יהוה

When we think of God, we should think of His goodness. When we think of goodness, we should think of God. God is inherently good. Everything He does is good. We can see this in other verses scattered throughout the Bible.

(1) The Lord is good

“The voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, ‘Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, **For the LORD is good**, For His lovingkindness is everlasting ’”; and of those who bring a thank offering into the house of the LORD. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were at first, ‘says the LORD” (Jeremiah 33:11).

“The **LORD is good** to those who wait for Him, To the person who seeks Him” (Lamentations 3:25).

“The **LORD is good**, A stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him” (Nahum 1:7).

“For everything created by **God is good**, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude” ([1 Timothy 4:4](#)).

The word ‘good’ or ‘goodness’ appears 622 times in the Bible (NASB). The Hebrew word is very generic, much like the English word. ‘Good’ in



English can refer to a good dessert or a good wife. The same is true in Hebrew.

The context, whether it be the verses above or in Genesis 1, helps shape what 'good' really means. Goodness describes God's ultimate, satisfying, and constant way of treating His creatures kindly.

Two worldviews of self

Let's apply these concepts of goodness to the things we hear and believe about ourselves by comparing the world's view of self with God's.

(1) Self-esteem

I believe in myself => I can do or be whatever I want.

Our world has popularized the concept of self-esteem. They rightly observe that people commonly lack confidence in their abilities. They say people have low self-esteem. They stress that each person should have high self-esteem, often by using phrases that hint at some magical force that can empower them to be or do whatever they want.

Although their hope of improving these individuals' lives is good, there is simply no basis for such talk, at least from the world's perspective. They simply have no basis to encourage such thinking. More often than not, this is where Eastern mysticism creeps in, suggesting that a world force fosters such power. Or, in other cases, they depend upon a mystical evolutionary brilliance shining behind everyone's unique powers.

To be honest, this only works when people are doing well. When they do well, they think well of themselves. Unfortunately, they become rather prideful about what they have accomplished. Our unique abilities as human beings do not originate from these mysterious forces but from God Himself.

(2) God-trust

I believe in God's goodness => He has wonderfully designed and equipped me to carry out His good purposes.

Genuine confidence is built not on false philosophy but on God's goodness. He has told us that He has purposely and wonderfully designed human beings so they might reflect God's image and carry out the tasks He appoints for them. God's Word clearly states this design and purpose.

Through Jesus and the new covenant, people can regain a relationship with God and live by His power to carry out God's good purposes. How marvelous that God has enabled people to carry out His purposes.

*Examine: On what basis does the world tout self-esteem?
On what basis can we believe in God's goodness?*

If we fail at something, we often come out feeling quite defeated. Don't try to pep yourself up with a pep talk: "I can do it." Instead, confess your defeat, but recognize that God has designed all of us to do good. We seek Him to further work out His good purposes through our lives, even though we have no clue how.

A Summary

God chiefly reveals Himself as good. Something is wrong when we doubt that the Lord's motivation toward His creatures is inferior or even evil. Our confidence in life does not come from an imagined reservoir of potential (i.e., self-esteem) but from God's goodness, through which we can assume we are wonderfully designed, equipped, and placed. When we are down and discouraged, we put our hope in Him, who will marvelously carry out His goodness toward us.

We might have many unsolved questions about what happens in this world or in our personal lives, but we must not doubt

God's inherent inclination to kindly help (i.e., be good toward) His creatures. He is good!

Exercise: List four things in this world that you would, if possible, improve. Star the most important one.

Difficulties Believing in God's Goodness

Believing in God's goodness is not easy. This is because of all the unhappy, difficult, and even unjust things happening in our lives and, if we dare to look, around the world.

Think about the things we want to improve: poverty, inequity, racial prejudice, war, etc. The list can and does go on! It is easy to doubt what God has done about these things. If God were truly good, then wouldn't He solve these problems? Have you ever asked this question?

Terribly Twisting Truth

The problem of evil can be addressed in various ways or left unanswered, but in no case should we accuse God of being an inferior God who produces inferior things that are no longer good. Be like Job, who "Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God" (Job 1:22).



When we turn to Genesis 3, we find Satan using the guise of a serpent to twist Eve's understanding of good. Society does that all the time. They say it is good to allow parents to murder their children. Say it enough, and people believe it. These leaders should be put in jail for their crimes of convincing us that gaming, immorality, murder, and deceit are good when they cause pain, injustice, disease, greed, and all sorts of evil. Meanwhile, virtue, justice, and contentment are portrayed as

evil by all sorts of newscasters, magazine writers, and even some daring politicians.

“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20).

To the extent we associate an inferior good with God, we have begun to carve out our own image. We start looking for our own idol. God is good, and in Him there is no partial good and certainly no evil.

A society’s decline is directly measured by how completely this switch of good and evil has taken place. Dare we measure our society?

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’” The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.” (Genesis 3:1-6)

Satan’s tactics

Our questions should not focus on wondering how God permitted evil, but on identifying evil and its true source. Many Christians will not be able to do this because up to 60% of believers state that, though they believe in a personal God, they

do not believe in Satan. They put themselves in a quandary. Where does evil come from? Or is God powerful enough to eliminate evil?

Clearly, from the earliest books of Genesis and Job, the Lord makes it clear that evil comes from the evil one. Human beings have become accomplices to his evil work. The Genesis 1 scene shows how Satan tricked Eve by getting her to question God's goodness, suggesting that God had withheld something good from her.

The false assumption about good is that God should give us everything best at once. Even parents know that giving their children too much at once will not be the greatest good and could even hurt them.

Study of Satan's Temptation

Let's study the progression of Satan's persuasive talk with Eve, where sin first entered the world. He first stains the picture of God's goodness and then subtly replaces good with evil. Each of the three steps takes us further from believing that God is good.

From Genesis 1, God wanted us to get a clear message. God is good. Notice that this is what the evil one would first get Eve to question. If God is really good, then why wouldn't He give us the best? Satan's implication that God didn't give man everything he should have shows that God didn't give the best. (This is a lousy argument.)

“You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?” (Gen 3:1)

Good is not good enough.

The evil one does not start with his blunt end goal of denying God's goodness, but with a carefully placed sentence that turns Eve's focus to something other than the goodness of what God has provided. Isn't the whole world of advertising built on this subtle message: something out there is better,

and we can't function without it? In other words, good is not good enough.

Good is not good enough.

Eve truly received many things from the Lord's hand—all the trees. Contentment comes from focusing on what God has given. Discontentment, however, leads to questioning God's inherent goodness. It makes us ask, "If God were truly good, then He would ..., wouldn't He?" This is the first entry of doubt. We should counter such suggestions with, "God is good, and I will be content with what He has given me."

This refocusing on what God has not given us, I believe, is not yet sin. Satan leads us further to snare us. The first point is the distraction, whether it be food, liquor, sex, etc., that God does not want for us. In most cases, we can't block our eyes from these things.

"Your eyes will be opened" (Gen 3:1)

Good is eating that fruit (which God said not to).

Sin begins when we doubt that what He gave us is good. This subtle form of questioning challenges our view of God, "You are not good because you have not given me the best." This is why the evil one tempted Eve with the phrase, "Your eyes will be opened" (Genesis 3:1).

In other words, Satan hints that God has withheld the best. He doesn't come right out and say that God is not good. Perhaps there was too much evidence against that because of the grand creation surrounding her. He had to have her focus on what was withheld from her and then have her believe that what was hidden was a better good. This is where the transformation begins to take place, that is, where good becomes evil and evil becomes good.

**Good is eating that fruit
(which God forbid).**

At this point, she is being enticed to believe that God has not given her the best. When she succumbs to this false belief, she sins. This matters because, as much as we might deny our role in sin and the strength of temptation, we are still the ones who put our faith in things other than God's person and promise. Once we believe, we take action. This is what we find in the third step, which Eve herself took.

“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food...” (Genesis 3:6)

‘Good’ is something other than what God defines as good and provides.

The complete transformation takes place here. We see that Eve took action. That action affirms that she has come to believe God held back the best from her and that she took hold of what God forbade. In her eyes, the good God had provided had become not good. And what God had forbidden had become the new ‘good.’ She became convinced of this, took the fruit, and ate it.

**‘Good’ becomes something
else than what God defines
as good and provides.**

So what was good has now become evil. If God has withheld the best, then it is no longer good but inferior. Something else has become the supposed good; that is, the evil has become good. That which was forbidden has become the new ‘good.’

Summary

At the heart of false worship is the belief that God offers inferior products in an unfair world. The one pretending to offer something better is the idol. People are willing to trust these idols because they seem to promise what they believe is the best good.

Religions, philosophies, and distortions of Christianity become nearly permanent means by which God's goodness is locked out of our minds by our doubt and our belief in a greater good. (e.g., if God is not good, then why should I trust Him?)

Therefore, we have no real way to believe in God's goodness unless a breakthrough happens. This most often happens when we see the emptiness of the idol in which we trust and therefore look to other, better alternatives.

Time for reflection

Do you question God's goodness toward you? Confess your doubt about His good treatment of you, whether in your person or in your role in society, then affirm His goodness in the very area you questioned.

Are there areas that you have resented about God because you do not believe He has been good or unfair, whether to you or to the world?

Dealing with Challenges in Life

"God is good." "God is good all the time." This is the phrase I hear and join in with many congregations as I travel across Africa. What is interesting is that those who say it face many more challenges than we do.

While preparing this, I received an email from the head of a Bible college in Nigeria.

“Please, I want you to pray for my daughter Esther. The enemy wants to take her life. We have been in the hospital. The condition is worse. We are praying and crying... because she is not doing ok. But with God, all things are possible.”

My heart, along with many others, began praying for her. “All things are possible.” We pray because God is good.



In the picture above, we're celebrating a new church. When I hold seminars, I use these special ministry occasions to serve other needs, such as the founding of a new church, as in this case. You might notice there is no roof or walls. Even the canopy has many holes through which the rainwater drips. (And yes, there is a lot of torrential rain there.) Needs are all around us.

- They have no money for simple medicines.
- They don't have money for Bibles.
- They walk endless miles to get where they want to go.
- Food is expensive. They eat porridge every day.
- Disease hits their chickens. Then their meat and egg supply is gone.

A weak theology will drive people into the dark corners of doubt. But wherever I go throughout Africa, I hear a common chant: Pastor: “God is good!” People reply: “All the time!” Pastor: “All the time!” The congregation responds, “God is good!”

There is no better way to address the hint of inferiority or mediocrity in God’s goodness than to praise the Lord for His goodness, despite what we see, hear, or feel. God’s good plan goes beyond what we can see. Just as with Jesus, God’s goodness ensured that, despite the evil that latched onto God’s servant, goodness arose and went far beyond Golgotha into the world.

Trace the great [Isaiah 53 account](#) of the Messiah’s sufferings and affirmation of God’s goodness.

“But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand” (Isaiah 53:10).

The good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. We praise the Lord that little Rebekah survived the night and came home. The pastor wrote back, Faith enables us to continually respond to God’s goodness despite the ferocious temptations that sometimes surround us. We seek Him, and He is gracious to aid us.

The Power of Knowing God’s Goodness

Although the evil one’s cleverness is certainly not to be underestimated, God’s people can surge forward in increasing trust in God’s goodness. This will be their best protection: Don’t dwell on the distractions put before them. They offer nothing better.

God's glorious goodness

God introduced His goodness alongside His power in Genesis 1. He kindly brought hope to our lives that the powers beyond would not expose our weakness for any other reason. God would ensure that His treatment of human beings would extend His goodness.



A thorough understanding of the scriptures will enable us to gain a much greater appreciation of God's goodness. Nothing but goodness can come from God—there is no room to question His goodness. The scriptures are filled with examples of God's characteristics and attributes that reflect His goodness.

God's mercy: God extends His goodness to the weak, vulnerable, and helpless.

God's patience: God kindly waits for our right responses, even when we make poor choices.

God's grace: God richly pours out kind treatment, going far beyond anything we deserve on our own, no matter what standard we use.

God's faithfulness: God constantly and persistently seeks to bring His goodness into our lives.

God's love: God persistently pledges to bring His goodness to those He commits Himself to.

Many Scripture verses inspire us to think more highly of God and fully embrace God's goodness. These verses themselves become a means by which we can personally experience the power of God's goodness in our lives.

Psalm 31:19

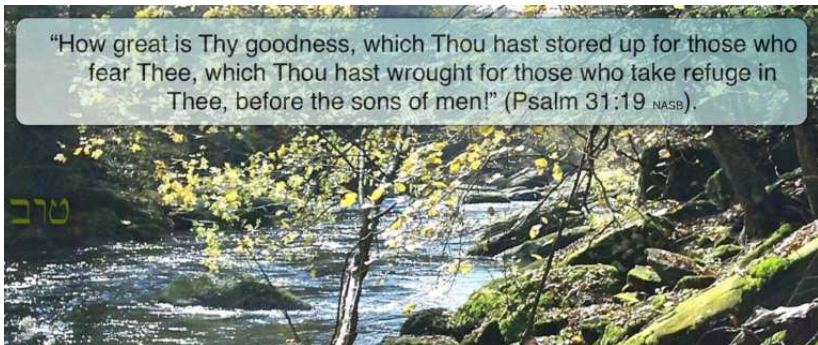
"How great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast stored up for those who fear Thee, which Thou hast wrought for those who take refuge in Thee, before the sons of men!" (Psalm 31:19 NASB).

God is good. Always. It is His nature. All His plans flow from His goodness. We see His goodness in every aspect of Creation, through which God calls us to respond to Him. "If you like what you see, then you will like me whom you cannot see!"

Psalm 31:19 calls us to think about the greatness of God's goodness. Far from being inferior, we find God's goodness is constant and completely good. No holes or dark spots keep God's goodness from reaching those who trust in Him. We can fully trust His goodness no matter what we witness.

In creation

God is good. We see His goodness overflowing in His creation—His works. Because of His goodness, we can be sure His plans and dealings are rooted in that goodness.



Psalm 31:19 calls us to hide in His goodness. It protects us from the world's scoffing, the scars of bitterness, and the marks of hopelessness. Can you see the faith this verse inspires?

Think about the attribute of God's goodness. What other characteristics come to mind? God's glorious goodness expresses itself in many ways. We see them in the ways He deals with His people.

Other Scriptures

John 10:14

"Jesus is our good shepherd. "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me" (John 10:14).

God's goodness is expressed in our lives largely through Jesus Christ. He tenderly guides us through life. He never leaves us alone and vulnerable (Mat 28:20). Jesus is our good shepherd.

Romans 8:28

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28 NASB).

God's goodness works into our daily lives, including all our problems. We can be confident in the way He works out all the details of our lives—"work together for good." Without faith, we cannot live within His sphere of goodness, even though it is still there. With faith, however, even when all seems dismal, we know God is working behind the scenes to bring about a greater good.

Jeremiah 31:14

“I will fill the soul of the priests with abundance, and My people will be satisfied with My goodness,” declares the LORD (Jeremiah 31:14).

God’s goodness leads to full contentment. “My people will be satisfied with My goodness.” This is God’s kind of goodness. It brings perfect satisfaction and delight. The priests will know of His abundance.

From this verse alone, we should recognize that whenever something causes us discontent, or we begin to doubt the goodness God is bringing into our lives, Satan is tempting us.

If we do go through difficult times, we should carefully reexamine our lives to ensure we are living in obedience. Once this is done, we can be sure the Lord is not correcting us (Hebrews 12:4-11)—another mark of His goodness. We should thank the Lord for His goodness, which swallows up the pain, suffering, and difficulties we face.

Our joy need not disappear as we keep our eyes on the Lord (Philippians 4:4). The Lord’s constant goodness is the foundation of our delight in His good care for us, no matter what we are experiencing.

How should we engage with this world?

Fate

Certain religions, such as Hinduism (think of the caste system) and Islam, are fate-oriented. They accept what is to be God’s will and resolve not to change (improve) things. If a person is sick, others assume he should be sick, maybe because of bad karma. People believe it is best to ignore them. (This is why nurses and hospitals, a Christian blessing, are radical innovations in some cultures.)

Self

Those in our modern culture are absorbed in their own abilities. This is because of great wealth. People think they can handle life's big issues and live for their own ease and comfort. Hedonism creates people who can't be bothered with others' needs unless those needs somehow meet their own.

Religion

Religious people are often shaped by their religiously shaped conscience. They feel guilty about what they ought not to do, or they try to make up for some wrong they have done. They think, "Perhaps God will be angry; they had better do something to make amends." This sort of response is hardly born of God's goodness but of self-interest, though it is religious in nature.

God

God has called us to bring His goodness into this needy world. We are to love one another. Yes, it is a command, and God's direct guidance propels us to love, but another element is at work. We are motivated by His love for us. We seek to please Him and feel a duty to pass on His kindness in our small corner of the world.

Summary

(1) God is good.

"God is good. This is the way God is. I need to start believing it!"

(2) Difficulties believing.

"I have wrongly understood God's goodness, myself, and the world. Forgive me, Lord!"

(3) Knowing God's Goodness.

"I am but a beggar, trying to grab a crumb of your goodness to feed my own soul. I repent of this narrow and selfish approach. Now let the power of the abundance of your goodness flow into my life for your glory and the sake of others" (Eph 3:20-21).

God is good	Believe it!
Difficulties believing	Repent!
Knowing God's goodness	Embrace

Questions on God's Goodness

It is difficult to trust that God is good when so much evil goes on around us. Many people simply believe other reasons for these things. They do not believe by faith in the Word of God, but in other things and religions.

God is calling you to believe that He is always good. How do you explain trouble in the world? Although God created the world good, man has done evil. Now He wants to restore what is good through man. The Lord redeemed man and reequipped him to do good. This is largely how God will do good. "Ask what you wish, and He will do this."

If God is good, why can't unbelievers or unbelieving Christians benefit from God's goodness?

Actually, we all greatly benefit from God's goodness. God is patient toward all, not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). God shines the sun on both the wicked and the good. (It would be an interesting world if the sun shone only on the righteous!) "... For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and

the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matthew 5:45).

The key issue is faith. When we believe in His goodness, we can respond. But when doubt arises, we live as if He is not good and therefore cannot respond to Him.

If God is good, why doesn't He improve things?

God emphasized that He made everything good. He even showed us in Genesis 3 how sin entered the world because He knew we might be confused. Here are some points to believe.

- God made everything good, even very good.
- Satan tricked man into believing that what God had made was inferior. Through this diabolical deception, sin and evil entered the world.
- Man has been and remains unfaithful. Even today, when we choose between good and evil, do we always choose good? If God's people consistently chose good, love would flow out to the world almost instantly.
- Why doesn't God do anything about all the war and people dying? God has done a great deal by sending Jesus to die for our sins and restore us to fellowship with Him. The question is not what God should do, but what we will do.

Study Questions & Projects

1. In what situation is it hardest for you to trust that God has your best interests in mind?
2. List one thing from this chapter that helped you most and explain why.

3. Meditate on God's reflective statements in Genesis 1, "God saw that it was good." What does "good" mean?
4. Have you ever thought of your life as a means by which God brings His goodness into the world? Explain.
5. What motivates you to serve others? Guilt, pressure, or His abounding goodness?
6. Do you tend to be grumpy or nitpicky? In what specific areas? Repent and begin seeking a picture of how God's goodness is to impact your perspective.

Project: Over ten days, refresh your life each day with ten verses that speak of God's goodness. (Search 'goodness' or 'good' in a concordance to find such verses, or use the list from the NASB.)

For the next several weeks, pray and reflect on God's goodness each day. Ask God what good you might do to bring more of His goodness into the world. Try to do at least one good deed each day to glorify Him and help others.

The Holiness of God

Psalm 89; Exodus 15:1–17; 1 Peter 1:15–16

Our goal is to deepen our knowledge of the Holy God and learn how His holiness shapes His people.

God's holiness is undoubtedly one of His most glorious attributes. No one can approach God without understanding this aspect of Him, for every part of Him is holy. His is a holy wisdom, a holy knowledge, a holy presence. His power is holy, and His justice is holy. Holiness is at once the characteristic of God that links man with God, because man was made in God's image, and that separates man from Him, because of man's unholiness.

God is not holy because He conforms to some law outside Himself. His own person is the standard. He does not derive His standard from our wants and feelings, nor from any law established by man. His own person directs His holy law and all that He does. First John 1:5 says, "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." He is holy.

If anything distorts our understanding of God, it is making Him like ourselves. We want God to think as we think, to like the things we like, and to dislike the things we dislike. But this directly contradicts the truth of a holy God. The first commandments warn us not to reduce the Lord to an image formed from creation or from our own imagination (Exodus 20:1-6). We do not define Him. He reveals Himself to us.

Only by knowing and experiencing His person can we begin to share in His holiness. When we understand that God has satisfied His wrath against us through Jesus Christ, He welcomes us into His presence. We then come to Him daily and, by being with Him, become more and more holy.

This helps us understand Christian maturity. Maturity has little to do with how many years we have served in Christ's name or how many good things we have accomplished. Work done for the Lord's glory is to be prized, but we must not confuse what we do with who we are. The godly man or woman is one who spends time with the holy God. Moses performed mighty acts, wrote the first five books of the Bible, and led Israel out of Egypt. We should not be surprised that God used a man who repeatedly stood, knelt, and spoke in God's presence. What Moses was privileged to experience points us toward what God desires for His children. Holiness and maturity grow from living in the presence of the Holy God.

As Peter wrote, quoting the Old Testament, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16).

God's Holy Name

Psalms 89 offers several helpful windows into God's holiness. The first is His name. Psalm 89:18 says, "For our shield belongs to the LORD, and our king to the Holy One of Israel." The Lord has many names and titles, but "the Holy One" reveals something essential about who He is.

The Hebrew word *qadosh* conveys sacred, holy, and set apart, and can also refer to a holy one or saint. Calling God "the Holy One" immediately distinguishes Him from all others. Holiness sets Him apart from everything created. He is not merely a better version of us. His holiness is not simply the best purity we know, raised to an infinite level. He is in a category of His own.

People commonly treat their gods as holy by showing them special reverence. I have met people who were afraid to turn to Jesus Christ because they feared offending an idol and being cursed. But idols are formed from human thought and materials. They reflect mankind's fears, desires, weaknesses,

and imagination. People may treat them as holy, but they are not the Holy One.

Psalm 115:3-8 contrasts the living God with idols: “But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man’s hands. They have mouths, but they cannot speak; they have eyes, but they cannot see...” Those who make them become like them. The point is not merely that idols are powerless but that they are products of creation. The Holy One is the Creator.

