

HE IS!

Hebrews 11:6

Knowing God
through
Fifty Scriptural Meditations

Mark R. Worden

HE IS!



KNOWING GOD THROUGH FIFTY
SCRIPTURAL MEDITATIONS

MARK R. WORDEN



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But without faith
it is impossible to please Him,
for he who comes to God
must believe that *He is*,
and that *He is* a rewarder
of those who diligently seek Him.

—**HEBREWS 11:6 (NKJV; EMPHASIS ADDED)**

With love for my children and grandchildren:

Ben and Christina:

Ian

Liam

Cecilia

Rory

The secret things belong to the LORD our God,
but the things that are revealed belong to us
and to our children forever,
that we may do all the words of this law.

—**DEUTERONOMY 29:29**

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In memory of Jim Bright,
who respectfully and persistently invited me to church.
He finished the course of his life on earth and is running into eternity.

There are two books,
other than the Bible,
that have challenged my thinking about who God is.
I mention them with thanksgiving and appreciation for their influence:
Knowing God by J. I. Packer

and

The Pursuit of God by A. W. Tozer

I also appreciate
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college professors who shared their knowledge with me,
my fellow students who learned with me,
all my students who challenged me in different ways,
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and my many friends along the way
who have been used of God
to challenge me in the pursuit
of knowing God and myself better.

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Patsy Skeels, who selflessly gave of her time and talents
to edit the devotionals as they were rewritten.

And last but not least,
My Mom!

To God be the glory!

PREFACE

In January 2011, I desperately needed the comfort of God in my life—the trials of life and ministry have a way of challenging a person to sink his roots deeper in God for survival. For about six years prior, I had been captivated by Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV; emphasis added), “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*: for he who comes to God must believe that *He is*, and *that He is* a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Having resigned and stepped down from a pastoral role in a local congregation, I now had time to search the Bible to find out specifically who God says *He is*. Furthermore, God placed on my heart a desire to write some devotional meditations to encourage others along the path of knowing God better. I soon started posting *God is* meditations on my blog and sending them out by mail and email. The response grew, and it dawned on me that I was indeed writing a theology book that would be devotional in nature, which someday might be published for God’s glory and the benefit of his church. I wondered, *Now that I have started, how do I know when to end?* I had peace to set a goal of writing fifty-two devotional meditations—one for every week of the year! I was amazed at how God provided and gave grace for me to write and complete fifty-two chapters on knowing God. The rough draft manuscript was finished by the end of 2012.

After seeking professional consulting and getting feedback on the manuscript for the meditations, it was clear that something was missing and that it needed extensive work to become a book ready for publication. I was at a point where I did not know what to do or how to do it. I sensed God telling me in my heart, “Not now. You have to die to this desire for publication; let the vision of this book die until I

resurrect it.” So, I waited—waning and waxing in my devotion to God like the monthly cycle of the moon. However, one thing was constant; God’s light continued to shine on me as bright as the sun. I was growing in a deepening realization that my walk with God was not based upon me but him. I had some growing and deepening to do before I could come back and finish this work. I had to let go and let God take control of my life.

As time passed, I wondered if I would ever pick up the manuscript again. Voices of doubt sometimes entered my mind, such as, “Who are you to write a book about God? You’re not worthy to write such a book!” and such. More trials of life came. I experienced a heart-wrenching and searching marital separation that sadly ended in divorce. Through this deep testing of life and months of wise counsel from an older couple in my local congregation, I found peace, grew in my trust of God, and experienced healing in areas of my life I did not even know needed healing. I began to prayerfully think, *Lord, do you want me to pick up the manuscript again?* I had no real direction and no passion to do so until after a sermon by Zane, my pastor, in May 2019. Somewhere in the message, he said, “What you believe about who God is and, consequently, who you are means everything.” I heard God’s still voice in my heart, “That is what is missing in the *God Is* meditations you wrote. There is not much about who you are because of who I am in them. Pick it up again, Mark, and write about who you are in relationship to who I am.”

Others and I have been blessed in the rewriting of the meditations. I give God praise for his help in preparing them for publication. I especially want to thank Patsy Skeels (a longtime friend and mentor, along with her husband, Fred Skeels), who edited most of the chapters as they were rewritten and suggested content that made some of the chapters more complete (such as references to church hymnology and church history). Others also read the full or partial manuscript and gave helpful feedback, for which I am grateful. The final rewrite reduced the meditations to fifty from my original goal of fifty-two as I combined several together to avoid redundancy. While I considered a complete third rewrite, I came to the conviction that 2022 was the year to seek publication, or it may never get published.

You may be wondering where my thoughts about God started.

Thoughts of God—How It All Began

As a child, I had thoughts about God that came from attending church sporadically with my parents, from a church-based preschool, and most strongly from a grade school teacher who taught me about infinity numbers. Most of all, I remember growing up trying not to think about God. I wanted to live my life my way and did not want any god messing with it. I reasoned, *If there was a god, why couldn't he keep my parents from getting a divorce?* Even with these innermost thoughts, I was confirmed and baptized in a liturgical church at age fourteen while living with my father. At age fifteen, I attended a charismatic church with my mother, where I repeated the sinner's prayer after a well-meaning gentleman in order to please him—not God. Next, I even read all four of the Gospels about Jesus with fascinated interest. However, I was still lost and in spiritual darkness. I walked away from it all, saying, "Well, I have tried religion. Now let's get on with life!" I tried to push the little truth about God I understood right out of my heart, concluding that God did not exist. I embraced evolution—it must be true! The problem was that I was miserable, angry, sin oppressed, conceited, and very empty. My favorite song was by the rock group Kansas, "All we are is dust in the wind . . ." At the same time, I was trying to convince myself that all was well, saying, "I'm good!"

In high school, my love for excelling in sports and seeking adventure were the dominant passions of my life. Long-distance running consumed my thoughts and activities with grueling twice-a-day workouts and the zealous reading of each *Runner's World* magazine. I also loved nature and enjoyed being alone on long runs on beautiful rural roads near Roseburg, Oregon. My own body and nature were the gods I worshiped. In my junior year, I pursued rock climbing and mountaineering, which combined my desire to push my body to the limits with my love for nature. Shortly before my senior year, my climbing friend Keith and I made big plans to climb Oregon's second tallest peak—gorgeous Mt. Jefferson. Without going into all the details, we had difficulties reaching the summit. Keith developed altitude sickness and returned to base camp. Three of us continued with headstrong and senseless determination in spite of an ice avalanche that narrowly missed us. Late in the afternoon,

we triumphantly signed the summit log book. The view was breathtaking; however, we did not take long to celebrate. Our more experienced lead climber, now worried about getting off the mountain before nightfall, chose a quicker but more dangerous route down. The major problem was all the unstable rock that forced us to make a decision to jump onto a glacier and arrest our falls with our ice axes. The lead climber had made the jump successfully and was out of our line of sight. As he was putting on his crampons, the rocks gave way under our feet. We yelled, "Rock!" Seconds later, he screamed in pain, cursing God harshly! As he fell down the glacier, we heard his voice fade. Fear gripped me. I don't know why, but I began to pray, "God, if you are up there, will you please save us?" I then pleaded, "I'll even go to church," to leverage my prayer with God, whom I really did not know. The two of us who were left made the jumps and went as quickly as we could to give aid. From our perch hundreds of yards above him, he appeared to be alive. We picked up his gear as we worked our way down to where he was. Miraculously, he had come within inches of falling into a deep crevasse in the ice that looked bottomless. He was shaken, bruised, and scratched—but alive. Relief! About midnight, we made it to tree line totally exhausted, built a fire for warmth, and dozed until dawn.



Drawing by author of Mt. Jefferson

Back in town the next week, I had no intention of going to church to keep my side of the bargain with God. I skeptically thought, *How do I know if God really heard and helped?* I was back to my default mode—pushing God out of my life! Things were going great until I met up with a Christian schoolmate at the local Douglas County Fair. Jim Bright was an upperclassman who had already graduated. He had been on the cross-country and track teams with me and had tried to share his faith with me. Sure enough, what I dreaded happened. He invited me to come to church with him—as he had before—even though I had already told him emphatically not to ask again! Time stood still as I relived the mountain fall and prayer in my mind. I’m not sure what showed on my face, but fear was in my heart. I thought, *God, I can’t get away from you!* I stammered out to Jim, “OK, just this once! What time should I show up?” The look of surprise and joy on his smiley face made me feel uneasy but curious. I did not sleep well that night!

The next morning, I met Jim at his home, and then we walked to his church just a few blocks away. I had not been to church for about three years, so I acted cool and watched Jim for the cues to know what to do next. I can’t remember if we went to Sunday school or not, but I will never forget what happened during the sermon. Pastor Roy Campbell explained the meaning of a verse that I had memorized as a child in preschool—John 3:16 (KJV), “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” He said, “This little but powerful verse is the Gospel in a nutshell.” Then he explained the Gospel, or good news, to me! He started with something uncomfortable but true. He told me that I was a sinner. I had to admit to that! “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23 KJV). He told me that Christ died for my sins. “But God [showed] his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8 KJV). He told me that I could call upon the risen Christ to save me from my sin and be born into God’s family. “But as many as received him, to them gave the power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12 KJV). At the close of the message, he gave an altar call for those who would like to trust Christ as Savior to come and talk with him. I wanted to go forward, but at the same time, I didn’t want to go

forward. I clung to the pew in front of me! I worried, *What would the kids from my high school think?* I cared more about what people thought of me than God. After the service, Jim asked, “Well, did you like it?” I responded nonchalantly, “It was OK.” He then invited me to come back for the evening service and come to a Meet-N-Eat. I said, “What’s that?” He explained to me about their youth group meetings where they eat food, talk, and play games. I responded, “I’ll think about it.”

However, I did not think about the youth group meeting much that afternoon. I couldn’t get the words of the preacher concerning my need to yield to Christ out of my mind. I had made my mind up to go forward after the evening service. The preacher preached that night, but it was not a salvation message, and there was no invitation to come to the front to trust Christ. I thought, *What am I supposed to do now?* So, I went to the youth meeting. Many of the kids in the group had just come back from summer Bible camp and were giving testimony about the work of God in their lives. I found it fascinating and wanted to know God too through Jesus, his Son. I began to remember the Jesus I had previously read about in the four Gospels and at that moment believed the message for myself. The best way I knew how, I said in my heart and mind, “OK, God, I give up! I am tired of running from you; I believe! Please save me! I give you my life. Help me to know you and live for you.” I can’t really explain what happened at that point, but I knew God was real and I was a new person. The weight of guilt was gone. A peace that I had never experienced came over me. I thought, *It is real! He is real! God loves me! I love God!* That night, the direction of my life changed 180 degrees. Before that night, I was running away from God, and after that night, I was walking toward God with an open heart to seek and know him more. After more than forty years, I am still seeking and desiring to know God more. I love him because he first loved me!

A Word of Welcome and Encouragement

Welcome to the adventure of seeking God through scriptural meditation and devotional thoughts springing from the *God is* statements in the Bible.

By whatever means this devotional book has come into your hands and in whatever spiritual condition you may find yourself, my prayer and hope is that you will grow in your faith in God. The Bible says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). These fifty scriptural meditations on knowing God are filled with approximately eight hundred quotations from the Word of God and when mixed with faith and trust in God are powerful. The Bible says, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Furthermore, we are told, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

My prayer is that you will please God! My hope is that you will seek him in faith and receive his present and eternal rewards. Remember, “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*: for he who comes to God must believe that *He is*, and *that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*” (Hebrews 11:6 NKJV; emphasis added). *He is!*

INTRODUCTION

The Bible is filled with verses and passages that tell us about who God is and how we can relate with him. The theme verse for the devotional meditations is Hebrews 11:6, “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*: for he who comes to God must believe that *He is*, and *that He is* a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (NKJV; emphasis added).

Will you join me in a diligent quest to know God more fully and intimately through prayerful meditation on the scriptures that reveal who *He is*? God’s Spirit will illuminate us as we ask for his help. You and I can find our greatest satisfaction, pleasure, and fulfillment in him and him alone! May “grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Peter 1:2).