A. W. Tozer observed that we cannot understand divine holiness merely by imagining someone very pure and then multiplying that purity. God’s holiness stands apart from anything in creation. This is why we ought not picture God as merely an enlarged human being. We ought not use His name carelessly or assume that He thinks as man thinks, is limited as man is limited, or has needs as man has needs. He is called the Holy One not because one part of Him is holy, but because He is holy.

Books, songs, teachers, and other resources can direct our thoughts toward God, but we are deeply mistaken if we think we have fully grasped His holiness. The better response is humility. We come to Scripture not to make God fit our expectations but to have our expectations corrected by who He has revealed Himself to be.

God’s Holy Nature

The second important use of holiness in Psalm 89 appears in verse 35: “Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David.” We must not speak of God’s holiness as we do of a human trait or temperament. We use the term holiness to describe God because He is holy. He would not be God if He were not holy. We cannot ask, “What if God were not holy?” God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.

In an age of moral relativity, we easily imagine God as if His nature could have been different if He had simply chosen otherwise. But God's goodness and holiness are not arbitrary choices detached from His being. His holy nature underlies His holy words and actions. When He swears by His holiness, He swears by who He is.

This reveals one reason Christians can become casual about sin. We tolerate spiritual stains because we are not very sensitive to who God really is. If we see a mark on our clothing, we wash it. If we see damage to something we value, we repair it. Yet we can become accustomed to blemishes in our character. We use culture, convenience, and even selective readings of Scripture to justify a life distant from God. New believers can sometimes see this inconsistency more quickly than those accustomed to it.

The answer is not merely to become stricter. It is to come closer to God. Unless we draw near to Him and stop defining Him by what makes us comfortable, our understanding of holiness will remain weak. A strong Christian knows God and is willing to change to draw closer to Him.

Holiness and God's Moral Perfection

God's holiness also helps us understand His opposition to sin. Holiness is not merely distance or separation. God is morally pure, and anything contrary to His character is genuinely evil. This is why Scripture does not treat sin as a harmless difference of preference. Sin corrupts what God made good and destroys what He designed for life.

We often separate God's love from His judgment, but Scripture does not. The same Holy One who shows mercy also opposes evil. His wrath is not an uncontrolled temper. It is His settled opposition to what contradicts His holy character and harms His creation. This connection matters when we read

passages of judgment. God does not stop being holy when He judges, nor does He stop being loving when He opposes what destroys.

This perspective protects us from reducing love to mere tolerance. A person who truly loves does not grow indifferent to what harms the one loved. Far more, God's holiness means He cannot call evil good or pretend that sin does no harm. His mercy is therefore astonishing, because He does not save by ignoring His holiness. In Christ, He provides a righteous way to forgive and restore sinners.

The clearer we see this, the less casually we will treat our own sin. We do not pursue holiness to earn God's acceptance. We pursue holiness because the Holy God has brought us to Himself and because sin is contrary to the life He is producing in us.

God Shares His Holiness

Psalm 89 also shows holiness applied to what belongs to God. Verse 20 says, "I have found David My servant; with My holy oil I have anointed him." Something is called holy because God sets it apart for Himself and His purposes.

This is an important biblical use of the word. The Hebrew word group connected with qadosh and qadash speaks of what belongs to the sacred sphere. A thing does not become divine. Rather, it becomes set apart to God. Scripture can therefore speak of a holy day, holy ground, holy garments, holy oil, and holy people.

Genesis 2:3 says that God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. In Exodus 3:5, Moses was told, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Exodus 28 describes holy garments for Aaron.

The oil was holy because God prescribed how it was to be made and set it apart for His sacred purposes. Its holy use

marked people and things as set apart to God. In the Old Testament, anointing oil accompanied the consecration of priests and the appointment of kings, signifying that they belonged to God, that His Spirit was with them, and that they were called to His service.

This is a useful safeguard when we consider holiness. Holiness is not a mysterious substance that can be mechanically transferred from one object to another. The biblical emphasis is on God's presence, ownership, command, and purpose. What belongs to Him is to be treated according to His will.

The same pattern reaches its highest importance among God's people. Israel was called to holiness because God had set the nation apart from the other nations as His possession (Leviticus 20:26; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:19). The restrictions God gave them were not arbitrary religious rules. They repeatedly reminded Israel that they belonged to Him.

The New Testament carries this idea forward. Believers are repeatedly called saints—literally, holy ones. This title can surprise us because we are keenly aware of our sins and weaknesses. Yet Scripture describes the redeemed as people set apart to God. We are not holy in the absolute sense in which God is holy. Our holiness depends entirely on Him.

Psalms 89:5 and 7 speak of an “assembly of the holy ones” and of God being greatly feared among those around Him. In that immediate context, the holy ones are heavenly beings. Their glory does not compete with God's glory; it depends on Him. Those who remain in His presence recognize that all their beauty and holiness are derived from the Holy One.

The same principle applies to redeemed people. God has purchased a people for Himself so they might be holy. Our holiness begins with belonging to Him and then increasingly shapes our lives. We do not make ourselves holy by human effort and then approach God. We approach Him through

Christ, are set apart as His people, and then learn to live consistently with the holy calling we have received.

This also explains the awe of the heavenly beings around God. Their power and glory do not make them casual in His presence. They recognize that any excellence they possess depends on Him. They do not confuse reflected glory with the glory of the One from whom it comes. Their response is fear, praise, and adoration.

The church should learn from them. We can become familiar with Christian language, worship services, Bible studies, and ministry activities and yet lose a sense of wonder before God. Biblical holiness does not make us stiff or distant, but it does destroy casual self-importance. The closer we come to the Holy One, the more clearly we see both His greatness and our dependence on Him.

This is why holiness is not merely negative—the absence of certain sins. Holiness is first positive: belonging to God. A holy life is reserved for His purposes. Our time, bodies, relationships, possessions, speech, and service all come under His ownership. To be holy is to be His.

Encountering the Holy God

They knew Him as the God of their fathers—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—but in an important sense, He was still the God with no name. They knew whom their fathers had worshiped, but they did not yet know Him as He would now reveal Himself to Moses—[Yahweh](#). God revealed His name, Yahweh (wrongly rendered as LORD). Throughout Exodus, and increasingly thereafter, He began to reveal who He was.

After the crossing of the sea, Moses and the sons of Israel sang, “I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea” (Exodus 15:1).

Their deliverance gave them a new experiential knowledge of the God they worshiped.

One can study holiness and still remain distant from the Holy One. An analytical understanding is necessary and good, but genuine holiness does not come merely from knowing definitions. It grows as we know God Himself. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."

Their song also teaches us that knowing God involves both His acts and His character. A miracle can amaze us for a moment, but Israel was led beyond amazement to a confession of who the LORD is. His mighty act became a window through which they saw His strength, faithfulness, judgment, lovingkindness, and holiness.

The same is true in our lives. We should not merely ask God to do impressive things for us. We should ask what His works reveal about Him. A deliverance, an answered prayer, a correction, or a season of waiting can become part of our knowledge of God when we connect His actions to what Scripture says about His character.

Take Joy in His Ways

Moses and the Israelites sang together. Not only Moses, the leader, stood amazed at God's works. God was forming a people. Each person had crossed the sea, witnessed God's deliverance, and now joined in praise.

Christian leaders alone cannot know God deeply. Their experience cannot replace ours. Each believer is called to know Him. We may admire someone else's walk with God, listen to their teaching, or benefit from their prayers, but we ourselves must stand amazed at God's holy ways.

The New Testament gives us an even greater revelation in Jesus Christ. Hebrews 1:1-2 says that God, who spoke long

ago through the prophets in many portions and in many ways, “in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.” The Exodus was a mighty act of God, but Christ is the fuller revelation. We glory in what God has done through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, worship should keep Christ and His work at the center. Music, instruments, emotion, quietness, and enthusiasm can assist our worship, but none should replace the truth about God that gives worship its substance. We do not merely seek a religious sensation. We want to know and praise the Lord for who He is and what He has done.

Know Him Personally

Exodus 15:2 says, “The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise Him; my father’s God, and I will extol Him.” Notice the progression from “my father’s God” to “my God.” They were beginning to know personally the One they had heard about from their fathers.

We should view our lives in the same light. We are coming to know our God more. Most of us are not starting from nothing. We have heard about God. Some grew up in Christian homes and have heard His name since childhood. But familiarity with the language of faith does not automatically produce appreciation for God.

A person can grow so accustomed to spiritual privileges that he hardly notices them. First-generation Christians may vividly remember the darkness and brokenness from which God saved them, while those raised in the faith can easily take salvation for granted. In either case, we need to draw near to God and refresh our understanding of the God we worship.

Another danger lies with those who have known Christian teaching for many years. We can confuse familiarity with intimacy. We may know the vocabulary, remember the stories,

and recognize the doctrines, yet our hearts remain distant. Israel had inherited knowledge of the God of their fathers, but at the sea they were forced to confront the God who was acting before them. In the same way, inherited faith must become personal faith. The God our parents or teachers knew must become the God whom we ourselves trust, worship, and obey.

Know His Name

Exodus 15 repeatedly uses the covenant name, Yahweh. Before the Exodus, Moses had asked God what His name was. Now the people were connecting the name they had heard with what they had witnessed. The God of their fathers was becoming known to them through His actions.

God's name was no longer an abstract religious term. When they heard the name of the LORD, they could connect it with deliverance, power, faithfulness, and judgment. They were learning that His name represents His person.

This is an important question for us: When God's name is used, is it merely a familiar word, or does it call to mind the One we know? Knowing God should make His name increasingly personal and precious to us.

Meditate on His Purposes

Exodus 15:4-10 describes what God did to the Egyptian army. The Israelites learned about God not only through their rescue but also through His judgment on those who resisted His purpose.

A superficial reading could reduce the event to God favoring one ethnic group and disliking another. But the text places the matter in the context of His purpose, His warnings, Pharaoh's resistance, and His deliverance of an enslaved people. God had repeatedly displayed His power before the final judgment.

The destruction of the Egyptian army also meant that Israel was truly free from its captors. Their deliverance was not merely emotional encouragement. God had broken the power that held them.

To know God better, we must meditate on deeper truths rather than remain forever at the simplest beginnings of the Christian faith. The basic truths of salvation are precious, but Scripture invites us to mature. We need to learn to feed on the Word rather than always depend on someone else to think for us.

Only Scripture tells us the larger spiritual story: that God chose His people in Christ, that He calls us to put aside our lusts and walk by the Spirit, that the person who walks in the Lord's way is truly blessed, and that His purposes reach far beyond what we can see in the moment. The Israelites watched the Egyptian army disappear beneath the waters and learned that God's will could not finally be defeated.

Glory in His Holiness

The center of the song appears in Exodus 15:11: "Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?"

What does "majestic in holiness" mean? The phrase sets God apart from and above all gods and powers. His holiness is His crown and glory. His purposes and His person are distinguished by a quality that belongs to Him alone.

The Israelites did not yet understand all of God's ways. Why had He waited so long before delivering them? Why had Abraham's descendants gone down into Egypt, where they eventually became slaves? They could not answer every question. Neither can we. Yet their deliverance taught them that God was carrying out a purpose far greater than they could see during the years of bondage.

The event also reminds us that holiness is not predictable. Israel could not have planned the route God led them through. They saw the sea ahead and the Egyptian army behind. From their perspective, the situation seemed impossible. Yet God used the very place that seemed to trap them as the setting for deliverance. His ways were not theirs.

We often want a holy God who still follows our timetable, our preferred methods, and our explanations. But the Exodus teaches us to let God be God. His holiness means His purposes need not conform to our expectations. Faith learns to trust His character even when His immediate plan is unclear.

One helpful sense of “holy” is “set apart” or “special,” though the word means far more when applied to God. His ways are distinct because He is distinct. We may not always understand His decisions, but His holiness calls us to humility rather than accusation. We do not stand over God as judges of His wisdom. We bow before the One who is majestic in holiness.

Holiness is not something we learn overnight. We are often unaware of how our thoughts and desires fall short of Him. We often imagine God mainly as One who will make us comfortable in our sorrows, but the Holy One does far more than comfort us. He confronts, cleanses, redirects, and calls us to Himself.

The more we understand His glory, the more meaningful it becomes to participate in His purposes. Service is no longer merely a duty. We are amazed that the Holy God would call us to belong to Him and join in His work.

Delight in His Kindness

Exodus 15 does not separate holiness from grace. The people who sang of God’s majesty had just been rescued by Him. They knew they benefited from His kindness.

Grace humbles us because we see that we are treated far better than we deserve. Israel had been helpless under bondage. God brought them out, led them through the sea, and began to bring them toward the place He had promised.

Exodus 15:13 says, “In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; in Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation.” His holiness did not make Him indifferent to them. The Holy One redeemed them and drew them toward Himself.

This is even clearer in Christ. We do not deserve to be included in God’s people. Our lives are beset with sins—complaining, envy, self-pity, ingratitude, pride, and many others. Yet the Lord has redeemed sinful people through Christ’s blood. Holiness and grace meet in the God who saves us and then brings us near.

Exodus 15:17-18 looks forward: “You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, the place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling... The LORD shall reign forever and ever.” God was not merely taking Israel away from something. He was bringing them toward Himself and His purposes.

The Holy People of God

This helps us understand the New Testament language of saints, or holy ones. Christians sometimes hesitate to think of themselves this way because they are aware of their sin. But the biblical title points first to ownership. The redeemed belong to God.

This does not excuse sin. It does the opposite. Because we belong to the Holy One, our lives should increasingly reflect His character. The call to holiness is rooted in relationship: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” We are not trying to become

independent moral successes. We are His people and are therefore called to live as His people.

God's holiness is absolute and belongs to Him alone. The holiness He shares with His creatures is dependent and derived. Angels are holy because they belong in His presence. Redeemed people are holy because He has set them apart and is transforming them. The distinction between Creator and creature remains, yet God graciously calls us into fellowship with Himself.

This is why genuine holiness cannot be manufactured by adopting the behavior of a religious group. Outward conformity can mimic holiness for a time, but it cannot replace knowing God. Genuine holiness grows from communion with the Holy God, submission to His Word, and the Spirit's work within us.

Conclusion: Draw Near to the Holy One

We need to move from the ancient to the present, from Israel's experience to our own relationship with God. It is not enough to become excited about what God did at the Red Sea thousands of years ago. We are to learn from how He revealed Himself there and throughout Scripture so that we become pilgrims who know God more and more.

Jesus Christ is not merely an experience of people in figure. Through the Holy Spirit, He continues to make Himself known to His people. The question is not merely whether we can define holiness but whether we know the Holy One.

The chapter's movement is therefore simple yet demanding. We begin by recognizing that God is holy in Himself. We then recognize that whatever belongs to Him is set apart for His purposes. Finally, we see that His people are called to live out that belonging in daily life. Doctrine leads to relationship, and relationship leads to transformation. The goal is not merely to speak more accurately about holiness, but to have the Holy

One increasingly mark the way we think, choose, worship, serve, and love.

A correct understanding of God requires changes in our lifestyles and thought patterns. As long as we defend our present decisions by our feelings, preferences, or culture, we will not draw closer to Him. A strong Christian knows God and is willing to change to draw closer. The weak Christian keeps himself off the altar of dedication because he is unwilling to draw near.

God is awesome. He is majestic in holiness. Dare we draw near and see Him? Dare we bow our knees and submit to His will? The path of holiness is not chiefly a program, a list of achievements, or years of activity. It is the life of a person who belongs to God, spends time in His presence, learns His ways, and increasingly reflects His character.

“Pursue... the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

Reflection Questions

1. What does it mean to say that God is holy rather than merely that He does holy things?
2. Why is it dangerous to imagine God according to our preferences or culture?
3. How does the biblical idea of being “set apart” help explain holy days, holy objects, and holy people?
4. Why are believers called saints or “holy ones” even as they continue to grow in holiness?
5. What did Israel learn about God through the deliverance celebrated in Exodus 15?
6. What does “majestic in holiness” teach us about how we should respond when we do not understand God’s ways?

7. How does God's grace lead to humility rather than to spiritual pride?
8. In what areas of your life is God calling you to live more consistently as one who belongs to Him?

The Wisdom of God

Trusting God's ways and plans because they are best.



*“O LORD, how many are Thy works! In wisdom
Thou hast made them all; the earth is full of Thy
possessions” (Psalm 104:24).*

An Introduction to the Wisdom of God

One of our recurring problems is not knowing how to make the best decisions! If only we could always be right. But that is God's prerogative; He alone is all-wise. This truth about God's perfect wisdom assures us that if we hear God, we can live successful lives.

Unlike humans, God is all-wise and cannot grow in wisdom. People can only strive to know God and assimilate some of His wisdom. Many will be surprised to find that gaining wisdom is not like a popular success story but is better reflected in a journey of holiness. We cannot be wise apart from knowing God.

Most people are deluded, believing that success comes apart from the Lord. We see it everywhere. People gain a bit of insight and build a great business plan to retire early. This greed stands in stark contrast to God's principle of working hard to share (Eph 4:28). King Solomon had it right. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever” (Psalm 111:10). The same story is told throughout the Scriptures, as if the Lord is trying to wake us up to the fact:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:7).

Our pursuit of knowing God is to become like Him, not to seek our own ways. It is not merely to obtain things from God, but to know Him and trust Him to lead us. This is equally true of wisdom. The greatest wisdom is knowing Him and living in light of all He says. The best decisions come only from knowing and understanding Him, who perfectly designed all things! As we get to know the Lord, we begin to gain His wisdom. To live out our lives and ministries successfully, we need to perfect our ability to draw close to God and to gain His wisdom.

A Definition of Wisdom

Wisdom is the ability to grasp all relevant factors and make the best decision. Insight alone is not wisdom. Knowledge takes us far, but our purpose and heart determine how we use that knowledge. God’s wisdom has always encompassed all knowable factors and perfectly aligns with His eternal purpose.

“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God” (1 Cor 3:19). Man’s wisdom is foolish and inadequate before God, whereas God’s wisdom is true. God’s wisdom calls for adoption and conformity because it reveals the best perspective for any decision, unleashing greater portions of His goodness.

Counter-knowledge and brilliant scheming always fail because they set one against God’s wisdom and end up fighting God, the fount of all wisdom. Satan, like Tyre, dazzled himself with his own wisdom and brilliance and fell the furthest down (Eze 28:1–7; 12–17), and still must stumble along the remaining downward path to the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:10).

God’s wisdom, unlike man’s, is fortified and brilliantly displayed, and it harmonizes perfectly with His other holy attrib-

utes. Let not people's vain attempts to portray wisdom otherwise mislead you.

Description of God's Wisdom

Paul humbly closes the grand Roman epistle with the words, "To the only wise God" (Rom 16:27). "Only" appropriately describes the extent of God's wisdom. People believe in all sorts of gods, most of them grotesque, and few are characterized by wisdom; most are obviously foolish. Only God is "only wise." God is the source and fullness of all wisdom. Any true wisdom we have is His wisdom passed on to us. Let's consider the implications of this further.

In this young age of artificial intelligence (AI), people are already reconsidering their lives, hopes, fears, and future in light of its growing capabilities. But we are fools to value knowledge without the constraints of moral discernment. Vast knowledge is not the same as wisdom. Information can be incomplete, mistaken, or misused; even AI systems often warn that the information they provide may be incorrect.



Wisdom, though built on knowledge, is always supreme in accessing knowledge, purpose, context, resources, etc., and produces wise output. Many hope it will help them navigate the stock market and make a fortune. Others fear AI, and rightly so, because it has gone awry and can do so again. In other words, it would not make wise decisions.

God alone is wise. Other beings may possess much knowledge, though incomparable to God's perfect knowledge, but none are as wise as God. Pursuing any philosophy or person outside of God, our Maker, is the first step toward foolishness. Consider the vanity of much education today, conducted in denial of God's wisdom. God is both wise and knowledgeable, fully able to perceive all and to navigate it according to His supreme plan. Furthermore, wisdom is closely tied to plans, purpose, and goals.

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (Rom 11:33)

People seek God's wisdom only for how it helps them handle life, but that's not a proper reference point for understanding it. This is why Paul states in Romans 11:33. We can't comprehend its depth; it's too deep and unfathomable. It includes both wisdom and knowledge, not just the limited knowledge AI has or is acquiring. With all knowledge, there are no loopholes or gaps later discovered. God is perfectly wise.

God's wisdom masterfully and perfectly makes and executes His glorious plans. This wisdom of His, scattered throughout our lives, helps us glimpse His brilliance.

God the Omniscient

God knows everything about all things. David rightly discerns, “You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it all” (Psalm 139:3-4). With all this knowledge, nothing can slip in to interrupt His plans. It's remarkable how Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 2, outlines some of the greatest events preceding the end of the earth, including the great apostasy, the man of lawlessness, and Christ's second coming as Judge.

God the Creator

God created the universe; we hardly notice its presence, yet it endures day to day. The lights (i.e., stars) in the sky cleverly reveal God's signs (Gen 1:14). The evil one wants us to stare at screens today, with our eyes away from God's big screen, where we learn to adore His greatness and wisdom. Just think of the race to get rewards in a computer game compared with the real world! There is no real contest. Only animated pixels dart back and forth in a computer game, but God has marvelously programmed everything that exists, animate and inanimate. Assuming our understanding is correct, every cell, at a microscopic level, is a wise declaration of God's wisdom. But that is only at the cellular level; then there is the atomic level and beyond.

God the Potter

God perfectly designs each person and their circumstances. We are not accidents in time. In His wisdom, He fashions us, fully aware of all the trillions of possible combinations given our different parents, grandparents, and family tree.

13 For You formed my inward parts;
You wove me in my mother's womb.

14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonder-
fully made; Wonderful are Your works,
And my soul knows it very well.

15 My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;

16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;
And in Your book were all written
The days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was not one of them" (Psa 139:13–16).

Our presence is part of His magnificent plan. He gives His people spiritual gifts to enable them to serve, and He distributes them wisely. Consider how the devil has us hating ourselves rather than adoring the Great One who personally designed us. Thanks and praise should fill our hearts, even when He allows us to face inferior circumstances and personal weaknesses. These are the very places where He deigns to reveal His glory (John 9:3). If we wake to His ultimate wisdom, we can exalt Him above all.

The Eternal One

God never gained wisdom, but as the Eternal One, He was forever “all-wise.” He cannot make mistakes or have discards, as if anything He made failed to fulfill His grand eternal purpose. God’s wisdom fully complements His eternal wise plan. For His people, this magnificent plan reaches far beyond what we can ever fathom. Note Paul’s “in all wisdom.”

“In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth” (Eph 1:8-10).

A Poor Contrast of Man’s Knowledge

Since the Lord is the only wise one, no creature or being can be considered wise apart from Him. Man’s wisdom can be defined only as what stems from God’s insights. Man’s greatest achievements in learning occur only when he discovers that the source of all wisdom (and morals) is the “only wise God.” God’s wisdom is beyond man’s ability to grasp. Man strives to gain wisdom and remains unsure whether it is adequate. We strive to know because we do not fully grasp knowledge. Our educational system constantly reveals itself as a wreck because it knowingly and purposefully departs from God’s truth

revealed in His Word. Man thinks he is cleverer by making bribes and twisting knowledge, but God knows that transparency and truth are supreme and lead to justice. His wisdom is perfect, never needing improvement and never missing a single calculation. No plan can be better, which is why God doesn't change.

Societal improvements, whether in thought, economics, or treatment, are always to be judged against God's wisdom; hence, man's greatest achievements can be discovered only by knowing God and obtaining His wisdom.

Hints of God's Supreme Wisdom

Psalm 19 reminds us of the two compasses that faithfully point to God's wisdom: creation and the Bible, that is, God's world and God's word.

*“O LORD, how **many** are Thy works! In wisdom Thou hast made them all” (Psalm 104:24).*

God's works, also known as creation, came into existence by His words (Gen 1:3; 2 Pet 3:5), which, like fireworks, display God's wisdom. They are many! God has made all the works around us in wisdom. The Lord has graciously made some of these great works visible. With electron microscopes and space telescopes, we can inspect God's spectacular world. Scientists gain knowledge that leads to inventions that help millions. God alone allows us, over time, to discover such insights. Wise people realize that these inventions stem from God's wisdom. We love roads and buildings, but they all depend on what God has made, not just minerals but also developmental ideas such as tractors, which imitate insights from the many animals and people around us.

The word “many” best captures the incomparable nature of His wisdom. We live in a living museum where, whether in a backyard or by a river park, we can equally discover insights into the manifold richness of God. Step out. Look up, look

down, and the closer you look, the more you marvel at God's creation. Look closely at a leaf or smell a flower petal. Observe how God enabled our eyes to see color and appreciate beauty's glory. He "made them all!"

Man tried to minimize God's creative power by appealing to evolution, believing the lie that anything can happen with time and chance. God revealed the lies of this false religious philosophy by exposing the remarkable programming behind every living thing. It's not just physical principles that govern large bodies, but precise chemical formulas that enable us to function, from sleeping to waking. We have spent decades trying to perceive and interpret this invisible, incalculable DNA code. "The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens" (Pr 3:19). These molecular discoveries reveal more of God's glory.

"Great are the works of the LORD; They are studied by all who delight in them. Splendid and majestic is His work, and His righteousness endures forever" (Psalm 111:2–3).

God has also distributed His wisdom through His Word, the Bible.

"And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:15-16).

The Lord not only has a plan of salvation, made possible through His Son Jesus, but has also made it known. Through the sacred writings, we gain the wisdom that leads to salvation. When saved, we can delve into the rich depths of God's wisdom, discovering the purposes and good works He has given us to join in.

God's Glory Seen in His Wisdom

The purpose of displaying God's wisdom is to manifest His glory. He shares insights into His works, words, and redemption plan so we can increasingly revel in His perfect wisdom. "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen" (Rev 7:12). Note how He shares His glory with us, enabling us to join in the wonder of His greatness. He displays His wisdom so mankind can identify and enjoy its Creator.

God is the only wise one, and His wisdom is beyond our comprehension. For that reason, His revelation of knowledge and wisdom is entirely reliable, enabling the foolish man to become wise as he leans on God. God patiently bestows His wisdom on those who respect Him. Man's best inventions mirror what we see in the world, so His Word becomes a compass that directs our souls toward life's richest living.

God's Wisdom in Us

I remember a key moment of growth in my life. I came to understand that God's truth always reflects what is best and most wonderful. All worldly thoughts present themselves as wise, but they are not. It's like wrapping hard dirt in a candy wrapper and offering it to a boy. Apart from God, man's greatest works end in vain glory. God truly wants all creation to delight in the glory of His Word and truth, as He has revealed His wisdom. God's works, such as animals and the inanimate solar system, manifest His glory, but they cannot grasp its greatness. God made people in His image to discover and revel in His glory.

Because God shares the glory of His wisdom, humans can appreciate it to some extent. We, of course, indirectly delight in the abundance of good food and the wonderful cascading falls. His wisdom keeps us alive and happy. But His purposes

go beyond this, as we see in these several verses where He dispenses wisdom.



“So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are ’” (Ge 41:39).

“And I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship” (Ex 31:3).

“Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore” (1Ki 4:29).

“For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God’s sight” (Ec 2:26).

Because of the special insight given to the church, she has become a crucial broadcasting station of God’s wisdom. “For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity” (Proverbs 2:6-7).

“Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; ⁷ but we speak God’s wisdom

in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; ⁸ the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:6-8).

God freely gives wisdom that brings help and healing, unlike much of the world, where knowledge and professional help can come at great cost. God has given us herbs and sunlight to promote health and healing. When these are insufficient, He has also given wisdom for medicine and care. Early Christian hospitals were established by believers who sacrificed themselves to serve the sick, the poor, and the distressed.

Wisdom is directly tied to knowing and experiencing God. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Pr 9:10). The fear of the Lord is a healthy apprehension of God’s presence and expectations, which helps us guard our actions.

“The effect of His gift of wisdom is to make us more humble, more joyful, more godly, more quick-sighted as to His will, more resolute in the doing of it and less troubled.”

– J.I. Packer ⁴

God’s Wisdom in the Gospel

The power of the Gospel, however, reveals God’s wisdom by leading individuals and nations to genuine freedom! Just think of a hundred thousand godly Indian or Russian Christians. If they set their hearts fully on the Lord, God shines through them, lighting up their nation.

This chapter on God’s wisdom begins by quoting the last verse of Romans, but in its prior context, we see the apostle flabbergasted by the wisdom of God found in the Gospel.

⁴J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chap. 10, “God’s Wisdom and Ours,” section “The Fruit of Wisdom.”

“25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; 27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom 16:25–27).

Jesus is God’s wisdom and plays the central role in revealing the Gospel’s wisdom. Human redemption was impossible because of sin and death; it required God’s wisdom in Christ to accomplish it. In His wisdom, God sent His Son to die for us. “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). In Christ, we have salvation and sanctification! The church is the display case for God’s wisdom. “In order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10).

Redemption’s purpose is to manifest God’s glory. The greatest way to display God’s wisdom is for people to find salvation in Christ and to reflect their admiration for God’s grace. The apostles often praised and thanked God because they were amazed by the grace and love God showed in Jesus Christ. When we look at the cross, we see God’s ultimate wisdom.

“3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet 1:3-4).

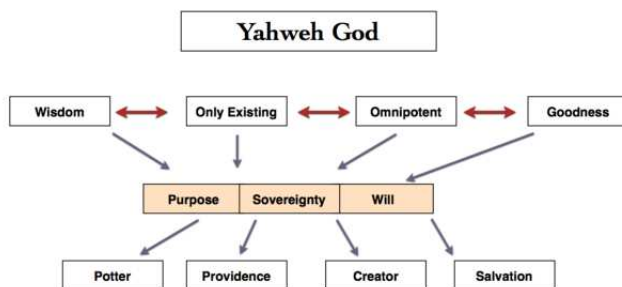
Though hinted at in the Old Testament, the full redemptive plan is revealed only in the New Testament, in which God became man, suffered man's death, and, because He was innocent, was raised from the dead, thereby replacing the first Adam's colossal disaster. Forever, His bride, the church, and the angels will marvel at God's wisdom, which displays His mercy and love in ways otherwise unseen. We should see the Gospel plan, including the necessary suffering, as the very means by which God reveals His eternal, manifold wisdom.

Conclusion

We trust His ways and plans because they are best. We see God's wisdom in the world and in His Word, but it shines most brightly in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, He commands us to proclaim His glorious redemptive plan throughout the world.

A Chart on Understanding God's Wisdom

Wisdom is the attribute of His all-perceptive insight into all things. His purpose, never changing, perfectly aligns with this insight and constitutes His will. His wisdom, therefore, is evident in His perfect will and in the ways He carries it out, as in the Gospel.



God's Character shapes all His works

Questions on God's Wisdom

1. Why do people think they are so wise? Are they really? How do we know?
2. Can any activity be wise without God's wisdom? Explain.
3. How does God reveal His wisdom in the world?
4. How does God reveal His wisdom in His Word, the Bible?
5. What areas of His wisdom do you seek further insight into?
6. Have you learned to connect your wonders of God's wisdom with your heart, giving thanks and praise to Him? Do so now!

The Faithfulness of God

**Confidence that He will help me when and where I need it.
(Lam 3:22-23; Nu 23:19; Hab 1:12-13)**

Most of us struggle to be consistent. God does not. What He says, He does. God is faithful and cannot deny Himself.

Reflection question: Share one area where you have personally seen God's faithfulness.

Understanding God's attributes is crucial to a healthy Christian life, and a firm grasp of God's faithfulness develops vital trust in Him. If we believe God is faithful, we will trust Him, strengthening our relationship with Him even in trials. Below we will review numerous aspects of God's great faithfulness.

Understanding God's Faithfulness

The theme of God's faithfulness is deeply rooted throughout the Bible. God openly declares His faithfulness. Related terms include true, dependable, steadfast, reliable, and fidelity.

"The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice..." (De 32:4).

"O LORD God of hosts, who is like Thee, O mighty LORD? Thy faithfulness also surrounds Thee" (Ps 89:8 NASB).

"And My faithfulness and My lovingkindness will be with him, and in My name his horn will be exalted" (Ps 89:24).

Our Expected Response

God expects us to respond in trust to His faithfulness. He has been faithful; He will be faithful. Though the world is confused by what it sees, we can live by trusting what He has said about Himself and this fleeting world (1 Cor 7:29-31).

Our Response to God's Faithfulness

**Our faith
and belief**

**Dependent
upon**

**Reliable
revelation**

Our faith, belief, and confidence depend upon what God has revealed about Him, His plan and the world. He is reliable.

Our trust in Him shapes our lives. "Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness" (Psa 37:3). "...The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness" (Gal 5:22).

*"O LORD God of hosts, who is like Thee, O mighty LORD? Thy **faithfulness** also surrounds Thee" (Ps 89:8).*

*"And My **faithfulness** and My lovingkindness will be with him, And in My name his horn will be exalted" (Ps 89:24).*

*"For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting, And His **faithfulness** to all generations" (Ps 100:5).*

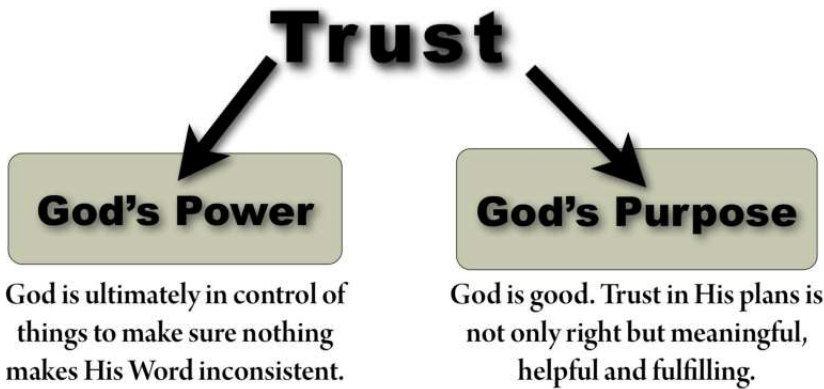
*"He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His **faithfulness** is a shield and bulwark" (Psalm 91:4).*

Trust and confidence in God's faithfulness

God's faithfulness depends on the certainty that He will accomplish what He has promised. The Hebrew verb can refer to a parent's steady hands carrying a child (TWOT#116). The word 'amen' and its variations can be translated as truth or faithfulness.

As a God of revelation, we depend on the words and pictures He reveals to us. They are reliable. The evil one, therefore, attempts to undermine our trust in the certainty of God's faithfulness to His Word.

Trust depends on our belief in both God's power and His purpose.



"For the word of the LORD is upright; and all His work is done in faithfulness" (Ps 33:4).

(1) His power enables us to believe it can and will be done. Nothing can stop His purpose. Often, when we doubt God, we question whether He can do it. Though we do not say He is unable, since we know many Scriptures teach His power, our doubts betray our unbelief.

(2) Trust depends on God's purpose to carry out a matter. Even with all the power in the world, that does not mean God will act. Only when God promises does His purpose become clear.

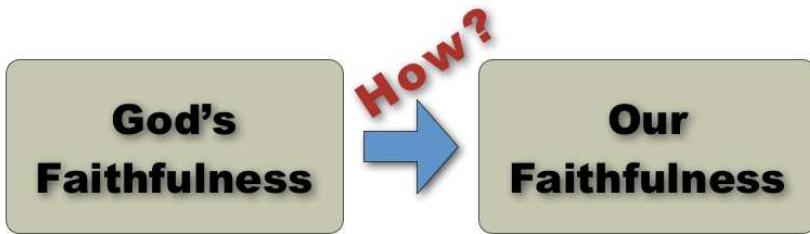
Once we know God's purpose for doing something, we can wait for His promise to be fulfilled—like King David. We can patiently accept God's timing. It is not "if it will happen" but "when it will happen."

"And My faithfulness and My lovingkindness will be with him, and in My name his horn will be exalted." (Ps 89:24).

God's Word helps in both respects. It assures us of His power and His purpose to fulfill His promises to His children.

How do we cultivate faithfulness?

God expects us to display faithfulness, a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Our problem is that we often fail to accomplish what we intend or say. Our circumstances can influence us more than God's promises.



To become faithful, several things need to happen in our lives. God does not need to change; we do. Unfaithfulness is rampant in our society, seen not only in marriage but also in deception, where countless empty promises are made. A person says he will do something but does not. Worse still, sometimes he can do it, but he never intended to do what he said.

Transfer of Values of Faithfulness

Let's better understand how God's faithfulness extends to our lives. Three kinds of value transfers help us trace those steps from head to heart!

(1) Observe God's faithfulness

Change begins when the Lord shows us His faithfulness. God has been faithful and has gone out of His way to reveal that faithfulness to us. Scripture highlights humanity's obstinate ways to underscore God's great faithfulness (for example, Pharaoh and the plagues).

This is the message of grace. God carried out His saving plans despite all humanity's actions—even when people rejected the Messiah. I like how King David designated some

people, "...designated by name, to give thanks to the LORD, because His lovingkindness is everlasting" (1 Chronicles 16:41). David observed God's faithfulness.

(2) Understand the importance of faithfulness

We should also consider how we might or might not keep promises, appointments, and other commitments. His faithfulness slowly shapes the way we do things. I'll mention two ways.

The first was already mentioned: understanding the importance of faithfulness to God. Because we serve Him, we will see how important faithfulness is to Him and esteem this trait as vital.

The second happens when we recognize how essential faithfulness is to our lives, welcome consistency, and embed it in our families. These are ways His faithfulness begins to shape us. Respect for God can go a long way, encouraging us to do things His way to please Him.

Being faithful becomes more important than gaining money. We are willing to lose money on a deal rather than be dishonest. Integrity becomes all-important. "A good name is to be more desired than great riches; favor is better than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1).

(3) Trust Him to help us carry out His will

When we consider the importance of faithfulness, we may face what seems like an unsolvable problem. We do not have the power or authority to control our circumstances. Trusting Him helps us remain faithful and guides how we approach various situations.

For example, we will be more cautious about what we say or do because we better recognize our weaknesses and sinful

hearts. Our desire to be honest and faithful to our word will influence what we promise.

God, however, will also make His power available to us. He has given us many promises that encourage us to ask in faith and in accordance with His will. Our faithfulness will depend on His faithfulness.

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you” (John 15:16). [Friendship Abiding](#)

God ties our fruitfulness to our dependence on Him in prayer (1 John 5:14). Our good works depend on God. As this confidence grows, we increasingly make God’s faithfulness the backbone of our own faithfulness.

As my weaknesses increase with age, the challenges of ministry also mount. What a beautifully liberating thought that God works His marvelous plan through our frail and limited lives! How could He do it? Why would He ever do it? It is simply amazing.

God’s Faithful Plan

God’s plans are wrapped up in His great, merciful, redemptive plan. “The LORD’S loving kindnesses never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Thy faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23).

From Lamentations 3:22-23, we see that God faithfully demonstrates His love and compassion. God’s faithfulness is described as “great” because His commitment to extend His great mercy toward us sinners in Christ Jesus is unchangeable.

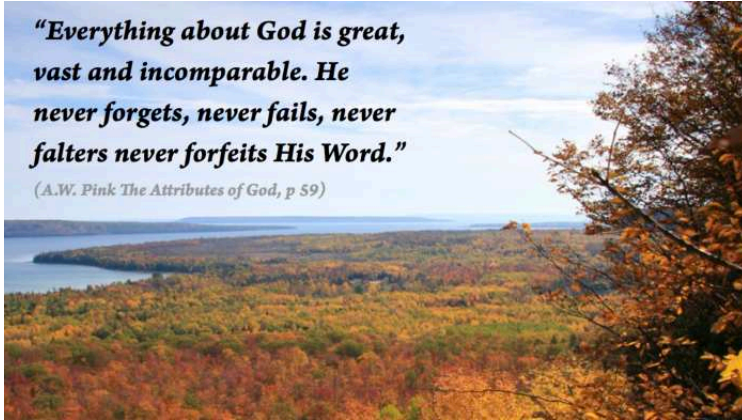
God is faithful to His Word. What He reveals, He commits to. All the promises to bring God's people into the land of Canaan were fulfilled.

God's comprehensive redemptive plan—a plan above other plans (Ephesians 3:7-11)—is underscored by His promises and thus encompasses many other aspects of life. This is God's untouchable plan. God, however, is faithful not just in one area but in all areas of our lives.

God's great faithfulness is exhibited in all His actions and ways.

1. God faithfully carries out His plan in our lives despite the difficult circumstances we face (Philippians 1:6, 12-14; Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Hebrews 13:8; Psalm 90:2).
2. He faithfully disciplines us as needed. "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness" (Hebrews 12:9-10).
3. The Lord faithfully helps us in our needs. "He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark" (Psalm 91:4).
4. He faithfully enables us to withstand temptation. "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).
5. God's faithfulness assures us that His words will come true. This attribute brings ongoing comfort in His promises

and, at the same time, a sober awareness of His coming judgment.



Though God is faithful in many areas of life, such as providing us with air and food, we should not forget His faithfulness in compassion. This is especially significant because we need it so deeply.

While His general care for His creatures is evident, our rebellious, hardened, sullied hearts cry out for His compassion. We remember God's response to the obstinate Israelites when He told Moses to stand aside because He was ready to judge the unthankful and idolatrous people.

God is faithful to His person and plan. Unlike humans, God does not change His plans; His wisdom enables Him to see all the implications of His plan, including His patient treatment of sinners and our potential responses. This makes His mercy more touching.

Discerning God's Faithfulness

During periods of chastisement or judgment, it often seems that God is not faithful, but this is not true. Let's look at three challenges to God's faithfulness.

What about Israel's captivity by foreign nations?

We might wonder what happened to God's promises when we look back on Israel's captivity. Indeed, there could not be a worse situation, yet we have clear witnesses to God's faithfulness.

First, God promised to judge them under the Old Covenant if they disobeyed.

"²⁶ And they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom He had not allotted to them. ²⁷ 'Therefore, the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; ²⁸ and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day" (Deut 29:26-28).

In contrast, Daniel and Nehemiah both humbled themselves before God through prayer and fasting. Daniel prayed for Israel's restoration because Jeremiah had prophesied that the exile would end after seventy years.

"In the first year of his reign I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years" (Daniel 9:2).

As Jeremiah had foretold, God brought His people back from captivity. Many years later, Nehemiah also appealed to God's earlier promise to Moses when he prayed for Jerusalem's restoration. Notice how his prayer alluded to Moses' warning and promise in Deuteronomy 30:1-3.

"Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you

among the peoples; but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell” ([Nehemiah 1:8, 9](#) NASB).

These examples show that God calls His people to obedience and faithfully fulfills both His warnings and His promises.

Doubt, therefore, chips away at our faith till we do not go forward but respond instead to the lies about God’s faithfulness.



What about David’s anointing as king?

We are sometimes tempted to doubt God’s Word. Consider how the Lord anointed David king over Israel many years before he actually became king. Instead of immediate fulfillment, David faced tremendous setbacks. These struggles often center on questions such as “What did God say and mean?” and “Why aren’t things turning out as He promised?”

Everything was fine as long as David served in Saul’s court, but that ended quickly when King Saul began to persecute him. This persecution continued for many years, and David even lived for a time under the protection of the Philistines—the chief enemy of Israel. Again and again, Saul almost killed David, and several Psalms testify to these struggles.

David wrote Psalm 63 while hiding in Judah’s wilderness. Though an anointed king, he was on the run as a refugee. He found peace in God as he refreshed himself in God’s presence and promises. “My soul thirsts for Thee... I have beheld...Thy power and Thy glory” (Psalm 63:1-2). He found God’s peace through His promises, but we do not grasp the danger he faced until the end of the Psalm.

“But those who seek my life to destroy it, will go into the depths of the earth. They will be delivered over to the power of the sword; They will be a prey for foxes. But the king will rejoice in God; Everyone who swears by Him will glory, For the mouths of those who speak lies will be stopped” (Psalm 63:9-11).

The phrase “But the king will rejoice in God” is exciting. While in hiding, he treasures the promise of kingship in his heart. One day he will rejoice as king.

God sometimes delays fulfilling His promises. The anointing pointed to a future fulfillment, but it was not realized until later in David’s life, after King Saul’s death.

What about God’s promised blessing upon the righteous such as Jesus?

Many verses speak of blessings for the righteous. “The righteous will inherit the land, and dwell in it forever” (Ps 37:29). “If the righteous will be rewarded in the earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!” (Proverbs 11:3). “Say to the righteous that it will go well with them, for they will eat the fruit of their actions” (Isaiah 3:10).

God considered Job a righteous man, yet he suffered greatly, so his counselors accused him of unrighteousness because of his troubles.

No one was righteous like Jesus (Luke 23:4; 1 Peter 2:22), yet these promises were not fully realized during His earthly life. Their fulfillment would be seen in His resurrection and in the Spirit’s work through the church (Isaiah 53:10-12).

“But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand” (Isaiah 53:10).

Looking at our circumstances, we will find frustrations and seeming contradictions with God's promises. We must fix our eyes on the Lord to work out what otherwise seems impossible. The righteous may face affliction, "but the LORD delivers him out of them all." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the LORD delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

As we carefully study the Scriptures, we discover God's faithfulness—even in what first looks like broken promises. God cannot lie. "The hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago" (Titus 1:2).