You are certainly free to read this devotional theology book in any manner you choose. God has given each of us a free will. However, please allow me to suggest how I envision its use:

1. An important reminder: no chapter is considered exhaustive. I have searched scripture for truth about God and have tried to relate that truth through my life experiences in hope that you will think more deeply about God and that your unique relationship with him will grow. It is a lifetime and eternal pursuit to know God.
2. An important tool: I suggest you use a blank notebook to respond in writing as you ponder the reflection questions and read in your own Bible the suggested scriptures for meditation. It is often helpful to read the verses in context to more fully understand passages I have selected. Write out your

own questions, thoughts, doubts, feelings, and prayers as you commune with God. Writing it out is amazing! It helps me think more deeply.

3. An important routine: We are encouraged in scripture to be still and know that God is God. Find a time that works for you to read a chapter at the beginning of the week. Prayerfully ask God to reveal himself to you in a more intimate way as you think about each *He is* statement throughout the week. Think and respond to the reflection questions as you read the suggested meditation passages. Reread the chapter at the end of the week. Only God knows what you will learn about him and yourself in one year. Share what you are learning about God with someone else.

In rewriting the meditations, I was able to read most of them to a small men's group that I have been a part of for a number of years. It helped us to focus on God and have some wonderful conversations and prayer times. So, I encourage you to consider these devotionals for a group study. I would love to hear how God ministered to you through these meditations; you can contact me through the *He Is* ministries webpage: <https://heisministries.net>

1

HE IS



“But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*:
for he who comes to God must believe that *He is*,
and that *He is* a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

—**HEBREWS 11:6 (NKJV; EMPHASIS ADDED)**

Have you ever heard someone testify about that God moment when they realized God was real? I recently heard a testimony at church when a young woman said with conviction and passion, “God is actually there, and he will help you with everything.” It was clear that she had a newfound peace with God and herself as she shared what God was doing in her life. This was a fruit of her having taken the first step in knowing God, which is acknowledging that *He is*. For truly, the fact that God is has profound ramifications in not only discovering more about God but in realizing who we truly are as God’s children. The tone of awe and wonder in her voice spoke even more powerfully than her words. God exists, and *He is* at work; it is marvelous to see it in others and experience it for ourselves.

A number of years ago, I was holding my youngest grandson on my lap during worship as we sang about God. He realized we were singing to God and said rather loudly, “Grandpa, where is God? I can’t see him.”

I whispered to him, “We don’t see God with our human eyes because *He is* a Spirit; we sense him in our spirits.”

Apparently, that made no sense to him, and he said again even more loudly, “Where is God? I can’t see him.”

He accepted my next response, “Listen to the worship music; we will talk about it later.” Which we did.

In my experience, there seems to be primarily three groupings of people in the world: those who believe in God, those who don’t know if there is a God, and those who deny that God exists. Over the course of my life, I have been a part of each group. I realize now, like a water droplet falling on the Continental Divide in the mountains of Montana, that what side of the ridge you fall on will lead you in completely different directions—whether unbelief, indifference, or belief—and ultimately into oceans of different beliefs about yourself and life.

I still remember what it was like not to believe in God. As a teenager, I tried to convince myself that there was no such thing as a god. Therefore, I was very willing to embrace evolution as an explanation for the origin of life. However, to be honest, deep in my being or God-given soul, I knew that an all-powerful Creator God existed and I was accountable to him. I tried to suppress that truth because I wanted to rule my own world. I desired to call the shots of my own life. The truth that “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19) was certainly true of me. Thankfully, God worked in powerful ways and brought me to a point where I willingly conceded to his awesome existence.

God’s existence is where people have to start with God, as Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV) indicates: “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*: for he who comes to God must believe that *He is*, and *that He is* a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (emphasis added).

Have you come to the point in your life where you believe that God is? Let’s consider some scripture passages that testify to the fact that God exists.

In the first sentences of the Bible, we are introduced to God as the Creator who spoke, and light was made as well as everything else. God’s existence is assumed as fact. No proofs for God’s existence are offered in the chapter besides the self-evident testimony of creation itself. The inherent design in this world begs for the conclusion that an all-powerful and all-knowing Designer-Creator exists. You would

think me strange if I told you that the painting on the wall did not have a painter. The fact of the painting presupposes the fact of the painter. Much like the artist's signature on a painting, God has left his unique signature all over his creation. Sadly, those who have chosen not to believe in God refuse to recognize his verifying signatures. The apostle Paul explained this clearly when he wrote, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (Romans 1:19–20).

Sometimes God has chosen to speak directly to people in audible words. Many of these occasions are recorded in the testimony of the Bible, which we can read for ourselves. If you have never read the Bible through from Genesis to Revelation, I encourage you to do so at least once in your life, regardless of how long it takes you. If you can't keep up with a reading schedule, forget the reading plan and just read it for yourself on your own schedule. As you read, remember to pray that God will reveal himself in clear and definite ways.

Presently, I call your attention to the time God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and spoke directly to him. Let the following words from God to Moses about his eternal existence speak to your heart:

And he said, "*I am* the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "*I AM WHO I AM.*" And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, *I AM* has sent me to you." God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations. (Exodus 3:6, 13–15; emphasis added)

Furthermore, the statements “I am” or “God is” are complete thoughts. God is the eternally self-existing one. He has always existed and will always exist. *He is* eternal and never came into being or was created. *He is* the Creator and Sustainer of everyone and everything! Paul revealed this person as none other than the Lord Jesus Christ when he wrote, “*He is* the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And *he is* before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:15–17).

In the Gospels, it is recorded that Jesus claimed to be the “I am,” and the religious leaders wanted to stone him for blasphemy. Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58), and in the book of Revelation, Jesus is called “the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8).

In the Old Testament song book, the testimony of God’s existence is poetically and beautifully described by King David in Psalm 19:1: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” Faith and belief in not only the existence of God, but the possibility and reality of a personal relationship with God is a safe and logical supposition to make when you look at his creation with an open heart and mind. It is rather a mysterious journey that is unique to each of us when God brings us to have faith in him. I would encourage you to read Psalm 19 over and over again and ask yourself the following questions:

- Can I believe what David believed and testified about God in Psalm 19?
- If or since God exists, what can I believe about myself?
- What role does the testimony of the biblical scriptures have in knowing God?
- What rewards are promised to those who seek God?

Reflection:

- How did you come to believe in the existence of God, or what are your obstacles to believing?
- In what ways are you in awe of God and how will you express this in worship?