Given our circumstances, we will encounter frustrations and apparent contradictions in God's promises. We must fix our eyes on the Lord to work out what seems otherwise impossible. The righteous may face affliction, "but the LORD delivers him out of them all." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the LORD delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

As we carefully study the Scriptures, we discover God's faithfulness—even when what first appears to be broken promises. God cannot lie. "The hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago" (Titus 1:2).

There are temptations that would have us question God's faithfulness.

"God is not able to carry out what He desires."

"God changed His mind about what He is going to do."

Doubt in God's power

Doubt in God's Purpose

God's Reminders of His Faithfulness

Trust in God's faithfulness matters, so He provides many reminders to strengthen our confidence in Him.

Why is the account of crossing the Jordan River in Joshua 3 placed there? Crossing the Jordan on dry ground gave future

generations a way to affirm the truth of the stories they would hear from their fathers about God giving them the Promised Land.

This historical event is important because it affirms that God faithfully brought His people out of bondage in Egypt and into their new home.

Joshua 3:11 NASB

“Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over ahead of you into the Jordan.”

As forty years passed, so did the eyewitnesses to the tremendous, miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. Only Joshua and Caleb remained from that generation. A single generation is not enough to witness God’s faithfulness. Each generation must develop its own faith in God. Faith then becomes trust in God’s faithfulness.

Joshua 4:7 NASB

“Then you shall say to them, ‘Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off.’ So these stones shall become a memorial to the sons of Israel forever” (Joshua 4:7).

God reminds us how consistently He kept His Word in the past, encouraging us to trust His Word today. His people needed great faith to believe God could do the impossible.

My Testimony of God’s faithfulness

God has faithfully watched over every aspect of my mission training trips to Africa and Asia. The trips were always fully supported, though often only at the last minute. More than once, only a small portion of the needed funds had come in just before I was scheduled to leave.

These experiences repeatedly taught me to remember what God had done in the past and to trust Him for the present need. Again and again, He provided what was necessary—sometimes at the last moment and sometimes beyond what I expected —enabling me to meet additional ministry needs that arose along the way. Through these experiences, God taught me that faith grows as we remember His past faithfulness and trust Him with what lies ahead.

Praying Through His Attributes

We need to pray through these themes so that the truth of God's attributes shapes our minds and hearts in Christ Jesus. This meditative prayer combines “making your requests known to God” (Philippians 4:6) with the instruction to “Whatever is true...dwell on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

“Everything about God is great, vast and incomparable. He never forgets, never fails, never falters never forfeits His Word” (A.W. Pink, Attributes of God, p.59).

For example, a brother once asked whether the low donations for a mission trip were typical. The evil one can exploit such circumstances to stir fear that the trip will fail and that the ministry's needs will not be met. In such a situation, I need to pray through God's faithfulness. The prayer might go something like this:

“Lord, You know our great need. Whether typical or not, You are there for me. You are the One who told me to ‘feed them’ with the little I have, much like that boy with the lunch. Lord, You know how little I have. You know how the evil one keeps trying to make me feel inadequate and to suggest that You are unfaithful. But You are faithful; that is who You are.

You want me to trust You through this time and again to manifest Your glorious ways. Thank You for caring for me. Take my 'little lunch' and feed these hundreds of pastors with food and Your Word. Prosper my way so that all might know how faithful You are. Great is Your faithfulness, Lord, unto me."

Summary

God is forever faithful; trust Him!

Study Questions & Projects on God's Faithfulness

1. Find three verses this week that speak about God's faithfulness. Memorize two of them.
2. Define the faithfulness of God.
3. How does the reliability of God's Word affect our trust in Him?
4. What is the promise of God?
5. Find and list the promises in Psalm 37. What kind of hope do they stir up in you?
6. Share any stories that God uses to encourage your faith regularly. (If not, read the Bible and more stories of famous Christians!)
7. Can a person be considered faithful when he is inconsistent?
8. List two situations in which we must trust God's faithfulness.
9. What area does Lamentations 3:22-23 say God is faithful in? What does the word 'great' add about His faithfulness?
10. List three areas in the past where you have seen God's faithfulness.
11. Do you have any stories of God's faithfulness? If so, name them and the powerful story that accompanies them.

The Mercy and Grace of God

Psalm 89:20–52

Recently, we have been confronted with God's awesome and holy person. He alone is God. His will is surely accomplished. His purpose is fulfilled. There are three favorable results I hope occur in our hearts as we increase in the knowledge of God: 1) We should gain a greater sense of personal intimacy with God, and 2) This intimacy leads to a humbled heart, not only because of His greatness but also because of His willingness to draw close to us. 3) We should also have a greater fear of disobeying such a great God. A fear that leads to obedience is good. In this sense, fear means "a healthy awe leading to reverential behavior." Proverbs 2:5 says, "Then you will discern the fear of the LORD, and discover the knowledge of God." We cannot say we know God if we do not personally revere Him.

I want us to think of our hearts as riverbeds and God's mercy as flowing water. We recently saw the damage to our towns and cities caused by too much water, but this is different when we consider the riverbeds of our hearts and know God's mercy. We need to ask for His mercy.

Zechariah 10:1 Ask rain from the LORD at the time of the spring rain- the LORD who makes the storm clouds; and He will give them showers of rain, vegetation in the field to each man.

Numbers 14:18 'The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression.

Psalm 5:7 But as for me, by Thine abundant lovingkindness I will enter Thy house.

Psalm 86:5 For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon Thee.

Psalm 86:15 But Thou, O Lord, art a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.

Psalm 103:8 The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him; And to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Jude 1:2 May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you.

Each of these verses speaks of the abundant way God uses His mercies to treat us, sinners within His covenant. This is why the Psalmist sings of God's lovingkindness - His mercy (Psalm 89:1). In verse 2, he says, "Lovingkindness will be built up forever."

God wants His people to know that there is no limit to His abundant mercies. He pours them out on His people. We are called by His mercy and saved into His mercy.

Some might misunderstand God's power. Many in our world today have a warped concept of power. I am cautious about how a lie planted in our hearts might grip us with fear of any authority. It is very difficult for some to accept a loving God who also exerts His authority. If we grew up in a home where our parents abused their power and we were crushed in heart, we are probably among these people. If, when growing up, we became cynical about the world around us because we saw the abuse of power, whether in school, church, or politics, we

are probably also among those who dissociate goodness from power. My generation has, on the whole, been analyzed as rejecting authority to such a point that we are never willing to commit ourselves to any organization, fearing that we ourselves will be abused. We will be used for something we don't agree with. This lack of commitment, particularly on the part of fathers, has allowed the evil one to initiate many evil policies for which our culture is now paying a price.

It is time to deal with these wounds in our hearts and put them aside. Why would you get closer to God if you perceived your parents as abusing their authority? Distance is your comfort. And most likely, unless you have dealt with these problems candidly, you still perpetuate them through burning anger and sharp bitterness against authority. When they raise their own children, they usually respond in one or two ways:

- 1) They refuse to be like their fathers, so they let their children do anything. They want an open relationship rather than an embittered one. Permissiveness reigns.
- 2) Others act just like their fathers and do not understand why they become so violent so quickly.

God is both good and powerful. He has not abused His power; in fact, He cannot use His power wrongly, for all His attributes are essential to His person. Today, I want to speak about God's mercy and how it complements His great power. I want us to acknowledge any anger in our hearts toward our fathers and to forgive them. I want us to welcome this fresh understanding that the all-powerful God wants us to experience His mercy. He wants His mercy to overflow our hearts.

I admit that studying God's mercy is not as straightforward as one might expect. Different words translate the same Hebrew or Greek term, and even translations differ. The NT word "mercy" (*eleos*) almost always corresponds to the OT word *hesed*. The King James Version uses "mercy" instead of "lov-

ingkindness.” The NIV chooses to use the words ‘great love’ or just ‘love.’ Notice how these beautiful verses combine the sense of mercy with abundance. Lovingkindness combines two words into one, but other versions choose one word to convey the glorious truths of covenant love. One aspect is the favored goodness that He pours upon His covenant people. The second aspect is how His love persistently deals with our unfaithfulness. Notice how lovingkindness and abundance are regularly associated together. Our study might not be so simple, but I trust we will not let this get in the way of further understanding God’s mysterious mercy.

To be a people who know God, we must be deeply moved by His great mercies toward us. If, for some reason, we limit the extent of His great love, distort its purpose, or treat what is precious as common and unnecessary, we have blocked our minds from perceiving His great and abundant mercies. At this point, let me limit my discussion of God’s mercy to how Psalm 89 presents the glory and abundance of God’s mercy given to His covenant people.

The Context of His Mercies (Psalm 89:19–24): His Covenant People

Some of you are wondering why I suddenly became selective and mentioned “His covenant people” as if God gives His mercy only to a certain people. Arthur Pink says there are three kinds of mercy: 1) the mercies given over all creation. Psalm 145.9 says, “The LORD is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works.” A better word for mercies is the NIV’s use of ‘compassions.’ Pink then says 2) God’s mercy is over all mankind, good and evil alike. This is seen in His general goodness shown to mankind, even though they sin.

This could also be the word love, which is made manifest in everything God has made. A great example of this is the mer-

cies shown to the city of Nineveh in Jonah 3 and 4. 3) The third is the mercy shown to His own people.

The first two kinds of mercies must be understood as temporary. They are for the moment but will not go on forever. A time of judgment will come. Mercy holds back God's righteous and deserved anger. We might think it will go on and on, but a natural disaster of one kind or another, or the death of a loved one, seems to remind us that God's wrath is coming to those who do not belong to His people.

While God's mercy is often temporary, we are further blessed as Christians with a covenant love and mercy that endure forever. Our lack of understanding of this point greatly diminishes the praise we offer Him in our hearts. In particular, I want to address two misunderstandings about the focus of His mercies so we might begin to grasp their unlimited nature.

1) Problem: We think His special mercies extend to everyone, but it is only for His people.

The first problem we face is assuming that God shows His lovingkindness to all. This teaching has been popularized by evangelists who did not know how to distinguish between God's general love and saving love. His general love is evident in the common graces He has given to each of us. The rain falls on the gardens of the evil too. Yet a clear stream of teaching throughout the Bible speaks of His mercy, His lovingkindness, and His great love as extended only to His covenant people. The best example God has built into us to teach this lesson is marriage. Although we want to be kind to all, we have chosen a spouse and covenanted with that person to give ourselves especially to that person. I don't hear people crying out at weddings and protesting: "He is unfair! He is not good!" We understand that one is not obligated to treat anyone with this special marital love, but if one so chooses to do so, then let their love be blessed. Weddings

show the culmination of our love because they focus on a person.

Is it wrong for God to choose to set His special covenant love upon anyone? Of course not. This is why many people who have not thought through these issues insist that Christ had to die for everyone on the cross. They think perfect love demands that He love everyone the same. But we should take clues from the way we love our spouses and our own children. It is not wrong for me to love my children more than another person. Even as a pastor, you must allow me to treat my children more specially than yours. I do not mean my children are better or more worthy. I only mean that my relationship with them binds my attention to them in a very special way. I appreciate my many sisters here. But you, too, must allow me to love my wife in a way I will not love you. Of course I love you, my brothers and sisters, but I have still pledged, in a still clearer and more focused way, to love. Everybody knows this, but nobody says it.

God intends for a multitude of people to be saved and to know His love. God has said that His descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore. We are to be overwhelmed by God's great love, not stifled by it. God wants us to know that the great numbers demonstrate how bountiful His love is.

Why can we not allow God the right to choose some of us to love in a particular, special way? When we say God's love is perfect, does that mean He has to love equally? I think many of us believe this, but it simply is not true. God has chosen a group of people and given them a special love. This does not make God's love any less perfect. The reason is clear: He didn't have to show His mercy to any of us. He wanted to and chose to, at a very high cost to Himself. This leads us to the next problem.

2) Problem: We assume it is our right to be God's covenant people.

If we can accept God's freedom to love a people so much that He took her to be His bride, then we will find another problem that often mucks up our understanding of the abundance of His great love. The problem is that we think we, His chosen people, are especially attractive or desirable by our own nature. We take God's choice of us as acceptance. The Jews got caught up in their Jewishness. They thought it was their circumcision that made God love them. No, it wasn't. Nor is anything we can or could do what makes us lovable. We are not lovable, not cute, not able to do anything to help God. We are totally undesirable, like the rest. The sin that creeps up on the church again and again is the thought that Christians are better because they are chosen. What a fat lie! In every way, we are as bad as, if not worse than, the others. Remember, it was not the righteous who looked for the doctor. God's love is totally unwarranted and unexpected. We do not see its abundance when we think it was what God should have done.

In verses 19-24, we see God's choice of David. He was only one chosen from many (19c). God especially anointed him and made promises regarding him. We know David was a great hero, but God made him so. But David was not perfect. We know of some of his great sins. When I recently read 2 Samuel, I was astonished at the ending. It recorded how David insisted on going against the others' recommendation and numbered the people against God's will. He later saw his mistake, but at the cost of the lives of 70,000 Israelites. David knew he should have died. It was his sin. What a way to end a great book recording God's work in His people. God made it clear that David was special not because he was perfect, but because God chose him. God chose to crush David's enemies (23). And so verse 24 says, "And My faithfulness and My

lovingkindness will be with him, and in My name his horn will be exalted.”

No one knew God’s mercy and love better than David. There was no special reason to choose the youngest of many boys from a no-name place to be king. But God considered it His privilege to choose anyone He wanted and to bless them. This is the context of God’s love for us. We are totally unfit and unqualified, yet God goes out of His way by sending His Son to die for us and then filling us with His Spirit so we could be His children. His love is beyond description. When it dawns on us that we deserved His wrath but it fell on His Son instead, we begin to understand the depth of His lovingkindness. For we, His children, are part of the new Covenant, where He desires to bring us into a very intimate relationship with Him.

The words mercy, lovingkindness, and the NIV’s “great love” all refer to God’s covenant love. In this case, no one looked appealing as a bride. His choice of us made all the difference in our lives. And just as a new bride treasures being her husband’s special woman and is therefore willing to go where he goes and help as she can, so we, the bride of Christ, have set aside our own wills so that our lives can be remade in His choice of us. We are chosen together and therefore share in the preciousness of His desire to be close to us.

The Extent of His Mercies (Psalm 89:28–29): Forever

If we understand the greatness of God’s mercy shown to the people upon whom He has poured out His love, we should also be moved by its extent, especially its ongoing duration and eternal nature. We are not sufficiently moved by God’s merciful treatment because we do not consider it properly.

1) Problem: We question the endurance of God's mercies and, as a result, lack His peace.

There are far too many Christians who have a worldly view of God's mercy. They think God's mercy is like man's favors. They think God's mercy is stirred by some emotional television blurb and then lost once He has dispatched sufficient aid. Have you been able to discern how Americans' concern for Somalia is directly dependent on how sad and frequent the stories the media brings? And now, no one mentions Somalia's concerns. I hate this manipulation. On the one hand, we think we are helping them out so much, but we are not. On the other hand, certain forces manipulate what we see and therefore our feelings. The worst part is that we really don't care. If we did, we would have admitted that we have not been able to bring them real help and that only God can. I understand why we have such a woeful concept of mercy. But God's mercy is not like this.

God's mercy is activated not because of some sob story that caught His heart. He chose His people even before they were born, before the world was made. He didn't choose us because of what we could become on our own, our intelligence, the people we hang out with, or our race, but by His own free choice. We were all totally unworthy candidates. Every choice was a miracle, a wonder. But because He saw all our deficiencies when He chose us, we had no later regrets, as we do when we find that the person we married is very different from what we thought, not long after the wedding. God's love is ongoing. The words "My lovingkindness I will keep for him forever" were specifically for David, but through David's seed, the Messiah, we were also to share in this laser-intense love.

We might think God's love comes and goes, or grows and weakens. But none of these things are correct. God's mercy has been perfectly expressed from day one. And as Chris-

tians, we should never doubt that He has removed us from His mercy list because we did something wrong or because we feel guilty. God's mercy is so perfect that when He looks at you as His child in Christ Jesus, He sees you as righteous. He sees us in Christ's righteousness. The Scriptures would raise any question about this security only if we stand apart from Christ. If we slide back and show our lack of love for Him, then a certain fear should arise within our hearts about whether we really are His or not.

2) Problem: We do not delight in the eternality of His mercies, so we cannot fully enjoy them.

God said He would establish David's "descendants forever" and "his throne as the days of heaven." It is clear that the Lord was trying to raise our eyes to the future. To a degree, I can accept that this passage looked forward to David's descendant, Jesus the Messiah, ascending into heaven. But we must understand that the promises go beyond this. Notice that the Lord said He would establish His descendants forever. He was not just establishing the Messiah but all those in the Messiah. In Romans 4, Paul uses both David and Abraham, and God's treatment of them, to show how God would treat us. It was the same. In verse 7, it says God accepted David apart from righteousness because he didn't have the righteousness needed. This is the predicament of us all. Only by believing in God's provision in Jesus Christ are we saved. But being part of this covenant of grace, we find that we will be His forever.

But we are not deeply moved by God's mercy because we are too focused on the things around us. We go running after this and that. Now, I like modern conveniences and computer toys, but in the end I have to realize that none of this compares to the mercy I have received in Christ. Another stage will soon take place on this earth once all who are to receive His mercy have received it. He says all the shakeable will be shaken out,

and He will make a new heaven and a new earth. He says He will give us an immortal body, an eternal peace, and a forever home where tears and thieves do not invade. God gives us certain delights and joys here so that we can begin to understand what great things He has planned for His people.

Our hearts do not treasure these things because we have stained our dreams with today's things. We chase the perishable rather than the imperishable.

May we be moved by His mercy. May the Lord open our eyes to see His wonderful love. May we begin to desire to turn off the television and refuse to put in a CD because we want to think about God's great mercy that He has bestowed upon us in Christ. We are to refuse imitation and go for the real. We are to confess our worldliness and pray for love of the eternal.

Some of you don't understand how love and power can work together. We assume the powerful must put aside their power to love. But I want you to know that it is precisely through God's great love and power that He devised and accomplished such a wonderful and awesome plan of salvation. No wonder God's people throughout Scripture praise Him. Rev 19:5-6 gives us a quick picture on the shores of heaven. Do not fear God's power. It is awesome, but if you are part of His wonderful plan, where He chose you to share in what you did not deserve and to realize that there is no change with time or variation in eternity, then we had better catch up to the glory of His great and abundant mercy.

This past week, I spoke with a frustrated brother from another congregation who was trying to explain to some Christians he works with how important it is to get closer to God. Puzzled, they asked, "God is everywhere. How can we get closer to God?" Just as they are wrong to assume God's omnipresence is the same as intimacy with God, so are many of us who think this book on Knowing God is about knowing more about

God intellectually rather than experiencing His presence. Jeremiah rightly rebukes our generation:

“But who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened?” (Jer 23:18)

Have you ever gotten close to God? Have you ever gone into His presence to see what He would show you and hear what He would say to you? Have you heard and then done what He has said? This book on Knowing God is meant to convince us that knowing about God is inadequate. I encourage you not to be content with God as just a far-off part of your life, but to come close to Him and get to know Him. I can talk a lot about knowing God, but in the end you need to bring that knowledge to life by meeting Him. You yourself must be touched in your heart by His great and wonderful person. Knowledge must turn into experience in the quiet meditations of our lives.

The Unchanging Nature of His Mercies (Psalm 89:30–37): He Is Faithful

Two messages separate the two aspects of mercy. They are similar in how they made us more aware of our waywardness and sin. They help us overcome one of the greatest problems in understanding God’s mercy: we simply believe we do not need His mercy. There is a big difference between the person who just escaped with his life from a terrible automobile accident and the person who just missed an accident with no damage done. Most of us respond to God like the latter case, as if salvation is no big deal; His mercy is good, but we would get by without it.

Earlier, we focused on the context and the extent of His mercies. His mercy and grace are two sides of God’s goodness toward sinful creatures. God chose David as an example of how He could and would show mercy to a small, unknown person born in Bethlehem by making an eternal covenant with

him. We now consider His unchanging nature as expressed in His mercies to His people. I will again point out some detours of thought that blind us to God's majestic and pure mercy. When we erase the errors and put away the wrongful notions, we can begin to see the unhidden glory of God's mercy. Then we shake in fear at the thought of what our lives would be like without His mercy. Then we are deeply moved by His gracious care for our lives.

Our problem in knowing God is that we meet Him so rarely. We often see man and, as a result, are more familiar with man's ways. But God's mercy is not like man's mercy. We have stained our understanding of mercy with staged events of compassion in Somalia or by using our tax-deductible receipt as motivation for giving to different charities. God's mercy does not show up where man expects it, nor does it fade away as we would expect it to peter out. This is because God's mercy is unchanging. His mercy is unchanging because it goes on and on and does not change. His mercy persists because He persists. His faithfulness, combined with His mercy, becomes our sole hope. Tell me, what Christian would stand in God's presence if, after wiping away his sin, the condition was simply not to sin anymore? We would begin coming up with schemes to believe and die at the same time. We would all perish. God's mercy starts in eternity before we existed, penetrates time, and extends into the heavens, where everyone will see the great love of God. Let me try to eradicate two problems that have blemished and distorted the unchanging nature of God's mercies.

Problem #1: We mock His mercies and His covenant by making allowance for sin in our lives (Psalm 89:30-32).

The first problem is seen among those professing Christians who keep on sinning. They prefer their sins to God's holiness.

I have met quite a few people who are shocked when they hear the gospel. They are taken aback by the problem that free forgiveness in Christ might create. After he believes, a person can sin and get away with it.

What really happens in this process as people come into the church? Those who profess to know God begin to take God's graciousness and forgiveness for granted. We grow increasingly presumptuous and fool ourselves into thinking that sin does not make a difference in our lives. We are confident that God will forgive us. Some might even use the truth of "the unchanging mercies of God" to feel more comfortable with sin. Some have even twisted God's grace to think that more grace is given with increasing sin. So they decide to sin more to get more grace. Paul rebukes such lies in Romans 6:1-2, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?"

Clearly, we should not take God's mercy for granted. The Psalmist, on the one hand, speaks of God's unchanging mercies and, on the other hand, of God's severe dealings with His people. God will deal with those whom He loves. He will never overlook sin. He can't; He is holy. Peter says in 1 Peter 4:15-18,

"By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler... For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER?"

We must, at all costs, resist mocking God's mercies through our disobedience. He will visit our transgressions with a rod.

Sure treatment is coming for those stubborn among us – if we really are His people.

David is a clear example of God's chastisement. There were two major setbacks in David's life because of his sin. Each time, God severely rebuked him. It may have spanned several years, but the chastisement surely came. After his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, David's family became an absolute mess. His son shamed him into running for cover and did evil to David's concubines. Was it David's fault or his sons'? It was both, but unless God's people deal with sin openly through confession and repentance, God will silently bring trouble until the wrongdoers are finally embarrassed. The longer we wait, the greater the penalty, not just for ourselves but for those around us. David's second stubborn streak, which God severely rebuked, came at the end of his life. We don't read that everything was rosy to the end. Instead, by calling for a detailed census against all his counsel and God's will, he caused tens of thousands of his own people to pay dearly with their lives. The greater our responsibility, the greater the judgment. David says in Psalm 51:1-4,

"Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge."

Ethan the Psalmist was right when he wrote in Psalm 89:30-32,

"If his sons forsake My law, and do not walk in My judgments, if they violate My statutes, and do not keep My

commandments, then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.”

God’s unchanging mercy does not mean He will overlook our evil ways. In the OT and NT alike, God will appropriately deal with sin among His people. We are certain that God will deal with us because He says that if He does not chastise His child, that is evidence that the person does not belong to Him at all (Hebrews 12). We are the fools if we mock God by sinning, for our sin will find us out. We will see the pain inflicted upon our marriages, jobs, relationships, and, most subtly, upon our children.

Clearly, God’s unchanging mercy does not mean we can escape sin. Instead, God’s great mercy assures us that He will not let us go undisciplined in our sin. His mercies will hold us back. God will always discipline His children, but He will let go of the unbeliever, the professing believer who loves sin more than God, in his own way. God’s mercy is so great and came at such a great cost that we should be awed by it and never think it overlooks sin. No, no. God’s unchanging mercy means He deals with sin, first on the cross and then in our lives.

Problem #2: We doubt His intention to fulfill His pledges (Psalm 89:33-37). Discouragement; give up

Another problem is the opposite of the first. While the first group presumes they can get away with most everything by God’s mercy, the second group gives up hope too easily. The first group makes the most of God’s mercy and very little of their sin; the latter group thinks very little of God’s mercy and much of their sin and unworthiness. This latter group is keenly aware of their sin. They feel their unworthiness. They bury themselves in the shame of their sin and, sadly, admit they have sinned again and again.

This latter group needs encouragement from the hope that comes from the unchanging nature of God's mercy. They need to see that God treats them not according to how they feel or what they did, but according to His great loving heart. They need to see that they are part of an agreement under which God said He would pardon them. Notice the strength of the words in verses 33-37:

"But I will not break off My lovingkindness from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness. My covenant I will not violate, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. His descendants shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established forever like the moon, and the witness in the sky is faithful." Selah.

- The Lord will not break off His lovingkindness (33).
- The Lord will not go against His agreement(33b).
- The Lord will not break His covenant (34a).
- The Lord will not modify what He has said (34b).

The reason for this is that the Lord has sworn by His holiness (35). Now, the Lord did not have to swear by His holiness. He did so because man talks and thinks that way. When man swears, he takes an oath upon something greater and more glorious than his own person to convince people of its truthfulness. But what is greater than God? What can be more pure than God? Nothing. So He swears by His own holiness. David did fail God with some great sins, but God cannot lie. The promises to David would be fulfilled.

Let's take a quick look at these promises to David and see whether God has done what He said He would do. By looking closely, those who so quickly lose hope can look up again and see the wonderful pardoning care of their Savior.

1) David's descendants endure forever (36a).

Do we see David's descendants enduring forever? Is this true? We cannot prove this in one sense because we have not stepped into eternity to witness whether His descendants will endure forever, but we can witness how it is happening. David, of course, could not see this, but we can see God's faithfulness with the advantage of time. First of all, we can look at the NT and find two of the most beautiful people as David's descendants: Joseph and Mary. We know Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, so He carried on the ancestral line.

2 Timothy 2:8 says, "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel."

Revelation 22:16 says, "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star."

Jesus came alive, and so David's descendants, those who belong to Jesus Christ, would endure forever. Galatians 3:26 clearly testifies, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

2) The throne of David's descendant will be as the sun before the Lord (36b).

An ongoing line is one matter, but having someone on the throne is another. We see Jesus' resurrection and kingly rule as ongoing matters, both testified to in this passage from Acts 2:29-36.

"Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS UPON HIS THRONE, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO

HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: 'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR THY FEET.' Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified."

The Lord has shown how faithful He has been to His promise to David. But you might wonder, "What does this have to do with me?" Jesus Christ has made it possible for us to join this eternal covenant and be part of it if we believe in Him. Jesus paid the way. He took the cross, the curse for our sins, upon Himself. If we believe in Jesus Christ, we too can live forever and rule with Him. This is what it means to be a Christian. Our whole faith is rooted in God's great mercy given to David and to us, His descendants, through our faith in Jesus Christ.

There is no reason for discouragement. There is only reason for joy. It is a sin to become distracted by our problems in life so that we forget the abundance of His grace and love in Christ Jesus. If God's love is this great, then we should confess our unbelief and doubt as sin. We must turn away from the sense of hopelessness and despair that plague our hearts.

Today's world does not encourage you to think about how unworthy you are. They teach us how good we are. And if we are not convinced of our goodness, the world continues its brainwashing by saying two further things:

1) That our thinking about ourselves is wrong. We are better than we think.

2) That our standards are wrong. They either attempt to weaken our sources of standards, such as our parents or religion, and then persuade us with popularity stories and false reports that downplay any negative side effects.

The Lord does want us to think about our sin and unworthiness, but He does not want us to dwell on them. He wants us to see how, in His great love, He brought us into His family. He paid the penalty our sins deserved and set us free to serve Him. We are naturally sinners, inclined to turn away from God and live for our own self-interest. Our past sins are history, and our sense of guilt should be too. If we still feel guilty about our sins, something is wrong. Either we are not forgiven, or we do not understand our forgiveness in Christ. No sin is so great, no thought so evil, and no action so devilish that the Lord's love in Jesus cannot wash it away.

An Overview

Satan would have us stand on either side of the throne of God's mercy, distorting our thoughts and lives, but not in its full light. He would either have us play up mercy so we can get away with our sin, or play down mercy so we would continue to trudge along in our misery of being failures. Either he will entice us with mercy to sin more, or convince us of our unworthiness of His mercy to false guilt so he can manipulate us. The Lord does want us to face our failures. He asks that we admit them and turn from them. Then we stand ready to be robed in His wonderful robe of unchanging mercy. His mercies endure forever. His mercies will not allow us to perpetually sadden our lives with sin. He disciplines us. His mercies will enlighten us to understand His great forgiveness so that we, as unworthy sinners, can depend on it forever.

We have never become so bad that God gives up hope on us or deserts us. I know some of us feel that way. We hide our sin from others, but God knows it all. God's mercies are His

goodness given to sinful and unworthy people. His mercies show up in words like lovingkindness, grace, and love, but more than that, they show up in the consistent and glorious way God kindly deals with us, frail people. Stand before His throne of mercy and let its light penetrate our deepest and darkest spots, for only in that light can we find true freedom and strength. Only here will we begin to know and experience God.

Once, I spoke with a brother who said he had a difficult time understanding why God would permit the Holocaust. He didn't seem to be questioning God, but he wondered why a loving God would allow such a horrible event. Indeed, it was a horrid event that reminds us how evil man can become, but it should also remind us how God's great mercy prevents us all from being as bad as we could be. God's mercy is evident in that He didn't destroy all of Europe at that time. I suppose that if God had wiped out the world at that point, we wouldn't have the mindless, senseless killing of millions of helpless infants today. These helpless babes are being experimented upon and used by the elitists. These helpless babes are being killed for the pleasure of man. God's mercy is far greater than we could ever fathom. Mass murders are taking place now in our modern cities and hospitals. Is not God's mercy present in that He doesn't wipe out our whole society?

Many of us are perhaps like this man, finding things that seem incompatible with God's mercy. Man will not clearly understand God's ways. In the end, it comes down to our judgment against God's. Whose is more correct? I know that when we bring up the Holocaust, in which 6 million Jews were slaughtered, or the millions of babies being thrown into trash trucks in the wealthiest nations of the world, we sometimes consider ourselves more compassionate than God, with our esteemed view that if we were in charge, we would not even allow such things to occur. But I must tell you that we esteem our views

much too highly and understand far too little of God's mercy. If we understood God's mercy, we would never accuse God of lacking compassion. No, if we understood God's infinite mercy, we would express our thanksgiving each day, wondering why He allows any prosperity and comfort. We would be astonished that He is willing to put up with our world for one more hour.

Proving His Mercies (Psalm 89:38–52)

The psalmist in Psalm 89 invites us to take a good look at the degree of our mercy. We will not use such uninvolved popular yardsticks, such as saying our government takes care of the poor on welfare or that we give billions of dollars in aid to countries around the world. This is, for the most part, politics, not compassion. I want to get personal. I want to see whether we can put our feet in this psalmist's shoes. What should we expect to see in our own lives as we begin to understand the great and profound mercy of the Living God? Let us look at three marks of a person who knows the great and merciful Father.

1. Frustrated with God's Limited Mercy (Psalm 89:38–45): Crying

The first mark of a man who knows God's mercy might surprise you. He is frustrated by God's limited mercy. He sees the scorched places where mercy is withheld. The psalmist may see an apparent contradiction between life's troubles and God's promises. Verses 38-45 clearly articulate his confusion. Listen carefully to the words of the psalmist,

“But Thou hast cast off and rejected, Thou hast been full of wrath against Thine anointed. Thou hast spurned the covenant of Thy servant; Thou hast profaned his crown in the dust. Thou hast broken down all his walls; Thou hast brought his strongholds to ruin. All who pass along the way

plunder him; he has become a reproach to his neighbors. Thou hast exalted the right hand of his adversaries; Thou hast made all his enemies rejoice. Thou dost also turn back the edge of his sword, and hast not made him stand in battle. Thou hast made his splendor to cease, and cast his throne to the ground. Thou hast shortened the days of his youth; Thou hast covered him with shame. Selah."

When he looked around at his city and town, he saw many seriously afflicted areas. Not all was well. The things people once boasted of were now symbols of shame. Glorious defensive walls, once a symbol of strength, were broken down. Other signs of power, such as the strongholds, were crumbling. The decline was so great that one didn't even want to mention it. He felt awkward admitting that they were the people of God. The enemies rejoiced. Where they attempted bold things, they were defeated, and the enemy captured even more territory. Simply put, it seemed that God had cast off and rejected His people. He seemed to be exercising His wrath instead of His love.

Let me say that this psalmist saw and felt more shame than we do. He felt his people's pain. He cared enough about them and believed enough in God to bring these contradictions before His Lord. My guess is that we, as God's people, are just not there. The contradictions in life that we mention all have to do with ourselves. "Why is God doing this to me?" You are so involved in fulfilling your youthful lusts and dreams that you use these contradictions as an excuse to vent your anger against God for frustrating you.

The psalmist cared, and so he cried out in verse 46, "How long, O LORD? Wilt Thou hide Thyself forever? Will Thy wrath burn like fire?" His heart of mercy was developing. His heart was beginning to beat in sync with God's heartbeat. When he looked around, he didn't judge the people. No doubt the people's sins provoked God to treat them so, but that didn't keep

the psalmist from caring. He looked beyond their sin because God's mercy had touched his own life.

Although legalists insist on their closeness to God, they clearly demonstrate their distance by their lack of mercy. The Pharisees cared only about keeping the laws, not about healing the sick. They would rather the lost be lost, and their order of service continue as before. But the real men and women of God will look around and weep over the sin and misery of the people around them. What did the Psalmist see? What do we see and feel as we look around?

- Can we sense God's wrath upon those around us?
- Can we sense the anguish as God allows people to die in their sins?
- Can we see the broken-down walls?
- Can we see the deficits, the lack of money to repair walls, roads, and buildings?
- Can we see the lack of resolve to stop graffiti writers?
- Can we see God's hand in the way He has allowed our enemies to hurt and kill?
- Are we disturbed by the way God has taken His glory from His people and by the boarded-up churches?
- Are we shocked at how dysfunctional schools have become and by the disrespect shown by our children?
- Are we disturbed to find pornography as common as Kaufmann and Sear's ads?
- Are we disturbed to find murder as common as in local hospitals?

Do we weep at all? Can we see the suffering around us?! Do we respond with pain at all? My sense is that God's people have not stood in the gap. They have not responded with God's heart. They are more interested in getting than giving;

they don't have time to care for the elderly and the sick. Money is more important than children. Education is more important than morals, and position than service.

My hope is that God will open our eyes more and more to see His great and unsearchable mercies. My prayer is that God will unite us in praise for His wonderful mercies and kindnesses. My dream is that we, as His people, will live by faith in His promises rather than pursue our materialistic dreams. And so let us look at how the psalmist responded to these unanswered problems. Let's try to feel his care for those around Him and the way he sought to honor God by bringing His kingdom in heaven to earth. We don't see the devastation around us, and we don't care about the destruction around us, because we don't care. We don't understand the greatness of God's mercy. We might know it intellectually, but we are not truly acquainted with Him and His mercy. His mercy has not touched our stony hearts. Once we see the greatness of God's mercy to us, we will understand that it is undeserved. Only then will we be able to begin to grasp the mercy of God and see those around us as living in the mercy of God - and to intervene on their behalf lest the fullness of God's wrath fall upon them.

2. Interceding for More of God's Abundant Mercy (Psalm 89:46-48) Praying

The second test of the depth of our mercy will be seen in our care for those around us, shown in intercession. Those who care will say, "How long, O Lord?" They will see God's wrath but intercede with hope of mercy. When was the last time you wept for the city, your neighborhood, your friends, your fellowship, your family, or your own soul?! Have you ever? Is it possible you haven't been able to see our lowly situation as a result of God's wrath? We just don't see the world as God sees it. Our self and concerns jump in the way.

When you are humbled by the brokenness of those around you, you will cry out like the psalmist in verses 47-48, "Remember what my span of life is; For what vanity Thou hast created all the sons of men! What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah."

He doesn't separate himself from the brokenhearted. He doesn't think, "They are sinners; therefore, I must stay away from them." He is so closely identified with the people that he naturally intercedes for them. He weeps for them. In this case, we see how oppressive the situation really was. Their land was in such shambles that the country had fallen apart and was threatened. Their lives were at stake. I believe this psalmist was a holy man. He was a good man. From the first part of the Psalm, one can see that he loved God and rejoiced in His mercy. But he didn't separate himself from his people. He was one of them. He didn't say, "It was their fault; if they only did what we said."

If we could only look at our society with this psalmist's heart! If we could stop in our tracks and realize people are dying around us. If we could begin to see that these gang members are in such a condition because their parents don't care for them and they only want to be accepted by someone. If we could just stop making ourselves out to be the good guys and see that we are part of the broken society, then we would lift them up. Then we would weep for them. Then we would stop moving out of the city and start befriending them. We would evangelize because we cared for and loved them. We would attend prayer meetings just to mention their names before the throne of God. Oh, people, we have not known the mercy of God; otherwise, we would be on our knees, confessing our sins and pleading for more mercy so that He might restore us.

3. Believing in God's Abounding Mercy (Psalm 89:49–52): Believing

The third mark of the merciful is an unshakable belief in God's abounding mercy. Most people falter in persistence. Our faith is so lacking that if we don't get what we ask for the first time, we just give up. We hesitate to put into practice the parables that teach us to persevere. We don't learn from the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, or the lost son, where what was so lost demanded a changed lifestyle until they found what they were looking for.

Besides not persevering, another closely related problem is that our faith is insufficient to pray on behalf of our desperate society. We clearly lack the faith of this psalmist, who argued with God based on His great promises to His people. Our faith is inadequate, and our confidence in God's promises is severely lacking. We don't even know God's promises! Clearly, God wants us to respond like this psalmist, who not only wept for the sick and dying but also reached out to them with God's promises.

Oftentimes, we are content with merely proclaiming God's promises to people. Declaring God's truth is essential, but it is not enough. We need to pray and, in a good sense, argue with God about our society.

Our care has to reach out in two ways.

First, we must care for those who profess to be under God's covenantal care. We need to recognize that our suffering is often directly related to our disobedience, not to some political office. The decay of God's church is due to God's people refusing to wholeheartedly love the Lord. They are willing to fight over doctrine but not over love. They squabble over how to use a little money rather than give as God commands. As a result, churches are left to die because they have left the Lord. We need to reach out to God's mercy, as stated in the

New Covenant. If God's people confess their sins and turn from their wicked ways, God will heal the land. He will establish His church.

Second, we must believe in God's promise to save the lost. If we forget the lost, what are we truly living for? God's mission must commandeer us. God has made us the light of the world to intercede for them. We see that this psalmist focuses only on God's covenant people, but as Christians, our love must go beyond the church and reach the lost, as the Lord has commanded.

You ask, "How does the psalmist argue with God?"

- He doesn't question God's lovingkindness but holds God to His promised love.

We give up so quickly. We desert Him in pride - and in foolishness. If only we would hold onto His promises.

- He argues with God with good biblical theology.

He returns to the covenant in the Scriptures. We need to hold God to the New Covenant established by Jesus' blood.

- He reminds God of the reproach against His people and His name.

He remembers that God wants to glorify His Name among His people. He doesn't want them to go through hard times.

- He shares the burden on his heart.

He believes God not only hears his need but also cares about what he says to God.

- He praises God for His glory.

He believes God will work all things out for His glory. His praise becomes a source of security for what God has entrusted to Him. His praise is not conditioned on God's present works but on God's promises.

Do we persist in our prayers? Do we love the church enough to plead regularly for revival? I tell you quite clearly that an occasional prayer meeting is not what God wants. He wants us to come before Him regularly as His faithful priests. We need greater faith to believe God and trust Him.

Summary

Like the Psalmist, we must drink deeply of God's mercy so that we feel the pain of those around us and our godliness is activated. In this case, the Psalmist says he bears the reproach of God's people in his soul. He has heard it and comes before the Lord on their behalf. As he sees, so he prays. He intercedes for those his heart pangs for. Lastly, he believes in God's promises. He persists with God until the Lord answers. He knows God cares and intercedes until His mercy breaks through the clouds of judgment.

The Sovereignty of God

Trusting God's Will to Be Perfectly Accomplished (1 Timothy 6:15-16)

An Introduction to the Sovereignty of God

People, including many believers, often struggle to accept God's sovereignty. We like to think we control our lives and decisions. We want, if not demand, our rights, freedom, and choices. Despite our resistance, God remains fully in control. Our lives would be greatly blessed if we learned to trust God's sovereign will, as Jesus did, even in difficult times.

What we believe about God's sovereignty profoundly shapes how we live. If we think His purposes are uncertain, we will continually question Him. But as we become convinced that His wisdom, power, and will are perfect, we learn to trust and obey Him more and more.

The Sovereignty and Providence of God

The sovereignty of God and the providence of God wonderfully blend together. God's sovereignty is more abstract, asserting His overall control and authority. Providence, however, speaks of how He integrates the daily affairs of life into His good and perfect will.

Although we will focus on God's absolute control of all things during this discussion of the sovereignty of God, we must never draw the clumsy and untrue conclusion that God is unconcerned about the welfare of mankind. God's providence speaks of His careful involvement in this world and His perfect working of all things together for the good of His people.

The Sovereignty of God

God's purpose and will are perfectly and completely accomplished in time and eternity.

As we develop our trust in God's overall control of life's affairs and His concern for us, these truths strengthen our hope, strength, and motivation to faithfully carry out our small part of His will to please Him. Notice how God has specially designed us to carry out the works He has created us to accomplish!

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

The Providence of God

1. The providence of God subtly teaches how God interacts with earth's daily events to bring about His good and perfect will in and through His people.
2. By understanding God's involvement in this world, we can avoid the philosophies of fate and chance and instead eagerly wait upon God to complete His good and perfect will in our lives.

"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove **what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect**" (Romans 12:1-2, NASB). Romans 12:1-2 [Commentary](#) | [Video](#)

The Biblical Teaching of God's Sovereignty

Many Bible verses address God's sovereignty explicitly and implicitly. A few are discussed below.

The Only Sovereign (1 Timothy 6:15-16)

*"Which **He** will bring about at the proper time-**He** who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the **King of kings** and*

Lord of lords,¹⁶ who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen” (1 Timothy 6:15-16 NASB).

- He likely refers to God the Father, given the later description ‘whom no man has seen.’ Either way, the passage describes God.
- Sovereign (Greek: *dynastēs*) denotes a ruler or one possessing authority and power. “Only” emphasizes that no other force or power can frustrate His purpose.
- King of kings describes God’s authoritative majesty as the supreme ruler. The Ruler decides what He wants.
- Lord of lords (Greek: *kurios*) emphasizes the duty of full obedience. As Lord of lords, His word has the final say and calls for full submission of our wills to carry out His purposes.
- Eternal dominion speaks of God’s eternally unchanging power to carry out His will.

This passage comes from many vantage points, all declaring the Lord’s sovereignty. His point seems to be that no matter how much we might fuss or hate God’s sovereignty, it remains true. The earlier we come to terms with His absolute power, the better for our lives.

“His sovereignty rules over all” (Psalm 103:19)

This verse wonderfully summarizes the teaching on God’s sovereignty. God’s sovereignty is all about His rule or control. The Hebrew word here for sovereignty derives from the word for rule or to be king, similar to the Greek usage mentioned above. His control is over all things. With God, no one imposes limitations. He rules as He pleases.

Notice the verse says, “His sovereignty” rules over all rather than “The Lord rules over all.” God’s control is so complete that there is no question about His absolute power, and there never can be.

God’s power is so absolute that He can easily establish or remove another’s sovereignty. “‘King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you’” (Daniel 4:31). Remember, King Nebuchadnezzar ruled the largest empire in the world. God speaks, and the most powerful becomes despised and hidden.

1. God’s involvement (1 Kings 19:10-12)

When we think about God’s sovereignty, we might first think of His mighty power, infinite wisdom, and involvement in this world’s affairs. He rules. He is mighty. Lightning and storms help us understand the absolute sway of His hand. Sovereignty speaks of the perfect execution of His will, while His omnipotence speaks of His absolute power.

We must avoid the unbiblical excesses of fate and chance. Fate is the blunt execution of God’s will, trampling over the individual’s concerns. Chance is the uncaring and erratic treatment of what He created. His sovereignty, however, combines the details of every aspect of life, blends them with full knowledge of our persons, and culminates in historical events and individuals.

Note this passage from 1 Kings. Elijah is complaining about God’s limitation of His power over evil—as if God does not care. The evil Queen Jezebel has vowed to kill Elijah mercilessly. He flees and now confronts God. God’s answer is mystifying but addresses what we are trying to say.

“He said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets

with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” So He said, “Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing” (1 Kings 19:10-12).