Scripture Meditation: God Is!

- Psalm 90:1-2
- Isaiah 44:6
- John 8:54-59
- Revelation 1:4-8

Notes:

2

HE IS BEYOND US



The secret things belong to the LORD our God,
but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever,
that we may do all the words of this law.

—DEUTERONOMY 29:29

While looking for *God is* statements throughout the Bible, I never came across a statement that says, “God is beyond us,” or as the theologians say it, “God is transcendent.” So, you might ask, “Why are you including it in your *He is* meditations?” Simply because it is true about God. God’s supremacy or preeminence is understood by knowing and experiencing our own limitations and observing and receiving God’s revelation of himself through creation and scripture.

An analogy may help us at this point to understand transcendence or the superiority of God. Simply for illustration’s sake, let’s compare God to the sun and ourselves to the earth. Now, from the vantage point of an orbiting space station around the earth, how bright is the sun? Would you agree, “Unbearably bright and hurtful to the eyes if you look directly at it for long”? How bright is the earth? Would you say, “Beautifully lit and pleasing to the eyes”? Why the difference? Well, the sun’s brilliance originates within itself and is exceedingly powerful and glorious, while the earth and its atmosphere reflect and refract the light of the sun. In like manner, God is light, and we simply reflect his light in the world. *He is* the potter, and we are the clay. *He is* the creator,

and we the creatures. *He is* King; we are servants. *He is* the Father; we, his children.

I have heard people say something to the effect that they won't believe in God because he doesn't make any sense to them. Others have expressed their unbelief in more bold ways by questioning and judging God by saying, "How could a good and loving God allow such and such to happen?" With other strong statements, they sometimes clearly imply that God is a figment of our imaginations. To them, the existence of evil, tragedies, and disasters in our world proves that a benevolent deity could not exist.

Certainly horrible things happen in this world! Honestly, I must admit that there are a lot of things I don't comprehend about God and his ways. However, that lack of complete understanding of God's ways does not bring consternation to me. It brings comfort. Here are three of my reasons for taking comfort in my Creator, whom I cannot fully comprehend:

First, the knowledge and power that would be required to create this world and universe certainly would be beyond my scope of comprehension and would require a being worthy of my admiration, subjection, and worship.

Secondly, if I could completely comprehend this Creator God, it would make me equal with him. That is a scary thought because I know myself—limited, deceitful, selfish, thoughtless—well, you get the point. I don't want God to be like me! If he were, he would not be worthy of my worship.

Thirdly, what I can comprehend about God is a gift and blessing from him that reveals his love, grace, and care for me—his child. So, I take great comfort in the knowledge that God is transcendent or beyond me yet my heavenly Father. I want to accept the truths about him as he reveals them through his creation and written Word—the Bible.

Let's go back to Moses, the man of God whom God spoke to personally with audible words. He became a God-called spokesman of God's will to the children of Israel. He longed to know God more fully himself and to lead the people of Israel to know their God more intimately. I marvel at how the Holy Spirit of God inspired Moses to write about God in two revealing passages:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. (Deuteronomy 29:29)

For I will proclaim the name of the LORD; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. (Deuteronomy 32:3-4)

What we can learn from the first verse is that we must accept that there are some "secret things" in life that God keeps from us for our own good and even protection. Then we should treasure the things he does reveal, knowing that they are for us and our children, that we might obey his good will for our lives!

Furthermore, we can learn much about who God is from the second passage, which is just a small portion taken from a lengthy song that the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write, as recorded in Deuteronomy chapter 32 (please read the whole song for a blessing):

- *His name is* worth talking about as well as being excited about.
- *His greatness is* recognizable and notable and worthy of deep and long conversations.
- *He is* the Rock, signifying his stability and protective power.
- *He is* perfect; therefore, he does not err or make mistakes.
- *He is* just; therefore, he will always rightly hold us accountable.
- *He is* faithful; therefore, he will never let us down, even though we may not understand the hardship he brings our way that is ultimately for our good.

- *He is* sinless; therefore, he will never do wrong.
- *He is* upright; therefore, he will deal with us in every appropriate and best way.

While our Creator God is far beyond us, he has, through his relationship with certain individuals as well as the whole nation of Israel, as recorded in scripture, shown us himself as a God who desires relationship. From the history recorded in Exodus chapter 33, it is clear that we have to choose to seek after God, as he constantly reveals himself to us in various ways:

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. (Exodus 33:7)

And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. (Exodus 33:10–11)

Moses's prayer or request to God in verse 13 shows his heartfelt need for God's presence and his desire for a deeper relationship with God: "Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight."

May Moses's heart's desire to know God be our desire that is fulfilled as we take time to be still and know that God is God. I encourage you to take some time and meditate on who God is as you read Exodus 33 and 34. Let's respond in awe and worship of our great Creator and Lord!

Reflection:

- How does knowledge about God affect your whole being: your mind—how you think; your emotions—how you feel; and your volition—how you make decisions?
- Do you find comfort in the fact that God is beyond you? Why or why not?

Scripture Meditation: The Transcendence of God

- Isaiah 55:8–11
- Psalm 108:3–5
- Jeremiah 23:23–24
- Romans 11:33–36
- Ephesians 4:4
- What have you learned about God and yourself from the passages for meditation?

Notes:

3

HE IS KNOWABLE



May grace and peace be multiplied to you
in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

—2 PETER 1:2

Among those who believe in God, there seem to be two primary groups: those who believe that God exists but that he is aloof, unknowable, and nonpersonal and those who believe in and sense his presence in a personal and knowable way. Historically, the former group distinguished themselves as Deists, with whom many of the founding fathers of the United States of America identified, in contrast to Christians, who believe that God is personal and knowable, hears our prayers, and is concerned about our lives.

As a child, I moved around a lot with my family. It seemed like I was always changing schools. Each time I transferred to a new school, most of the kids were unknown, and the barriers to getting acquainted with them often seemed overwhelming. Fortunately, someone always reached out to me first and let me know that he or she was interested in getting to know me. I still remember many of their faces, if not their names. It may have been a smile or word of welcome, but once the ice was broken, there was potential for friendship. By the time I graduated from high school in Roseburg, Oregon, I had friends in every high school in the Southern Oregon Conference.