God has all power, yet He is gentle enough to work carefully in and through people to accomplish His purposes. He is speaking to Elijah. God had carefully preserved 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Though Elijah felt alone, God had quietly preserved a faithful remnant and was still carrying out His purposes.

This reveals that God is merciful and patiently working with mankind. In His subtle way, He is generally involved in all the affairs of mankind, even in our individual design and purpose.



All of God's Attributes Come Alive in Discussing God's Sovereignty

When we begin to consider God's amazing sovereignty, we find that all His attributes come alive! Without His power, He would have no control. Without His omniscience, He would not know what is best or what any act would result in.

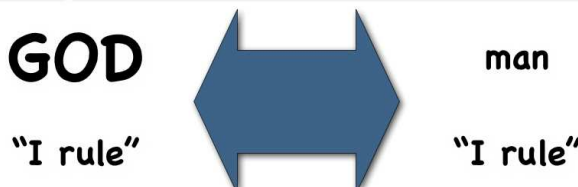
Without God's omnipresence in human affairs through His Spirit, He could not work alongside our lowly lives. Without His goodness, His sovereignty would be anything but comforting. With His mercy, we can trust God's sovereignty to pour out special patience toward us as we carry out His will. (See [Abraham as an example](#)).

Mankind's Two Problems with God's Sovereignty

Scripture clearly teaches two basic problems with man's acceptance of God's sovereignty.

Problem #1: Man Innately Hates the Sovereignty of God

Man deeply resists God's sovereignty, for otherwise he would have to live his life in light of all that God does, wants, and delights in. This would quash his love affair with his own choices and lusts. Mankind has difficulty seeing God's work in this world as helping mankind rather than condemning them.



"Men will allow God to be everywhere except on his throne. They will allow him to be in his workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to be in His

almonry to dispense His alms and bestow his bounties. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth.” – Charles Spurgeon from *The Attributes of God* by Arthur W. Pink, p.33.

This picture is precisely what we see in our society today: various forms of humanism fighting against God. They are desperate to exclude God from their consciences so they have a free course to live out their ungodly lives, unpleasing to God and painful to man. [Secular parenting: Two Ways, Two Choices](#)

Problem #2: Man Cannot Comprehend the Sovereignty of God

God’s glorious and comprehensive rule remains far beyond the reach of our puny minds, so we cannot easily grasp it. As a result, we have grossly misrepresented His authority and power, which further removes the truth from our hearts and minds and leaves us with greatly distorted conclusions.



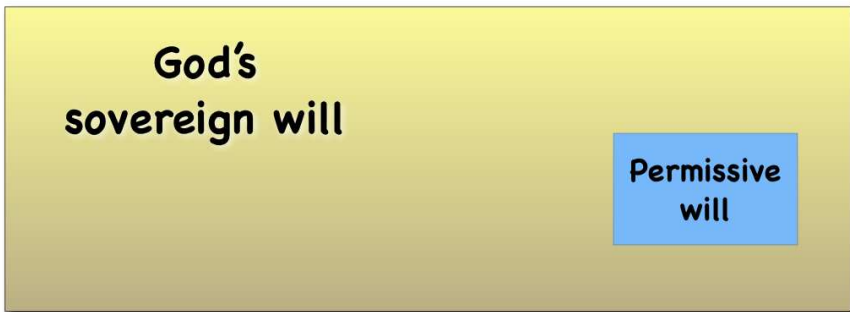
Each of these topics, prayer, prophecy, evil, salvation, and missions, has been and remains a hotly contested issue when the full truth of God’s sovereignty is brought to bear on them. In each case, man, even the church, wrongly concludes what our response should be. If God is sovereign, man concludes that prayer is of no effect.

If God controls all things, then we need not preach the Gospel or send our resources to far-flung peoples. Each time we allow man's logic to take hold without being properly shaped by biblical teaching, we end up with devastating practices that ruin the church's glorious work.

Fortunately, the Bible provides ample instruction and examples, including Jesus' own actions, to guide His people into a life that fully embraces God's sovereignty. These problematic topics will be discussed further below.

God's Sovereign & Permissive Will

The diagram below shows a common explanation that attempts to answer many theological questions about evil.



This chart shows three essential aspects of explaining God's permissive will.

(1) God accomplishes all His sovereign (decretive) will. The yellow block represents all things God fully controls, which includes all things that were, are, and will be. He does all He pleases all the time. Pink appropriately says,

“Subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent: God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him. So His own Word expressly declares: “My counsel

shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure” (Isa 46:10). *The Attributes of God* by Arthur Pink, p. 32.

(2) He allows some things, for a time, to function in a less-than-ideal way (permissive will). This blue block is intentionally small, and if we looked at this chart at the proper size, we would hardly see it. His permissive will is a small, temporary block of events, though it may seem great to us. To the Lord, a thousand years are as a day— a blink, and it is gone.

This permissive will encompasses things like evil, rebellion against God, blasphemous words and thoughts, murder, lies, and so forth. As if man’s deeds are not wicked enough, man, night and day, broadcasts his evil thoughts, filling our television and computer screens—not to mention our minds.

(3) In the end, all that happens fully carries out God’s larger purposes. We have great difficulty reconciling God’s sovereignty with the things He allows to happen under His watch. He does not. God is greatly pleased with His glorious plan. If we get tied up with the details, just step out into the full light of the teaching of His great care in doing all that He pleases. Don’t let the chart remove the joy of delighting in God’s ultimate control over all things. God’s will is “good, acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).



**Prophecy &
sovereignty**

**Prophecy & Sovereignty of
God**

In each of these difficulties, we will present various truths essential to keep in mind as we discuss the topics.

At times, God reveals what will happen in advance.

This is often what we call prophecy. Micah 5:2 tells us, hundreds of years in advance, that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem: “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to

be among the clans of Judah, from you one will go forth for me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.”

God therefore knows what will happen.

“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). The Lord stands outside of time and knows all that is and will be.

God in fact controls what will happen.

“Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps” (Psalm 135:6). Job humbly repented after God revealed His glorious power to him, “I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted” (Job 42:2).



*“Thus says the LORD, ‘Tomorrow about this time a measure of fine flour will be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria... **It happened just as the man of God had said**’ (2 Kings 7:1, 18-20).*

Conclusion: God ordains not only the ends but the means.

Therefore, we should not merely conclude that because God knows all things, He can reveal future events. Quite the contrary: God knows the future because He controls all the micro-events that lead to the significant events we can observe. God ensures that everything works out to the smallest detail.



Prayer & Sovereignty of God

If God is fully in control, then there is no such thing as free will, right? Wrong and right. It gets a bit difficult to define and defend the term ‘free will,’ which is not used in the Bible. It would be much more helpful to let Scripture frame our discussion, such as this one on prayer. Do our prayers really make a difference in God’s sovereign court?

God controls all things

God has declared what will happen.

“Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:10).

God wants us to pray

“Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full” (John 16:24).

Throughout Scripture, we are told that our prayers matter to Him and affect what happens. We should accept this, even though we struggle to reconcile it with God’s sovereignty.

God acts upon our prayers (as believers)

God has ordained prayer as one of the means by which He carries out His will.

“You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2).

Conclusion: God embeds our prayers in His ordained work.

It is time we took up our privilege and duty to pray. If the world steps toward further corruption, it is because the church has not lifted up her arms in many sincere prayers. Our prayers do make a great difference. Instead of blaming God for the lost, we should humbly realize that God has provided all for the gospel to go forth powerfully, and if it does not, it is not because of His insufficient grace but because of the absence of our persistent and effective prayers.



Evil & Sovereignty of God

God is light

"God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). "For Thou art not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with Thee" (Ps 5:4). "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'" (James 1:13).

We cannot, we must not, impute any evil to God. The evil originates in the wills of others.

God is all-powerful

"The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; and His sovereignty rules over all" (Ps 103:19).

The Lord can do all that He wants.

He allows evil to exist under His rule for a temporary time.

"Kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:7). "Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem" (Judges 9:23).

The evil spirit acts destructively, yet even this remains under God's sovereign permission and serves His purposes of judgment (Judges 9:23; compare with Job 1:12).

God's greater purpose

God temporarily allows evil to exist to display His marvelous power, wrath, grace, and love.

God displayed His power and authority through Pharaoh's destruction, which symbolized the destruction of the ancient world empire of Egypt. "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate my power in you, and that My Name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth" (Romans 9:17).

"What if God, although willing to **demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath** prepared for destruction? And He did so in order that He might **make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy**, which He prepared beforehand for glory" (Romans 9:22-23).

Conclusion: God accomplishes greater purposes through evil.

God temporarily allows evil to develop to display His power, righteousness, and grace. As such, God's people are most magnificently and undeservedly blessed.



Salvation & sovereignty



Salvation & the Sovereignty of God

God

God saves sinners who do not care for God or righteousness.

"None seeks for God" (Rom 3:11).

God chooses in advance those who will be saved.

"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4).

Man is spiritually dead.

The “mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God” (Rom 8:7).
Ephesians 2:1-3.

God regenerates man and thus causes new life that desires spiritual things.

“Born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). God brings about new life.

Man is called to repent and believe.

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mat 4:17).

Man can actively place his faith in Christ: “Many more believed because of His word” (John 4:41).



Conclusion: God saves, yet man believes.

Both God and man are involved in salvation. Man, however, cannot save himself. God works in man’s heart so that he is able and willing to believe in Christ. Without this work, he would not choose God.

God’s sovereignty never eliminates human responsibility. Scripture affirms God’s sovereign purpose while calling people to repent, believe, obey, and answer for their choices. We should not use God’s sovereignty as an excuse for our sin or passivity.



God wants the gospel preached to all.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mat 28:19).

God predestines those who will be saved.

“Having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will” (Eph 1:11).

Man is called to repent and believe.

“Whoever will call upon the Name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13).

We are to actively promote His saving Word.

“How then will they call...? How will they believe...? How will they hear...? How will they preach unless they are sent?” (Romans 10:14-15).



Conclusion: God has determined who will be saved and the means by which people are saved.

God has ordained the means by which His people are saved: the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To despise the means is to despise God’s command and to lack compassion for mankind, without which people will perish. We must wholeheartedly work toward God’s high purposes by praying for and financially supporting His marvelous redemptive plan.

God’s Rule through His People

“Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him” (Daniel 7:27).

“... Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood, 6 and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God

and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:5-6).

“And raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6-7).

God has chosen to bestow the wonderful blessings of His love and life upon the church. They will share an incomprehensibly glorious position in the future, co-reigning with Christ. Though we can hardly comprehend such wonders, they are meant to encourage us to be faithful stewards of all that God has given us here on earth.

God’s Sovereignty and His Love

We must not separate God’s sovereignty from His love. We cannot gauge the extent of God’s love by what happens to us. We may face distress, loss, or circumstances we would never choose, yet nothing can separate us from Christ’s love (Romans 8:35-39). Once we see that His sovereign will is wrapped in His love, His will no longer threatens us. It becomes a place of security where we can trust Him even when we do not understand what He is doing.

Testimony: The Holes of Life

Experience the power of God’s sovereignty in your lives!

I once wrestled with God over His sovereignty for a week. Several things happened that I would never have chosen, mostly involving ministry responsibilities, but they spilled over into my personal life. I felt ensnared, trapped, and unable to change the circumstances.

Troubles

Serious website problems repeatedly disrupted the ministry, while government paperwork consumed hours of tedious work. In each case, I had to wrestle with the same question: How do these things fit with God's sovereignty?

Battling it out

Let me share with you how, by His grace, I handled it. In a serious time of prayer, I told the Lord I did not want these things to happen. But I know that sometimes suffering is part of His purpose, just as Jesus had to suffer and the Apostle Paul had to endure imprisonment and beatings. God did not make a mistake. These circumstances were serving a greater purpose, probably one I would never fully understand on earth.

God's sovereignty, however, calls me, His child, to look beyond these things. So I resolved in my heart to trust that God's sovereign hand was at work. As I talked with Him, I resisted nosediving into discouragement and persisted in doing what was right in each case. The Lord began to change my approach and attitude.

What seemed entirely wrong became a point of faith and trust. These circumstances led me into God's presence and prompted me to praise Him for His ability and willingness to redeem what seemed like lost time. Somehow, God is able and willing to work behind the scenes to bring about greater good.

God could easily have prevented or stopped it, but His allowing it to continue meant I had to trust His judgment. So I changed my attitude by thanking Him for these matters, too. I also needed to seek Him to redeem what I considered lost time and opportunity. This is where I needed to trust in His sovereignty.

I could now believe Him for this, even though I couldn't earlier, and it completely changed my attitude and prayers. The situation no longer troubled me the same way because I believed God had heard my prayers and would bring blessing through it, even if I might never see the result on earth.

Do you see how God's sovereignty made such a key difference in how I dealt with these things? He is not only in control of what I deem bad, but through prayer I can seek Him to bring about a better situation than I otherwise would have imagined. I get to praise Him instead of being grumpy or critical. Meanwhile, I am in a better frame of mind to work through unpleasant circumstances. Where before I might have become critical, I can now focus on His greater work.

Full of trenches

Yesterday, God greatly encouraged me through a passage about holes. That is why I am using the word holes. "And he said, 'Thus says the LORD, 'Make this valley full of trenches. For thus says the LORD, 'You shall not see wind nor shall you see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, so that you shall drink, both you and your cattle and your beasts'" (2 Kings 3:16-17).

Who would have thought an army could win by digging holes? But they dug them, and God not only filled these trenches with water to refresh the army crossing the desert, but also used these puddles to fool the enemy. The Moabites thought it was blood from the Israelite army fighting each other.

What a mistake that was! They ran into the Israelite camp, totally unprepared to meet them, and faced a horrible defeat.

God's people, including ourselves, will at times face many unchanging things in life. We should pray about them first, but if they persist, we should not be discouraged. Instead, we should turn toward God's sovereignty and deal with them as

Habakkuk did. Habakkuk learned to admit and accept his weaknesses in light of God's sovereignty.

Habakkuk's secret

Note the six things below that Habakkuk confessed were not good or helpful.

“Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls, Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places.” (Hab 3:17-19).

He admitted that these 'evil' things were messing up his life and the lives of those around him, but he could see beyond the absence of life's provisions. His joy and life did not depend on them. They came from God, of course.

Usually, God cares for our lives by providing these things. In times of judgment, however, God often does not work in that normal way, in order to shake us up and bring us back to Him. Yet Habakkuk can still hope in God's care: “Yet I will exult in the LORD.” “The Lord GOD is my strength!” What is he speaking about?

Habakkuk knows that God will still care for him. God is working a deeper plan into the fabric of his needy society that also brings the only possible hope for recovery. But this does not mean God is absent or unable to work greater things within His plan. By faith, Habakkuk captures the joy of God's greater plan and provision.

During the assignment, you will also be asked to identify some of these unchangeable and unpleasant situations and ap-

proach them as Habakkuk did. Use his grammatical pattern, “Though ..., I will ...”

Conclusion

The sovereignty of God is most challenged and hated because people want the freedom to live for their own desires. Full joy in life, however, comes when we discover and surrender to His sovereign plans, for our Lord is not only all-powerful but also all-loving and all-knowing. God’s sovereignty is not meant merely to be understood but to be trusted.

Note how this teaching contradicts the prosperity gospel. God wants to richly bless His people’s lives. The prosperity gospel errs because it fails to recognize how God uses weakness, frailty, suffering, and poverty to accomplish greater things. There is little room for self-denial or humility, but too much room for boasting and greed.

A Study Assignment on God’s Sovereignty

What is the sovereignty of God?

1. Where and how does the Bible speak of God’s sovereign power?
2. Memorize three verses or sections of verses that relate to God’s sovereignty.
3. Read through the Psalms and Proverbs, and note God’s sovereign ways!

Handling a life ‘hole’

Identify a few unpleasant situations in your life. Since we cannot change them for now, we need to accept them and begin trusting God’s greater plan working behind the scenes.

- God ordained it.
- He works through weakness.

God can instill a joyful song in my heart because of a vibrant faith in His deeper plan to bring about good through them.

Write out your own “Though..., I will...” statements, including praise that stems from confidence in His greater plan. Learn to rejoice in God’s awesome power to work through our defeat, discouraging times, difficult trials, sickness, and problems.

What are five things that you cannot change about yourself?

While we love to exercise control, we have to admit, perhaps reluctantly, that we cannot change many things. They are chosen for us—such as our height, sex, family, and other aspects of our background. Some believe it is all by luck. That simply is not true. God has stepped into our lives and set us where we are. Through our decisions, we have made many other choices, some we like, and some we do not, but those unchangeable aspects of our persons are often with us for life.

True spiritual growth requires a full acceptance of who we are. God purposely made us that way. Any challenge to that can easily become a subtle fight with God. We may be able to change some things about our appearance, but there are many things we should not change or reject, such as our parents, race, intelligence, or sex. List the few things you personally struggle with in your life. Thank the Lord for who you are. He loves you!

Handling contradictions

Think through the five areas discussed above where many people have a hard time understanding how God’s sovereignty relates to man’s will. Which area (prophecy, prayer, evil, salvation, missions, other), if any, do you have most difficulty with?

- Try to state the difficulty as clearly as you can in your own words.
- Return to the discussion and find verses that support both God's activity and man's activity. Learn to accept the truth on both sides, even if it is not obvious how they work together.
- Seek God in prayer for further understanding. Deepen your commitment to embrace the truths of God's Word.
- Special project: What aspects of God's sovereignty do you find in 2 Kings 7, the account in which Elisha promised food the next day despite the severe famine that had affected Samaria during the siege? Read the whole chapter if time allows.

1 "Then Elisha said, "Listen to the word of the LORD; thus says the LORD, 'Tomorrow about this time a measure of fine flour will be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.'" The royal officer on whose hand the king was leaning answered the man of God and said, "Behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" Then he said, "Behold, you will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat of it."

3 "Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, "Why do we sit here until we die? ... And they arose at twilight to go to the camp of the Arabians...."

18 "It happened just as the man of God had spoken to the king, saying, "Two measures of barley for a shekel and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, will be sold tomorrow about this time at the gate of Samaria." Then the royal officer answered the man of God and said, "Now behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?" And he said, "Behold, you will see it with your

own eyes, but you will not eat of it.” And so it happened to him, for the people trampled on him at the gate and he died” (2 Kings 7:1-2, 3-5, 18-20 NASB).

1 Timothy 6:15-16

- Memorize these verses.
- Pick the phrase that most impresses you as a description of God. Which one is it? Why? Explain what it means, and in prayer praise Him for who He is.

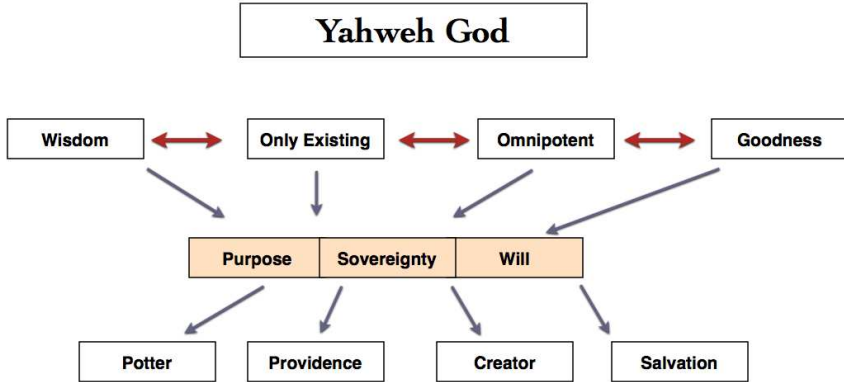
Questions on God’s Sovereignty

Although Scripture speaks clearly of God’s rule over His creation, several areas still trouble people.

1. If God is in complete control, why is there suffering? Does this mean God is not loving or not powerful?
2. How would you explain the concept of ‘free will’? (Start by looking it up in the Bible!)
3. Is the prosperity gospel an accurate way to share God’s love? Doesn’t He want us all to be wealthy and healthy? How do you know?
4. We do not need to pray if God knows and will accomplish what He wants, right? Wrong. God has ordained the means by which He accomplishes His will.

A Chart on God's Sovereignty

Here is a chart that explores how God's attributes work together. In essence, the chart shows how God's person (first row) shapes His will (second row) and all His activities (third row).



God's Character shapes all His works

The Healing God

Discovering the Lord Your Healer

Exodus 15:26

*Adapted from The Lord Your Healer: Discover Him and Find His Healing Touch
also by Paul J. Bucknell.*

“And He said, ‘If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer.’” (Ex15:26)

The Lord’s declaration in Exodus 15:26, “I, the LORD, am your healer,” offers more than a promise of health. It reveals something about God Himself. Healing is not merely a benefit people seek from Him; it becomes a pathway to knowing Him, the Healer. The hard questions surrounding sickness, suffering, disease, and death can easily produce doubt about God’s love and mercy, but this passage calls us to look beyond our immediate condition and discover the One who gives life.

The setting is important. Israel had just been delivered from slavery in Egypt by God’s mighty hand. Miriam led the women in praise: “Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; the horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea” (Exodus 15:21). Yet only a few verses later, after three days in the wilderness without drinkable water, the people grumbled. At Marah, the waters were bitter. Moses cried to the LORD, and God showed him what to do, and the waters became sweet (Exodus 15:22–25).

In that setting—after deliverance, complaint, and God’s merciful provision—the Lord made His promise and revealed Himself as Healer. That timing tells us much about His heart.

God's Concern in the Midst of Suffering

Many doubts about God's concern for people stem from the pain, suffering, and death we see around us. How can a loving God allow sickness and incurable disease? Exodus 15 does not hide the hardship. Israel was thirsty, the water was bitter, and the people complained. Yet God did not wait for them to become sweet and humble before showing kindness. He healed the waters and then gave them a promise pointing to His care.

Think of a parent and child. Parents usually enjoy doing something special when a child is responsive and grateful, not after a day of complaining. Israel, however, was acting like a group of ungrateful complainers. Still, God did not simply judge them. He responded with mercy and gave them a word that disclosed His concern for their welfare.

What is God showing us about Himself? His children quickly forgot the great things He had just done for them and complained about the way He was leading them. Yet He offered them a gracious promise. The timing and character of the promise reflect God's love. Some people, perhaps including us at times, wonder whether God cares. But His actions reveal that He means the best for us. We may not always understand why He does things as He does, including the testing mentioned in Exodus 15:25, but His mercy stands out clearly.

The same pattern appears in the Gospel. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). God loved us when we were ungrateful and sinful. Instead of quickly concluding that suffering or disease proves God does not care, we need to look at the larger display of His mercy. Sending His Son is not evidence of indifference but of deep concern.

This does not answer every question about suffering at once. It does, however, establish where we begin. We begin with the character of the Healer. Before interpreting God through our pain, we need to remember His acts of mercy and allow Him to teach us what lies behind the sickness and death that spread across the earth.