To some, the obstacles to knowing God seem insurmountable,

especially when they focus on how transcendent or beyond us *He is*. Furthermore, you may have either asked this question or heard others say, “How can I know God, who I can’t even see?” Although God is infinite in all of his attributes and invisible to our eyes, we can know him through the ways in which he reveals himself to us. God reaches out to us in four primary ways:

First, he speaks to us through the universal language of his creation. David says, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard” (Psalm 19:1–3). We can know and experience God through his creative acts and powerful deeds in this world in which he has placed us.

Secondly, he speaks to us through the inspired message of the prophets. Scripture testifies, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets” (Hebrews 1:1). God is showing himself friendly by giving and preserving knowledge of himself in the Bible:

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

Thirdly, he speaks to us through the grace-and-truth-filled life of his Son, Jesus Christ. The author of the book of Hebrews says, “But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world” (Hebrews 1:2). Knowing that this is true helps us to understand Jesus’s conversation with a disciple:

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. (John 14:8–10)

Fourthly, God sometimes speaks to us personally through dreams and a gift of the Holy Spirit called a word of knowledge. I have experienced this a few times in my relationship with God, which I will share in future meditations when it relates to a *God is* statement. However, we need to be careful in this more subjective area to know it is not ourselves but God who is speaking to us. If it is contrary to scripture, know that you are mistaken and are not really hearing from God. But when God gives a true word of knowledge or wisdom, experience his presence, thank him, and walk in it (see 1 Corinthians 12:1–11).

Knowledge of God should not merely be an academic understanding about him but a listening and relating personally with him as he communicates with you. In the Greek language, there are two words for knowing: *oida* refers to knowing about someone or something, while *ginosko* carries the connotation of knowing by personal experience. For example, during my first semester at Bible college, I began to get to know a girl who sat by me in American Lit class. She happened to have a twin sister I knew about but whom I had never personally met. Other classmates were astonished when I told them that I did not know Becky’s sister. I knew Becky because we shared some common experiences and conversed, but I was not even acquainted with Rachel. The difference between “knowing about God” and “getting to know God” is much more serious.

The word *know* (*ginosko*) is often used in the Gospel of John and the first letter of John. Notice John's personal use of *know*: "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. *He is the true God and eternal life*" (1 John 5:20). Like John, you can experience and appreciate a personal relationship with God!

God constantly speaks to us with language that we can understand. Are you listening to him? If you are, God wants you to share this knowledge with the next generation! This is the balancing truth in Deuteronomy 29:29, "The things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever." God's gift of insight and understanding of himself is eternal. What an honor to experience God forever! May the Lord help us to respond to his revelation of himself attentively each moment of our lives. Please find some alone time with God and read the following passages numerous times while you talk and commune with God. Ask God to help you know him more personally and to help you sense his presence.

Reflection:

Read Psalm 100 in your own Bible and make a list in your own notebook of the following:

- List the awesome truths about God.
- List the ways of responding to this knowledge.
- Read Proverbs 2:1–5 and answer the following questions:
- What are the conditions required in Proverbs 2:1–5 to "find the knowledge of God"?
- Do you meet them?

Scripture Meditation: Knowing God

- Isaiah 43:10–11
- Ezekiel 20:18–20

- Daniel 11:32
- 2 Corinthians 4:5-7
- Colossians 1:9-12
- John 17:3
- 1 John 5:20-21

Notes:

4

HE IS LIGHT



This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you,
that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

—1 JOHN 1:5

In the first meditation about God's existence, light was mentioned two times. We will find as we examine the *God is* statements in the Bible that they are intertwined and inseparable from other attributes of God. It is very hard to focus on just one aspect of God at a time; this is a good thing, for to do so exclusively would surely lead to erroneous thoughts about who God is. This is so because God is the sum total of all his qualities at the same time in perfect harmony and without contradiction. We can only see God as he truly is when all of his characteristics are aligned in perfection within our hearts and minds. This is hard for us to grasp at the same time concerning his complete fulness because of our humanness and natural limitation. However, it will be necessary for us to attempt, as best we can, as we come upon some attributes that on the surface may seem to be contradictory to other qualities describing who God is. Certainly, thinking about who God is will stretch our minds in good ways. It is especially beneficial when we consequently understand who we are as his children—made in the likeness of God.

Theologians often break God's attributes into two groups: communicable and noncommunicable, which means some attributes can be passed on to us, and others cannot; some belong to God alone. But

certainly, all of God's attributes contribute to the personal relationship we can have with him as we seek to know him better and ourselves more completely.

Light is very important in this earthly world that God has made for us. He gave us the sun to rule by day and the moon and stars to rule by night. Without the sun in perfect relationship to our earth, there would not be life. All living things would either freeze or burn up. Our very existence physically depends on physical light; likewise, we will see spiritually our souls depend on spiritual light.

All of us who have eyesight no doubt have been dazzled by the natural light in our world. Is it possible not to be touched or be in awe of a spectacular sunset or the way light reflects or refracts in the most mysterious and breathtaking ways? Certainly, all are moved in emotional ways by the beauty of light. Can you picture the sunlight breaking through a cluster of dark clouds and the sudden emergence of a glowing fan of brilliant colors through the water droplets of rain? Yes, a rainbow! Simply amazing! Furthermore, light influences our thinking and vocabulary of language with such words as *bright*, *effervescent*, and *brilliant* to name just a few. And then there are idioms such as "He saw the light!" or drawings of light bulbs indicating a bright idea. I am sure you can think of many more, for light is a phenomenon in our existence that permeates our whole world and way of life.

When light is taken away, it can be rather scary. When my grandchildren were young and would spend the night, I could count on the same reaction each time I turned off the light after our bedtime routine—"Grandpa, I can't see! We need a night-light!" My response was pretty much the same as well: "There is more light in the room than you think; give your eyes some time to adjust." Will you pray during these reflections on who God is, "Lord, help my eyes to adjust in such a way that I see your spiritual light in the spiritual darkness around me"?

The previous story reminded me of one of the bedtime stories I have told my grandchildren numerous times about living in Brazil. Early in my ministry, I was asked to help at an interior camp for a number of small churches up the Madeira River, a tributary of the mighty Amazon River. A group of us had booked passage down the Amazon from Manaus on a regular passenger boat, to be dropped off

at a floating store and house. There we would be picked up by a small cattle boat that would take us the rest of the way to camp. We arrived at the docking point around midnight. After precariously getting all of our group and baggage off board and on to the little floating walkway with missing planks without incident, the big riverboat with all of its lights continued downriver. We gasped as it took all the light with it. Panic set in. We soon sat in complete darkness! No one had thought to get out a flashlight. No one wanted to move because a fall into the piranha-infested river meant possibly more than getting wet. Finally, someone managed to pull a flashlight from her luggage. Relief! We could see again!

Considering the nature of light may be enlightening at this point (pun intended). The laws of physics make it possible to produce a flashlight for our use—to help us see when it is dark. Darkness is the absence of light but not vice versa; light is not the absence of darkness. No one has been able to, or will be able to, build a flash-dark because it would be contrary to the natural laws God built into the world of his creation, as well as being against his very nature as the God who is light. Therefore, it is observable and clear that light always penetrates or dispels darkness. Darkness cannot penetrate or dispel light. What is true in God’s created physical realm is also true in the spiritual realm, for God reveals his own nature in and by the things which he has made, as we learned in other chapters from Psalm 19 and Romans chapter 1.

Moving now from God’s natural revelation to his special objective revelation in the Bible, the apostle John declares, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). In the Bible, when a person is right with God, he is referred to as “walking in the light” and not in darkness (1 John 1:6–7). Lines from many traditional Christian hymns and choruses carry out this theme (examples: “Walking in sunlight, heavenly sunlight,” and “I saw the light ...”). Light is symbolic of God, truth, and goodness; darkness is symbolic of Satan, falsehood, and evil. It should not have been as shocking to me as it was when a worshiper of Satan who was dressed in all black once told me on a dark street, “I love the night and hate the day.” The Bible says:

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God. (John 3:19–21; please read the whole chapter)

Let's consider this fundamental statement about God's very personhood—God is light!

This three-word statement says volumes about who God is. As light, God exposes or reveals truth and falsehood, sin and righteousness. As light, God warms the heart like the sun warms the body on a cool spring day. As light, God is powerful like a laser beam used to remove cancer or correct vision loss. Today, we can rejoice because of God's light! "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

God as light reveals our dependence on him. In the same way that we are dependent on light in our physical world, we are correspondingly dependent on God as light in the spiritual realm. Light is necessary for life. An absence of light equals the absence of life—physically as well as spiritually.¹ Psalm 36:9 says, "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light." Therefore, we find it very appropriate that Jesus as Immanuel (God with us) would say, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Furthermore, Jesus said, "I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness" (John 12:46). I have had the privilege of knowing a blind man who cannot see physical light with his eyes because they were damaged at birth. He lives in physical

¹ Patsy Skeels, one of my editors, shared in a note that even the creatures that live at the bottom of deep seas in seemingly complete darkness have some small amount of light not discernable to ordinary observation by humans to sustain life.

darkness. In like manner, every person is born with damaged spiritual vision. We live in spiritual darkness until God works in our lives in such a way that we see his light. The Christian-hating Saul of Tarsus's self-righteous eyes were opened as he responded to Christ's appearance to him as light on the Damascus Road. Jesus struck Saul with physical blindness as he spoke audible words detailing new commissioning: "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18). He soon became known as the apostle Paul. God would enlighten him to be the human author guided by the Holy Spirit to write many of the New Testament letters preserved in the Bible that we read for spiritual wisdom, instruction, and enlightenment today.

In our world, there is an age-old battle between light and darkness, goodness and evil, God and Satan. When you read the Bible from cover to cover, you will see this theme enacted over and over. Who will ultimately win? The nature of light gives us a sign. Light always overcomes or dispels darkness. Every morning at dawn, at the rising of the sun, there is a testimony that the God of light, who is revealed in creation and the Bible, will ultimately triumph. The last chapter of the Bible predicts a startling feature of the new world and heaven to come, "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:5).

Have you seen God's light? Have you put your trust in the God who is light? There is always more light for us to see. Let's seek help for our spiritual vision by praying David's prayer, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (Psalm 119:18).

God is our everlasting light and glory!

Reflection:

- Spend some time thinking about the properties of light and what they reveal about God.

Scripture Meditation: God Is Light

- Genesis 1:1–19
- Psalm 4:6
- Psalm 18:28
- Psalm 43:3–5
- Psalm 119:105
- Psalm 119:130
- John 1:1–18
- 1 John 1:5–10
- Luke 11:33–36

Having read the scriptures for meditation:

- What is God saying to you personally through these passages?
- What have you learned about God?
- What have you learned about yourself?

Notes:

5

HE IS ONE YET TRIUNE



Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.
You shall love the LORD your God with all
your heart and with all your soul
and with all your might.

—DEUTERONOMY 6:4–5

I will never forget the perplexed brow and tone of wonder when a thoughtful seven-year-old girl asked me in children’s church, “Mr. Worden, if there is only one God, how come the Father is called God, Jesus is called God, and the Holy Spirit is called God?” After a brief pause to think, with a big, amazed smile, I said something like this to her: “Yes, that is one of the mysteries of God and hard for us to understand. But God has put within our world many examples of things that are three in one to help us comprehend it just a little.” We then talked about some of the triads in the world, such as water and many other elements that can be a liquid, a solid, or a gas, and beyond that the building blocks of matter—atoms, which are composed of protons, neutrons, and electrons yet one. Examples like these have their limitations but do help us to conceive of the reality of God, who is one God yet triune.

One of the distinguishing marks of Christianity, with its Jewish roots, is the belief that there exists only one true God, known as monotheism (one God) as opposed to polytheism (many gods). The Bible clearly reveals God as being just one, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD

our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). That is the testimony of Moses in the law, and then from the book of Joshua, we learn what kind of “One” God is. The tribes on the east side of the Jordan called God, “The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One” (Joshua 22:22). However, not only is he the Mighty One, *He is* also the Holy One, as Isaiah the prophet reveals in numerous passages, “Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 48:17). Note that scripture never refers to God as the mighty two or the holy three. Furthermore, there are a few passages where the apostle Paul refers to the truth that “God is one” in his teaching to emphasize a particular point of truth. Paul reasons that “God is one” to show that the one true God of the Hebrews is also the God of the Gentiles because there is only one God (Romans 3:29–31).