Healing as an Expression of Mercy

Exodus 15:26 also forces us to confront another difficult question: why does Scripture sometimes associate God with disease and judgment? The verse speaks of “the diseases ... which I have put on the Egyptians.” Many people are uncomfortable with such language because they believe God’s love means He would never bring judgment. But we cannot understand God’s mercy without grasping the depth of mankind’s rebellion and the judgment that accompanies it.

In the Garden of Eden, God warned Adam of the consequence of disobedience: “in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:16–17). Adam and Eve disobeyed, and the curse of death fell upon mankind. Yet they did not die immediately. God could have ended their lives at once, but He did not. Their lives continued under the sentence of death.

This helps us see healing in a broader light. Healing is an expression of God’s mercy in a world under the curse. God holds back death’s invasion by renewing and sustaining our bodies. Every extension of life is an act of mercy. God is not obligated to heal sinful mankind as though we had a claim upon Him. We are the created; we are the debtors. Yet in His mercy He extends life and grants time.

The book portrays this as a healing tunnel within a world under the curse. Death surrounds us and eventually overtakes every earthly body, yet healing repeatedly holds back its advance. A wound closes. An illness passes. Strength returns. A

body recovers. These ordinary mercies may seem small because we are accustomed to them, but they are reminders that God continues to sustain life.

Why does He extend life? The purpose is greater than temporary comfort. God extended human history so He could send His Son into the world, and He extends our individual lives so we may seek Him and receive His offer of eternal life. Healing is an act of grace, but it points beyond itself. Temporary life gives us the opportunity to find the Savior and receive the life that does not end.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24).

Why Doesn't God Heal Everyone?

If God is the Healer, why does He not simply heal everyone, or at least every Christian? Would it not be magnificent if every genuine believer were instantly healed of every disease? Such a pattern might seem like an obvious proof of the Gospel. Yet God does not work in a single, general way that removes all sickness from His people in this present world.

God certainly understands what we need to feel well. The Garden of Eden displayed His generous provision, and throughout Scripture He gives good things to His people. But larger issues remain. If everyone remained healthy until death, mankind would still face judgment, but might be far less aware of the danger. Sickness and disease remind us that all is not well. Jesus said that the sick recognize their need for a physician, not those who think themselves healthy (Mark 2:17; Mat 9:12).

Comfort can easily create an illusion of self-sufficiency. When life runs smoothly, people can settle into routines where they

scarcely consider their need for God or a Savior. But serious sickness confronts us with the truth that we are not in control. Calling out to God in that state is not a weakness; it is an honest recognition of our frailty.

Disease and illness, as difficult as they are, can therefore serve as messengers. They remind us that we are perishing and need more than an improved earthly life. Even if God gave us perfect health for many years, the sentence of death would still stand. God's purpose is not simply to hide our true condition from us but to bring us to the One who can save us from judgment and grant eternal life.

This is why Christ's suffering stands at the center of the Christian answer. Isaiah wrote, "Surely our sickness He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried" (Isaiah 53:4). John announced Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). God did not remain distant from a suffering world. He sent His Son into it.

God not healing everyone now does not mean He is indifferent. Even removing every disease temporarily would still leave mankind under the deeper curse. God aims at something greater than merely extending earthly comfort. He offers salvation and eternal life.

Sickness, Personal Sin, and the General Curse

It is also important not to draw the opposite wrong conclusion—that every sickness or physical problem must be the direct result of a specific personal sin. Some pain and disease are certainly connected to our choices. Anger can harm us. Sexual immorality can spread disease. Foolish habits can increase suffering. Exodus 15:26 itself links obedience with well-being.

But Scripture does not teach a one-hundred-percent direct link between every illness and a specific personal sin. Job was described as a righteous man who nevertheless suffered

greatly; God Himself spoke favorably of him (Job 1:8). Concluding that every fever, rash, or physical problem must point to a particular hidden sin can lead believers into needless condemnation.

A better starting point is the general curse. All mankind lives under the effects of sickness, suffering, pain, and death because of the fall. Within that larger context, our personal choices can either shield us from some of the harsh effects of the curse or make us more vulnerable to them. But not every sickness directly accuses the person who suffers.

This distinction matters because the Healer draws us to Himself, not into endless self-condemnation. We should examine our lives honestly, confess known sin, and listen to God's Word. But we should not let suffering convince us that we are beyond grace. The Gospel directs guilty people toward redemption in Christ, not toward hopelessness.

Look Beyond the Healing to the Healer

One of the most important lessons in Exodus 15:26 is found in the final words: "for I, the LORD, am your healer." Where does healing come from? The verse certainly links blessing with obedience, but it does not end with the commands. It points us to the Person who gave them. The truth leads us to the One who spoke it; the cure leads us to the Curer.

This protects us from reducing religion to a collection of rules, traditions, or techniques. The commandments are good because God is good. They reflect His concern for His people because He is loving. Yet every generation risks preserving religious forms while forgetting the Person behind them. The priests, temple, garments, law, and songs of the Old Testament existed because Yahweh intended to dwell among His people. When people focus on the forms but lose sight of Him, religion becomes an end in itself.

The same danger exists in the church. People can confuse Bible knowledge, church experience, and religious familiarity with actually knowing God. Knowing the Bible is good, but knowing facts about God is not the same as living in relationship with Him. Exodus 15:26 refuses to let us stop at the promise of health. It points beyond the blessing to the Healer.

There are at least two reasons this matters. First, no matter how much physical or relational healing we experience now, we will still die unless Christ returns first. Temporary healing is therefore insufficient. Even if we received another ten years of life, as Hezekiah did, we would still eventually face death. God does not merely want to lead us into healthier lives; He calls us to pursue Him.

Second, our deepest joy is not found merely in successful obedience or improved circumstances, but in knowing Christ and living in God's presence. The commands and truths of God should open our eyes to His good and gracious heart. Healing's ultimate purpose is therefore not simply to make us feel better but to draw us nearer to God.

This is why brokenness can become a call from the Healer. Physical weakness, emotional pain, relational trouble, and other forms of frailty expose needs we might otherwise ignore. These troubles can beckon a person to come to God, or, if already a believer, to draw closer. Jesus stands as the ultimate Healer. He not only rescues us from physical problems but also saves us from the devil, the world, our own flesh, and, finally, from death by giving eternal life.

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

When Health Becomes a Barrier

It may seem strange to say that health itself can become a barrier to knowing God, but it can. Obedience often brings real

blessing. Scripture links honoring parents with well-being and long life (Ephesians 6:1–3; Deuteronomy 5:16). A family or culture that values obedience, faithfulness, and wisdom may enjoy many benefits that flow from those choices.

Yet blessings themselves can become a spiritual danger when people enjoy them and forget the Giver. Good health can make us feel independent. A comfortable life can persuade us that we have no great need. We may receive the effects of God's mercy and never turn our hearts toward Him.

That is why the goal of healing cannot be merely health. Health is temporary. If a person receives healing but never seeks the Healer, they miss the greater purpose. Jesus warned His hearers not to work merely for food that perishes, “but for the food which endures to eternal life” (John 6:27). We should be grateful for physical restoration without confusing it with the final life God offers.

The nine lepers who failed to return and give thanks offer a sobering picture of how easily people can receive a benefit and move on. Healing should deepen gratitude, worship, and trust. It should turn our eyes toward the One who gave it.

Doctors, Medicine, and the Healer

Recognizing God as Healer does not require rejecting physicians or medicine. Hospitals, medicines, and medical knowledge work with the bodies God made and the healing processes He sustains. The danger arises when we place our ultimate hope in the means and forget the Healer.

After once using a chainsaw, I once woke with severe back pain and automatically headed for the medicine cabinet. I took medicine without once thinking of the Healer. The problem was not the pill itself; it was the direction of my trust. I had looked to the medicine while ignoring the One who sustains my life.

A better response would have been to acknowledge my frailty, thank God for His mercy, seek Him, and, if appropriate, use the medicine while asking Him to restore the body for His purposes. This keeps the means in their proper place. We can receive medicine with gratitude without making it a substitute for dependence on God.

The same principle applies in serious illness. When my wife, Linda, developed congestive heart failure, we sought the Healer, examined our lives, asked believers around the world to pray, followed medical advice, and used prescribed treatment. The approach was not to replace the Healer but to serve under His mercy. In her case, God restored her strength in a remarkable way, and she later returned to ministry travel. The lesson was not that every case will unfold the same way, but that sickness should lead us to seek the Lord rather than choose between prayer and proper care.

Healing as an Illustration of the Gospel

Physical healing is precious, but it is not our final answer. Everyone who is healed will eventually die. Healing, therefore, points to something greater. It becomes an illustration of salvation.

The curse of death entered through sin. Paul writes, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). Mankind lives under judgment; John 3:36 describes the wrath of God as abiding upon those who reject the Son.

Healing temporarily holds back the curse. The cross addresses it at a deeper level. Jesus willingly died on behalf of His people. He did no wrong, yet He took judgment upon Himself and gives His righteousness to those who believe. By satisfy-

ing God's judgment, Christ sets His people free from condemnation.

This is why physical healing is limited. Healing repairs or preserves a body that is still decaying. Cells continue to die. Age continues. Death eventually comes. Eternal life is different. Through Christ, the believer receives new life and the promise of resurrection. The final hope is not endless repair of the present body but life in God's presence, where the curse is gone.

Healing shows mercy by holding back death's effects. The Gospel shows even greater mercy, for through Christ God rescues us from judgment and gives eternal life. As Paul writes, grace reigns "through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:21).

Repentance is therefore essential. It recognizes our sin and rebellion, admits we are wrong, and turns toward God's provision. Faith sees that Jesus came and died to bear the burden we could not remove. Just as someone healed from a serious disease wants to tell others what happened, those who have received spiritual life should delight to speak of the Savior.

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Facing Sickness and Death

The Lord's revelation as Healer does not mean believers should pretend death is unreal. Sickness still hunts us down until our bodies finally succumb. The question is not whether we will face weakness and death but how we will face them.

Fatalism is not the answer. Scripture does not teach us to say, "If disease comes, I will not fight it." Hezekiah sought healing, and many people came to Jesus for healing, and He healed them. It is right to seek life and to pray for restoration. At the

same time, we must recognize that earthly healing remains temporary and that death will come unless the Lord returns.

Serious illness, therefore, becomes a time to place our lives, families, hopes, work, and future into God's hands. The questions can be painful: Will the person recover? Will life return to what it was? How will the family manage? What changes will be required? These questions should not drive us away from God but toward Him.

John explained why he recorded the signs of Jesus: "These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). Again, the central word is life. Death has claimed mankind, but Jesus offers eternal life. That life does not come merely through medicine, exercise, or a better earthly condition. It comes through the Son of God.

Exodus 15:26 therefore does more than offer a principle for avoiding some diseases. It makes sickness, pain, and brokenness a call to enter the presence of the Healer. We may go to doctors and hospitals and be grateful for skilled care, but our deepest need is to seek Jehovah Rophe, Himself. The Lord can use sickness, including grave illness, to shake our lives and turn us toward Him.

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared in a body that still bore the marks of the cross. Thomas saw Him and confessed, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Jesus then said, "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:29). The Healer calls us not merely to seek another span of earthly health, but to hear His words, believe Him, follow Him, and receive eternal life.

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27–28).

Know the Healer

The Lord's words, "I, the LORD, am your healer," reveal His kind intent toward frail and suffering people. Sickness should not lead us to conclude that He is indifferent. Healing is a continuing expression of mercy in a world under the curse. Every restored body, every extended day, and every measure of strength should direct our attention to Him.

Yet God's purpose extends beyond temporary healing. We can receive health and still miss Him. We can pursue cures, obey wise commands, use medicine, and enjoy years of life without ever knowing the One who gives life. The command and the cure are meant to lead us to the Person.

So when sickness comes, seek healing, but seek more than healing. Examine your life without assuming that every illness is the direct result of personal sin. Use proper means without making them your god. Receive restored health with gratitude, but do not let health make you forget the Healer. Above all, hear Jesus' words and seek the life that endures beyond death.

The greatest gift of the Healing God is not merely another healthy day. It is Himself—and through Jesus Christ, eternal life in His presence.

The Wrath of God

God's wrath assures us of His thorough justice

Christians hold widely varying views of God's anger. Some insist that God's wrath is, or should be, nonexistent. In contrast, others wonder why God hasn't done more to stop the growing injustice around us. Let's see what Scripture says! This biblical study on God's wrath offers a clear picture of how God works in our world, churches, and lives.

Understanding our Relationship with God

Project: Let's start our inquiry by listing below what we can learn about God from the following verses.

"Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David sought the presence of the LORD. And the LORD said, "It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.... They buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the country of Benjamin in Zela, in the grave of Kish his father; thus they did all that the king commanded, and after that God was moved by prayer for the land" (2 Sam 21:1,14).

- 1.
- 2.

Definition and description of wrath

God's wrath is His stored-up or released anger against those who dare defy God's judgments. "The wrath of God is the onslaught of the holy God asserting and establishing His absolute claim to dominion" (TDNT Vol. 5, 407).

Many Scriptures openly testify to God's anger. "So the anger of the LORD burned against them..." (Num 12:9).

1. "All its (Israel's) land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsown and unproductive, and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew **in His anger and in His wrath**" (De 29:23).
2. "Then **the anger of the LORD burned** against Amaziah, and He sent him a prophet who said to him, "Why have you sought the gods of the people who have not delivered their own people from your hand?" (2Ch 25:15).
3. "And **the anger of the LORD burned against** Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the sons of Ammon" (Jud 10:7).

Biblical Analysis

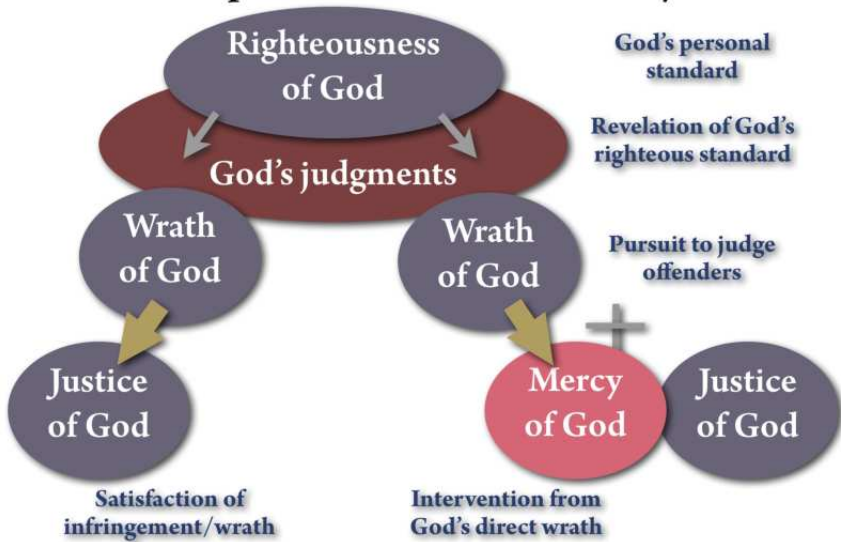
1. Several Hebrew words mean 'wrath' and include meanings such as wrath, indignation, fury, and poison. 'Wrath' appears 184 times in the NASB.
2. Several Hebrew words mean 'anger,' most notably the word for nose (*aph*), which is connected to expressing anger. 'Anger' appears 266 times and 'angry' 87 times throughout Scripture. (Note: These occurrences do not always refer to God.)
3. A principal New Testament word for wrath is *orgē*, which refers to anger or indignation.

Understanding God's Wrath and His Mercy

Anger arises from God's moral creatures' resistance to carrying out God's judgments, whether known through natural revelation or found in His Word. "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book which has been found; for **great is the wrath of the LORD** which is poured out on us because our

fathers have not observed the word of the LORD, to do according to all that is written in this book” (2 Chronicles 34:21).

Description of God’s Wrath & Mercy



God’s standard of righteousness becomes the world’s standard because of God’s wrath. God’s anger ensures that, in the end, everything conforms to His holy standard. There are no exceptions. Because of this, each of us should carefully comply with all of God’s expectations.

God’s wrath harmonizes perfectly with His other characteristics, such as mercy. God’s wrath begins when His righteous judgments are infringed upon. His wrath is the personal drive to pursue all offenders until full vengeance is paid. (See the left side of the chart.)

At times, His wrath is put off (stored up) for a later and greater unleashing, or it can be perfectly satisfied through atonement (i.e., appeasement), but it must be satisfied. God’s wrath never gets out of control like man’s. God carries out His carefully calculated judgment perfectly. His wrath might seem brutal, but this is exactly what is necessary to avenge that person’s or society’s rebellious deeds.

God's mercy does not overlook His righteous judgment. At the cross, Christ bore the judgment due to sinners, so that God's justice is satisfied while mercy is freely extended to those who believe.

Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:1–2). “My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:1–2). This explains why Jesus had to die rather than merely teach well or empathize with mankind.

Although God's wrath may not be a commonly considered attribute of God, it describes how He ultimately protects His holy Name. God clearly reveals His righteousness through His intense, severe, unbiased, just, and ongoing wrath.

God's wrath parallels His love by persevering until it completes its mission. His wrath goes forth until justice is satisfied, while His love extends itself until the ultimate display of kindness is brought forth.

God's wrath is an outpouring of vengeance against offenses against His judgments. He makes it His personal pursuit to right what is wrong. “Man's anger, as a whole, does not accomplish the righteousness of God” (James 1:20) due to his sinful nature.

God's anger against unbelievers

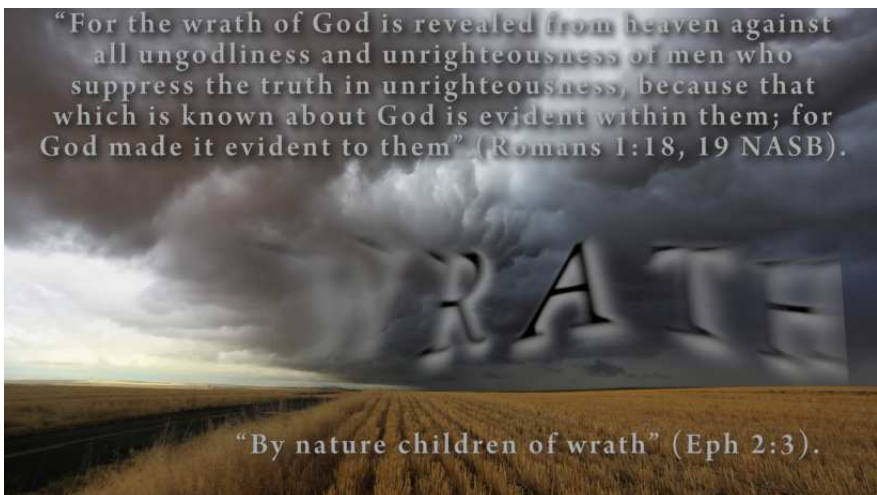
God's justice ensures that all offenses against God's judgments are fully paid. We all suffer under God's wrath, “Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest” (Eph 2:3).

Man cannot excuse himself from this judgment, for he himself lives by this standard. Although man can overlook sin (e.g.,

through bribery), society as a whole reflects this same sense of judgment through the appointment of judges, criminal court systems, and responses to personal offenses.

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). We might dismiss our sin as unimportant, trite, or even a personal preference, but God the Maker holds every sinner liable for rebellious deeds and thoughts—no matter what we think. This is why God’s wrath ‘abides’ on us. It is constant and waiting, like a storm, to rain God’s judgment upon us sinners.

God’s greater plan encompasses man’s sinfulness by clearly manifesting His righteousness and love. “What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory” (Romans 9:22, 23).



His wrath will one day be unleashed upon the sinner. “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he will also drink the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of

His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (Re 14:9-10).

God’s great patience

Why does God delay releasing His mighty wave of wrath? People sometimes deride God because of His delay in judgment. Such delay can make Him appear weak, uninvolved, or even nonexistent to unbelieving eyes. “Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:3-4).

God clearly regulates His anger. While man’s anger might get out of control, God’s does not. He is by nature ‘slow to anger.’ “The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression...” (Num 14:18).

Instead of revealing weakness, God’s patience gives us the opportunity to discover and find refuge in His mercy. “But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:7–9).

In light of this delay, we are wise to repent of our sins, turn to Jesus Christ for refuge, and live holy lives. If we grasp the implications of the end of time, when Christ will return to judge all sin in the fury of His wrath, we might call on His Name to be saved. “The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:7–8).

Common misunderstandings of God's patience.

1) Some believe that God, in His great love, will overlook our sin. This view distorts God's love and mercy and casts Christ's death as foolish. God's love does not ignore His righteousness. He never overlooks sin but fully satisfies His justice, so pardon or forgiveness in Christ Jesus is sought.

2) Others believe that God has a problem executing judgment. Perhaps the Lord is weak, uninvolved, or impotent. They have seen horrendous crimes. Their souls scream for judgment but do not see it. This anger and sense of impotence were evident in David when his daughter was violated, yet he took no action. "Now when King David heard of all these matters, he was very angry. But Absalom did not speak to Amnon either good or bad; for Absalom hated Amnon because he had violated his sister Tamar" (2 Sam 13:21–22). This became the root of Absalom's rebellion.



3) Tragedies and 'mini' judgments that come upon earth's people are not mere rumblings of 'mother earth' but warnings to those spared, granting them a bit more time to repent. The soon-coming final judgment is distinguished by the fact that no one is exempt from appearing before the Judge (Matt 25:31–

33). These warnings are meant to urge us to turn to Christ for refuge from our sins. We can safely say that these ‘mini’ judgments—including storms, earthquakes, and floods, even when caused by humans or instigated by the evil one—are a type of the final climax of this age, the final judgment known as the Day of the Lord. “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10).

Other Reflections on God’s Wrath

The Bible is not hesitant to speak of God’s anger, as if it were a defect in His character. His wrath is a necessary aspect of His person, ensuring that He fully carries out all His judgments. Unlike man, God’s judgments are always true and deserved. For this reason, God says that vengeance is His. We are not to take revenge, in heart or otherwise. During this brief interim, we are on a mission of love and warning before His full wrath is unleashed.

God’s anger arises from rebellious expressions against His authority. He expects man to conduct himself in ways that please Him.

God’s anger, then, is a special response mechanism that ensures no injustice or inappropriate conduct escapes its due consequence. From our perspective, people may seem to get away with a lot of sin, but that simply is not true. God is now carefully executing His complete plan to fully carry out His justice. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Ro 1:18). But its most complete and thorough expression is reserved for the great Day of Judgment. “But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7).