However, this poses an apparent problem when we realize that the Bible also clearly teaches that three persons are God:

1. The *Father* is recognized as God: 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:17; John 6:27; Philippians 2:11; Psalm 83:18.
2. The *Son* is recognized as God:
 - He is called God (Matthew 1:23; John 1:1, 14).
 - He is described in terms reserved for God alone (Colossians 1:16).
 - He is worshiped as God (Luke 4:8; Hebrews 1:6).
 - He is God made flesh (Philippians 2:5–8; John 1:1,14; Hebrews 1:3).
3. The *Spirit* is recognized as God:
 - Lying to the Holy Spirit is equivalent to lying to God (Acts 5:3–4).
 - The Holy Spirit has the attributes of God:
 - all-powerful (Isaiah 40:12–14)
 - all-knowing (1 Corinthians 2:10–11)
 - all-present (Psalm 139:7)
 - eternal (Hebrews 9:14)

How can this be, if there is only one God? How can we reconcile this apparent contradiction in the Bible? The early church leaders,

sometimes called the church fathers, worked together to understand the oneness yet triune-ness of God. The First Council of Nicaea was a council of Christian bishops convened in the Bithynian city of Nicaea by the Roman Emperor Constantine I in AD 325. There were an estimated 250 to 300 or so attending, who were to decide upon the basics of the Christian faith and to put them in the form of a creed. They struggled to capture in words the exact relationship among the three persons of the Trinity, but finally most did agree on the wording of a creed in AD 325, which was improved in AD 381. Some of the phrases in the Nicene Creed, as altered in AD 381, are powerful and beautiful:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy catholic [universal] and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The doctrine of the Trinity is an example of a derived doctrine that is reasoned from the scriptures, which challenges us to think

somewhat beyond our own limitations and accept by faith how God reveals himself in the Bible. Many cults or offshoots of Christianity have tried to explain away the triune nature of God to make their doctrine more understandable to the human mind, but they end up denying the deity of Jesus Christ and often rejecting the personhood of the Holy Spirit. The triune nature of the one true God is a mystery. *He is* clearly beyond us. In fact, it should bring us comfort to know that we can't fully comprehend God. If we could, we would be equal with God, and that would be frightening when we realize how flawed and finite we are. If God is God, we should expect that there will be some mysteries that we struggle to comprehend. One of these areas is the nature of the triune Godhead. The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct persons yet one God. They are three persons who are not only working together for the same purpose in unity but are united as one God-Being. Jesus testified, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30, see also Jesus's prayer in John 17). This oneness is more than just a unity of purpose; it is a unity of nature. Within the Godhead, there are three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, who are coeternal and coequal. We see this manifested in many places throughout the scriptures:

1. God is referred to in scripture as a being of plurality. His name, *Elohim*, is plural, and sometimes pronouns and verbs that refer to God are plural as well (Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8).
2. All three persons of the Godhead were present at the baptism of Jesus. "And when *Jesus* was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the *Spirit of God* descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a *voice from heaven* said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16–17; emphasis added).
3. Jesus prayed that the Father would send the Holy Spirit. "And I will ask the *Father*, and he will give you another *Helper*, to be with you forever, even the *Spirit* of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:16–17; emphasis added).

4. Disciples are commanded to be baptized in the name (singular) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the *Father* and of the *Son* and of the *Holy Spirit* (Matthew 28:19; emphasis added).
5. All three persons of the Godhead are united together in their ministry to humankind:
 - a. Together they work for our salvation—“Elect ... according to the foreknowledge of *God the Father*, in the *sanctification of the Spirit*, for obedience to *Jesus Christ* and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed be the *God and Father* of our *Lord Jesus Christ!* According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of *Jesus Christ* from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:1–5; emphasis added).
 - b. Together they empower believers to serve God and others—“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same *Spirit*; and there are varieties of service, but the same *Lord*; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same *God* who empowers them all in everyone” (1 Corinthians 12:4–6; emphasis added).
6. All three persons of the Godhead are united in an apostolic benediction. “The grace of the *Lord Jesus Christ* and the love of *God* and the fellowship of the *Holy Spirit* be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14; emphasis added).

Furthermore, as you enter into prayer, remember that prayer is encouraged to be done in a Trinitarian way. We address the Father in the name of Christ as the Spirit directs us. Paul wrote, “For through [*Christ Jesus*] we both have access in *one Spirit* to the *Father*” (Ephesians 2:18). Jesus wants us to do great things for him. Listen, learn, and practice his teaching in your life:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the *Father*. Whatever you ask in *my name*, this I will do, that the *Father* may be glorified in the *Son*. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the *Father*, and he will give you another *Helper*, to be with you forever, even the *Spirit of truth*, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:12–17; emphasis added)

O Lord, please help us to worship, abide, and commune in prayer with you with a Trinitarian mindset so that we may love you with all of our heart, soul, and might.

Reflection:

- How would keeping a Trinitarian mindset affect the way you worship, pray, think, and live?
- Are you in astonishment of God right now? If so, talk to him in reverence as you express how awesome *He is!*
- I would encourage you to spend some time looking up many of the references in this study and reading them in their context for more insight and blessing.
- What amazes you most about the triune nature of God?

Scripture Meditation: God Is One

- Isaiah 48:17
- Isaiah 54:5
- Mark 12:28–31
- Luke 4:33–34

- Romans 3:29–31
- 1 Corinthians 8:3–6
- Galatians 3:19–20
- Ephesians 4:4–6
- Timothy 2:3–6

Notes:

6

HE IS ALL-PRESENT



The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

—**PROVERBS 15:3**

Oftentimes, I have wished I could be two places at the same time, or maybe even three places if there were three activities that I did not want to miss out on. In my business as a handyman, when things get busy, if I could just work on two separate job sites at the same time, I could help people more quickly and not have such a long waiting list. Actually, back to reality, our humanness confines us to one place at a time. Not so with God! God is everywhere at the same time, which is an ability unique to him and his greatness.