How does hell fit into this whole scheme of God's anger? Many so-called believers no longer believe in hell because they do not believe in God's wrath or judgment. They have also become blind to God's holy person and expectations. This is a major reason people leave the faith. They no longer believe they need a Savior. Without a relentless judgment seeking to cut off our lives, people live oblivious to the greater dangers of judgment.

Jesus commonly referred to hell as a most undesirable judgment (Matt 5:29), fearsome (Matt 10:28), and a place of unquenchable fire (Mark 9:43). Hell is described as an eternal fire (Matt 18:8) that follows death here on earth (Luke 12:5). Two fearsome verses explain that the dead apart from Christ will suffer in the lake of fire (Rev 20:14–15), where they will be subjected to torment along with the beast and false prophet, “tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev 20:10).

Is Jesus' anger in the temple connected to God's anger? Jesus' anger was akin to His Father's. Jesus cleansed the temple twice—once near the beginning of His ministry (John 2:16) and once near the end (Mark 11:15). In each case, He acted decisively to defend the holiness of His Father's house. Though the immediate effect may have been short-lived, these acts also anticipated the greater judgment that came upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

God's anger shaping believers

Do believers experience God's anger? Yes, most definitely. God gets angry with His people, whether in Old or New Testament times. But believers do not bear God's condemning wrath, for Christ has borne that judgment. Instead, God disciplines His children when they disobey Him. As with Moses, God expects His children to obey Him. God became angry with Moses because he complained that he was not eloquent enough for the job. “Now then go, and I, even I, will be with

your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.” But he said, “Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever Thou wilt.” Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses....” (Exodus 4:12–14).

God became very angry with the Israelites to the point that He did not allow them (the fathers) to enter the Land of Promise. “So the LORD’S anger burned against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until the entire generation of those who had done evil in the sight of the LORD was destroyed” (Numbers 32:13).

It is good that the Lord is slow to anger. “Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth ’” (Exodus 34:6). Even so, His anger often breaks out against His people.

The Lord became angry with Hezekiah and the land of Judah after healing him because Hezekiah did not show proper appreciation. However, He withheld His full fury when Hezekiah repented. “But Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received, because his heart was proud; therefore wrath came on him and on Judah and Jerusalem. However, Hezekiah humbled the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come on them in the days of Hezekiah” (2 Chr 32:25, 26).

God’s anger is different with His people

In summary, let me distinguish how those who are saved and those who are not bear God’s anger. Unbelievers will suffer greatly under God’s stored-up wrath, which is waiting to be unleashed. He is patient, giving people opportunity to find grace. After that, His mighty wrath will perfectly execute His severe eternal judgment upon those who do not repent.

God's judgment upon His people is different. For God's people, Christ, the perfect sacrifice—the righteous for the unrighteous —has borne His condemning wrath. God's anger toward His people takes the form of temporal, fatherly discipline so that they might better reflect His glory and gain reward through holy living.



Hebrews 12 states the principle. God does judge His people, but His judgment focuses on present training rather than condemnation. Christ has already borne that condemning judgment. His judgment now serves to train and preserve. "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom he receives. You endure for discipline; God deals with you as with sons, for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons" (Heb 12:6–8).

"For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?" (1 Peter 4:17-18).

God regularly gets angry at His people's sins and expects the church to remain holy, or His anger falls on them. "For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:29-32 NASB).

God's people are to keep the church pure, protected, and effective for service. As believers, we are responsible for maintaining the church's holiness through biblical discipline rather than inviting the Lord's corrective judgment, which is sometimes seen in sickness, trouble, and death. "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges.

Remove the wicked man from among yourselves" (1 Cor 5:12-13).

God's anger against His people, especially their leaders, is more particular than His anger against unbelievers. God's anger is chiefly seen in His withdrawal of protection and His allowing the evil one to cause further trouble. "Now again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'" The king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Go about now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and register the people, that I may know the number of the people" (2 Sam 24:1, 2).

The same was true of David when he counted the men. God's anger was released upon the land. "Joab the son of Zeruiah had begun to count them, but did not finish; and because of



this (i.e., counting), wrath came upon Israel, and the number was not included in the account of the chronicles of King David” (1Ch 27:24).

What is the difference between just and unjust anger? Most of man’s anger is sinful. Anger, as an emotion, is not inherently right or wrong. Man can be angry without sinning. Man, like God, can become intensely focused on righting injustice. The problem is that, because of his sinful nature, man often focuses on protecting his own interests rather than caring for the downtrodden. Man does such a poor job that Paul plainly says to put away all anger (Eph 4:31). When we get angry, we do all sorts of wrong. God is not that way.

While God’s wrath ensures that vengeance is carried out, His justice ensures that exact judgment is carried out upon every act or thought of disobedience. God’s justice determines the fury of His wrath, His plan, and how quickly it is carried out. This requires perfect knowledge, power, and determination. “The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. In whirlwind and storm is His way, and clouds are the dust beneath His feet” (Nahum 1:3).

Summary

God’s anger, though equally rooted in our rebellious behavior, is treated differently for unbelievers and believers in Christ. Full judgment is delayed for the unbeliever so that he might come to know the Lord’s grace. For a short time, man has the opportunity to call upon the Lord in his need; then the door of opportunity is closed, never to open again, as he forever suffers judgment under God’s hand.

God equally dislikes disobedience in the Christian, but the believer is hidden in Christ; that is, his sins are judged in Christ. He stands free. Practically, however, God chastises the believer so he might share in God’s rewards and display God’s

righteousness. The way we conduct our lives as the pure and holy people of God makes an immense difference—not in terms of salvation, but in terms of reward.

Study Questions

1. What is God's wrath or anger?
2. How does God's anger originate, and how does it reveal itself?
3. How can God be angry and yet loving? Is this a contradiction?
4. What are 'mini' judgments, and how do they relate to God's full judgment?
5. Is hell real? Describe its dangers.
6. Why should we believe in hell?
7. God never commits injustice, but why does it seem He allows so much injustice to occur?
8. Christian believers have sinned. Will God's wrath be partial toward them? Explain.
9. Describe how the fear of God relates to our belief in the Lord's wrath. What do our foolishness and brazen immorality reveal?
10. Do believers suffer from God's anger? If so, explain how. Refer to the Scriptures.
11. How is our lack of evangelistic zeal a sign of unbelief? How should these truths guide our lives as we proclaim God's truths?

The Exalted God

Humbly Living to Bring Him Glory

We are not very good at acknowledging God's glory. We simply do not grasp God's greatness and far overvalue our own importance. Life's path becomes exciting when we finally begin to understand and respond to our Lord's glorious person.

The Largely Neglected Truth of God's Glory

Some aspects of life are more foundational than others. The need to continually glorify God is one of these foundational aspects of our lives. Our lives fall into disarray when we neglect to give God what fully belongs to Him and instead distribute glory, honor, and exaltation to ourselves or others. Let me give you a simple example.

Consider museums that excite people by revealing many of the secrets of God's creation yet assert that it all came about by accident under the supervision of evolution. The suggestion is preposterous. Why would people pay to watch mindless, accidental messes? We insult God and humanity at the same time. Every such museum deserves judgment for stealing God's glory.

I am thankful for those I met early in my Christian life who spoke often of God's glorious teachings and His sovereign power. Each strain of Christian teaching seems to have its own dangers, but it was good to be refreshed by God's glorious person. That experience gave me a challenge to pursue, as well as a measuring stick against the humanism and superficial religiosity I saw around me.

The Exaltation of God

Most believers lack a living understanding of God's exalted person. This is like living on crutches.

Our Duty to Exalt the Lord

Scripture repeatedly exhorts us to praise and exalt God.

"Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool; Holy is He" (Psalm 99:5).

"Sing praises to Him" (Psalm 9:11). "Be exalted, O God, above the heavens, and Thy glory above all the earth" (Psalm 108:5).

"All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer to exalt Him according to the words of God, for God gave fourteen sons and three daughters to Heman" (1 Chr 25:5).

Note: The word "praise," or a form of it, appears 253 times in the Bible.



Our Life Purpose

The Westminster Shorter Catechism rightly asks and answers:

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

Unfortunately, we often miss the first—to glorify Him—and therefore cannot do the latter, enjoy Him. Our life purpose is wrapped up in identifying why God made us and striving to accomplish those purposes.

Worship Services

Worship can degenerate into a time focused on satisfying man's tastes rather than on expressing heart-focused adoration (2 Timothy 4:3). Truths about God invigorate us, yet inferior and idolatrous thoughts often fill our minds. Many Christian songs strip out these truths and focus instead on our feelings. Music can overpower the words, again degrading God's truths by making them secondary or trite.

Our Unwillingness to Exalt God

This pattern of stubborn disobedience appears throughout the Bible. Man is fascinated by the option of disobedience. He seeks to please himself rather than God.

Read the first time man and woman disobeyed in Genesis 3, or in Genesis 4, where man again openly defied God's careful rebuke. And onward it goes. If the redemption story were not so clear, the Bible would recount man's mounting rebellion against God.

As a project, read from Numbers 11 onward. Even after God miraculously delivered the Israelites from Egypt and revealed His glory on Mount Sinai, the people could not help but be preoccupied with their own desires and ways.

Disobedience to God is the opposite of exaltation, for it displays subservience to one's own desires rather than to God. Man resists acknowledging God's importance, lest he be convicted of the need to obey. Without God's touch, man's heart grows increasingly hard. The more God reveals His exalted person and truths, the more man rebels.

Distortions Abound

What we believe about God is often distorted to the point that it no longer reflects reality. Take, for example, Mormonism or Jehovah's Witnesses. Or consider the many configurations of modernism, including humanism in its various forms, or even movements to unify all religions. They care little about truth and emphasize affirming man's thinking. It turns out that God is very different from what we believe, and man is often unconcerned about it.

Jesus accurately summarizes man's theological problem: "Did I not say to you, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" (John 11:40). Belief ushers us into God's presence. Unbelief escorts us away.

Standing in God's Presence

If we could but see God in His glory, we would indeed perish. He truly is that glorious, like the sun. One cannot look at it. "But He said, 'You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!'" (Exodus 33:20). He is the One who is lifted up on high.

"Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (Psalm 46:10).

Exercise: Exploring God's Glory in Job

Job had an awesome experience with God. In the right column, write what you discover about God's glory. Our purpose

is to deepen our understanding of how to gather truths about God from what He says about Himself in the Holy Scriptures.

"Behold, God is exalted in His power; Who is a teacher like Him?" (Job 36:22).	
"Remember that you should exalt His work, of which men have sung" (Job 36:24).	
"Behold, God is exalted, and we do not know Him; The number of His years is unsearchable" (Job 36:26).	
"The Almighty—we cannot find Him; He is exalted in power; And He will not do violence to justice and abundant righteousness" (Job 37:23).	

The Meaning of “Exalted”

Several biblical words convey exalting or lifting up. Daniel 4:37 reflects this: “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride.” After his senses returned and he was properly humbled, King Nebuchadnezzar could rightly acknowledge God’s exalted person. He used three similar Aramaic words to speak of God’s glory.

- Praise emphasizes laud—that is, words that highlight one’s greatness.
- Exalt carries the sense of lifting up or raising to a high position. Thrones are often lifted up on platforms.
- Honor carries the sense of glorifying or giving weight and dignity.

Once his senses were restored, the great emperor Nebuchadnezzar had no trouble praising God. What a tragedy that mankind has such difficulty today. It appears our society needs to go through this “dumbing down” period as King Nebuchadnezzar did! These meanings overlap, describing God’s glorious person with our inferior words. When men or angels see God in His glory, they fall to their knees and bow before Him.

Nebuchadnezzar emphasized God’s glory by using a broader range of words to describe what he knew to be true about the Lord. This is one advantage of poetry and song. The psalmist joins the chorus: “Let them praise the name of the LORD, for His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven” (Psalm 148:13).

Contrasting Holy and Exalted

The words holy and exalted have distinct meanings yet share a similarity that requires distinction.

Holiness, like the Lord’s glory, demands a distance between God and man. In this case, the separation is seen in God’s dissimilarity to us. God operates differently from us; He is set apart by His person and ways. We do not see that distance in the Garden before man’s sin.

Exalted distinguishes itself from holiness by its height. The Lord is lofty; His position and status are beyond our reach. Isaiah’s famous vision records this: “In the year of King Uzziah’s death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple” (Isaiah 6:1).

While holiness speaks of the necessary distance from us because of God’s character, His exalted position demands distance because of His honor and prestige. Both words remind us of how unapproachable God is. He is far off. The Exalted One is high and removed from us.

Interestingly, both “lofty” and “exalted” in Isaiah 6:1 come from the same Hebrew root, *rum*, but appear in different forms.

God’s Masterful Plan (Ephesians 2:4–7)

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:4–7).

The full glory of God’s awesome plan is seen in Ephesians 2:4–7, where He reveals the measures He has taken through Jesus Christ to share His holiness and glory with His people. We were far from God, in a seemingly hopeless situation. Both God’s holiness and exalted state keep God’s people from Him.

A Holy God (Ephesians 2:4–5)

God reconciles us—brings us close—to Himself through Christ (Ephesians 2:5). God’s separation from us stems partly from our character differences. He is holy; we are unholy. He makes it possible for us to be reunited by cleansing us of our sin. This process of reuniting us with Him, despite our sin, displays God’s magnanimous grace and kindness. God overcomes the distance our sin creates.

An Exalted God (Ephesians 2:6–7)

God raises us up in Christ (Ephesians 2:6) because of His rich love toward us (Ephesians 2:4). He not only makes us acceptable so His wrath does not fall upon us, but also makes us lovely and desirable. Removing our cancerous disease does not, by itself, make us desirable companions. By raising

us up, God places us in the highest possible position. God is the Exalted One. We do not deserve anything. Yet here, as David kindly treated Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake, He brings the unlikely one to share at His table (2 Samuel 9). God brings us to His royal table for Jesus' sake.

Ephesians 2:7 says this is to display the surpassing riches of His grace. God further exalts Himself by displaying His kindness toward us. God overcomes the distance caused by our inferiority—His lofty position in contrast to our lowly one. He lifts us from our low place into His high and honorable one.

God's Motivation (Eph 2:4)
From love

A Holy God (Eph 2:5)

God's separation due to character differences. He reunites us despite our sin.

An Exalted God (Eph 2:6)

God's distance due to His lofty position. He lifts us from our low place.

God's Purpose (Eph 2:7)
To display His grace

The Ways God Is Exalted

Do not be mistaken. Even though we neglect to give God His glory, He remains fully exalted—even through our dull hearts and disobedient lives. "The LORD is high above all nations; His glory is above the heavens" (Psalm 113:4). We cannot diminish His glorious person and ways. In Ephesians 2:4–7, we see that God further glorified Himself by kindly treating the most deadened and hostile people. His glory floats high above all the evil below.

God in no way “needs” our attention and glory. He desires that we share in His best by recognizing His glorious person.

The heathen are those who reject God’s general revelation and live without due respect for His splendor. One day, to their great consternation, they will discover that God is glorified even by the hardness of their hearts. Two major scriptural scenarios illustrate this: Pharaoh’s hardness and God’s enemies in the Book of Revelation.

“Still you exalt yourself against My people by not letting them go” (Exodus 9:17).

If we do not exalt God and His ways, we necessarily exalt our knowledge, will, and desires against God. Our sin is never “small,” for it becomes warfare against God.

“Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory” (Rev 16:9).

“Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him” (Jude 14–15).

Being on God’s side. In the end, we are either for or against the Lord. Because of Pharaoh’s defeat, exaltation was lifted up to the Lord.

“Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said, ‘I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea’” (Exodus 15:1).

“And Miriam answered them, ‘Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea’” (Exodus 15:21).

- We exalt Him by deliberately recognizing and praising His glorious person.
- We exalt Him through our lives, affirming His good ways by choosing to live for them.
- We exalt Him by delighting in His glorious person—“enjoy Him forever.”

Reflection on His Exalted Ways

If Your Life Is Boring

Living in light of God’s glory is never boring or repetitive. Spiritual dullness stems from our inability to fully grasp God’s glory and is compounded by our resistance to living in conformity to His person. We are blinded to His glory and therefore tend to focus on our desires rather than on His glory.

If the sun is hidden by clouds, it is not because it is absent but because of our blindness. Take an adventure. Start taking God’s glory seriously. The clouds will readily depart as you purpose to focus on His person and pleasure. “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8).

- Take an adventure. Start getting serious about living for God’s glory.
- Tell Him you want to live for His glory.
- Readily follow the steps He shows you.
- Be completely obedient—that is where you will be tested and where allegiance is gained.
- When you sin, confess it, hide in the blood of Christ, and keep focused.

- Keep a journal and share with someone else what God is teaching you.

Bringing God Glory

How can we, as believers, step into our calling to glorify God? Keep a few things in mind.

Perhaps most important is keeping our greater purpose in life clearly in mind. We all have clear assignments—bank teller, wife, dad, nursery worker, and so on. We have no end to the many assignments in life, and they blend with one another. Behind them all, however, is the greater purpose for which we do these things.

We live to exalt God. We do this by remembering why we do what we do. We are men and women of integrity—how we do things must glorify God as much as the end purpose. This calls us not only to be faithful in carrying out our tasks but also to excel in what we do—for Him, not for a higher salary, personal recognition, or some other lesser motive.

The nurse remembers that God has appointed her not only to carry out her hard shift work but also to remember that she represents God Himself. She does her best to reflect God's amazing person and purpose. I once worked in a Hebrew library at a university. One could do an average job or an excellent job of categorizing and shelving books. Probably no one would ever look for many of those books, some of them in Yiddish!

We are likewise reminded by great artists who did their work so that even the hidden sides—hidden from our sight—were completed with wonderful skill. They knew God would see it and wanted to glorify Him in all things.

Our secret life. What we do in secret is perhaps more important than what we do in the open. Why? Because our private conduct and thoughts reveal what we love and hate. God

watches what we do in secret because it best reflects our motives.

If our worship time is dull, it is not because of God or His Word, but because we cannot fully grasp God's greatness. Doubts have corrupted our view. Those who grow up in churches must break through this religious veneer to be spiritually reborn.

If we could see God's glory even partially, even from the back as Moses did, our lives would change. This was the great fear associated with meeting God in the Bible. The high priest's robe even had bells around its hem as he ministered before the LORD (Exodus 28:33–35), a reminder of the seriousness of entering God's holy presence.

- Humility and knowing the Exalted God. Moses encountered God's glory on the mountain, while Jesus revealed His glory to His disciples at the Transfiguration. How does Numbers 12:3 show what it takes to know God's glorious person? "Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). Why is humility so important in grasping God's glory?

Our Assignment

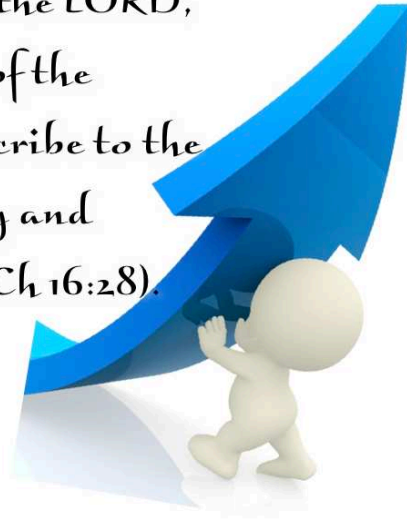
God is glorious and demands that all peoples, creatures, and creation reflect that glory back to His great and exalted person. All that we have comes from Him and exists for His ultimate purposes.

- Consider how much of your life is centered on bringing God glory. Repent as needed.
- Reflect on the ways you have "seen" or experienced God's exalted person. Write down the details of each experience.
- Search your heart to see whether you desire to know more of God's glorious person. Reflect on your answer and pray as appropriate.

- List any ways you steal glory from God for yourself. This happens when we accept or seek the applause of man without giving God His due glory. We correct this by consciously recognizing God's role in enabling us to accomplish what we have done.

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." (Rev 5:12–13)

*"Ascribe to the LORD,
O families of the
peoples, Ascribe to the
LORD glory and
strength" (1Ch 16:28).*



Our Future Journey

Continuing to Know and Love God

Each believer is on a spiritual journey with God, whether they fully recognize it or not. It begins with the new birth and continues throughout life. New and young believers need firm foundations, but God wants every believer to keep pursuing a deeper relationship with Him. We sometimes become so focused on doing what God wants; this is good, of course, but we must not forget that our developing relationship is the basis for spiritual growth.

Studying God's attributes and how they influence our lives has been another tool to deepen that relationship. We have tried to go beyond an abstract study of God's person and ways so that what we learn about Him shapes how we live each day.

Keep Growing in Your Knowledge of God

Here are some final pointers.

- Constantly seek to deepen your relationship with the Almighty God while you are still on earth. Much of this growth comes from an increasing awareness of who He is and what His purposes are.
- Ask yourself what problems might keep you from seeking to know the Lord more. When you identify one, face it and overcome it. Each step of obedience brings you closer to God.
- Persistent growth does not happen automatically. Distractions multiply, responsibilities press in, and even good things can crowd out what matters most. Consider what practical steps will help you continue growing in your relationship with God.

- Maintain a good, challenging pattern of reading God's Word and praying.
- Keep asking what hinders you from knowing the Lord more deeply, and address each obstacle as it becomes clear.
- Read good missionary biographies and other faithful accounts of believers who learned to trust and follow God.

The Journey Continues

Knowing God is not a subject we complete and set aside. As long as we live, there is always more to discover about His person, His ways, and His purposes. Keep seeking Him, listening to His Word, and responding to what He reveals. Your journey of knowing God continues into eternity!

About the Author

Paul J. Bucknell is a Christian author, Bible teacher, and international trainer who has written more than twenty-five books on discipleship, spiritual growth, Christian leadership, marriage, parenting, and Bible study. He founded **Biblical Foundations for Freedom**, a ministry devoted to equipping believers and church leaders worldwide through books, courses, videos, and biblical training. Paul has been married to Linda for more than 45 years, and they have eight children.

Knowing God: Experience and Love Him

Who is God really, and how should knowing Him change the way we live?

Many believers know truths about God without allowing those truths to deeply shape their trust, worship, decisions, suffering, relationships, and hope. *Knowing God: Experience and Love Him* invites readers to move beyond merely learning facts about God and to know Him more personally through His Word.

Paul J. Bucknell explores how God reveals Himself and examines His goodness, holiness, wisdom, faithfulness, mercy and grace, sovereignty, healing, wrath, and exalted glory. Each chapter connects biblical truth with everyday Christian life, helping readers trust God more fully, worship Him more deeply, and increasingly shape their lives around who He truly is.

Companion Workbook Available

The companion workbook, Handouts for Knowing God: Experience & Love Him, provides study questions, reflection prompts, and exercises for personal study, small groups, classes, and church training.

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