God reveals this truth about himself through the prophet Jeremiah with the following questions:

“Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 23:23–24)

The intended answers are obvious: God is at hand and not far away; he cannot be hidden from, and he does fill heaven and earth!

These applications of his omnipresence are mind-blowing, and the ramifications in our lives are staggering. The one true God is everywhere! This is the God that the apostle Paul preached in Athens that so intrigued the Greeks who worshiped many gods, who were at war with one another and limited in powers. I love how Paul quotes from their own poets to help them realize that the God they referred to as “unknown” was in deed the Creator God that he proclaimed—this Creator God was near to them.

“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. *Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’*; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’” (Acts 17:24–28 emphasis added)

When God called upon the prophet Jonah to preach in Nineveh, he refused and boarded a ship going the other direction. He tried to run from God’s presence only to find out that the Lord was still with him when he prayed from the belly of a great fish (Jonah chapters 1–2). Like the prophet Jonah, have you desired to flee from the presence of God only to find, after having run, that God was there too? I tried for a few years and found my attempt futile. King David acknowledges God’s everywhere presence in the following beautiful and poetic way:

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take

the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. (Psalm 139:7–12)

God is always present with us, but sometimes we do not sense his presence because of the distractions or anxieties that overwhelm us. The prophet Elijah, upon hearing the threat of assassination from Jezebel, ran in fear. God led him to a cave where the “word of the Lord came to him” (1 Kings 19:9). God spoke the truth to him in love and helped him to see the faults in his thinking. Can you take courage from the way God corrected the terrified prophet with his presence and counsel? Can you remember a time when God revealed his presence to you in a very real and special way? If you cannot, ask him to do so! He has promised to be with his followers on this earth “to the end of the age.”

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mathew 28:18–20)

You can also take comfort in the fact that God will be with not only you but also with those about whom you are concerned. While distance separates us from others, it does not separate God from them.

God reveals his presence in a special way to all those who are humble in heart before him.

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a

contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.” (Isaiah 57:15)

It is often during the hardest and most difficult times of life, when we are humbled, that we can profoundly sense God’s presence. He gives help and comfort in our deepest and darkest hours. The first writing of the “God Is” meditations occurred in my life after a time of great trial, loss, and need for help. The Bible research kept me focused on God as I sought to know him better and make sense of his path for me. Years passed, and another even deeper trial in my life hit. More spiritual and emotional healing was needed. Through weekly counseling sessions with a couple in my local church, God provided the help I needed to deal with some childhood traumas that I never faced properly. I had blocked out memories that I needed to take to Jesus for healing. I had never grieved and felt the proper emotions from some of my childhood experiences, and I found great comfort in allowing God to speak truth into those horrifying experiences. Healing came as I faced those memories, felt the fear, pain, rejection, and then took it to God, acknowledging that he was with me through it all. I could now see clearly his care and protection through it all. During the intense sessions, the counselors had me answer this question while I relived the memories, “What would Jesus say to the little boy Mark in that situation?” Then I would speak God’s truth to my little self as I felt the appropriate emotions that I had refused to feel as a child. God’s truth, wisdom, comfort, peace, and the ability to forgive came as God worked in my heart and mind. God was present even though I did not know it as a child, and I certainly felt his presence as I invited him into those memories for healing.

No doubt you have faced some difficult times in your life. Perhaps it is time for you to invite God into those memories you do not wish to face. He was present then and will be present now as you work through them. Please be humble enough to ask for help when you realize you may need a counselor to guide you through the healing process. Pray that God will lead you to the right person, who he can use to help you deal with any trauma from your past that still affects your life today in negative ways. He did so for me when I wasn’t even asking or looking for it. I am confident that God will send you the help you need.

For us to see God's presence in all of our past and present, with hope for the future, we have to be poor in spirit. Therefore, let us pray that God will help us to be poor in spirit and pure in heart, that we may see God (see Matthew 5:1–12).

Reflection:

- Have you ever tried to run from God only to find out that he was there too?
- Read Matthew 5:1–12 and think about the kind of person who will see God. Are you that type a person? How can you become that kind of person?
- Will you raise your voice in worship to God in awe of his power to be everywhere at once?

Scripture Meditation: God Is All-Present

- 2 Chronicles 2:6
- Jonah 1:1–4
- Matthew 18:20
- Ephesians 1:16–23

Notes:

7

HE IS ALL-KNOWING



“For I know their works and their thoughts,
and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues.
And they shall come and shall see my glory.”

—ISAIAH 66:18

Over the past few years, I have been told by not a few people to “Google it!” Most recently, it was my mom, who is over eighty years young. Boy, did that bring a grin to my face. I usually respond pretty much the same way to each person, “I didn’t think of that!” Knowledge is at our fingertips and even our voice in this internet age in which we live. But is the information accurate and complete? Sometimes it is hard to tell, and we easily sense our own limitations. Unfortunately, there are as many falsehoods as true facts out in cyberspace databanks. Certainly, our human knowledge pales next to the knowledge of our Almighty Creator God. God does not have to Google anything; he already knows everything (1 John 3:18–20).

Again, this attribute of God is part of all of his unique personhoods: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is related to his omnipresence that we considered in the previous devotional. Because God was present everywhere in eternity past, is everywhere present now, and is present everywhere in eternity future (*He is* really outside of time, for he created time), he can and does have all knowledge instantaneously and without limitation or flaw.

After the apostle Paul expounds on the sovereignty and kindness of God in his letter to the Romans, he breaks out in adoration of God's knowledge:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33–36)

How often have you recognized and praised God for his unsurpassed and limitless knowledge? You can right now!

A. W. Tozer elucidates the unequalled brilliance of God as follows:

God knows instantly and effortlessly all matter and all matters, all mind and every mind, all spirit and all spirits, all being and every being, all creaturehood and all creatures, all law and every law, all relations, all causes, all thoughts, all mysteries, all enigmas, all feeling, all desire, every unuttered secret, all thrones and dominions, all personalities, all things visible and invisible in heaven and in earth, motion, space, time, life, death, good, evil, heaven, and hell.

Because God knows all things perfectly, He knows no thing better than any other thing, but all things equally well. He never discovers anything. *He is* never surprised, never amazed. He never wonders about anything nor (except when drawing men out for their own good) does He seek information or ask questions. (A. W Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, NY: Harper, 1987, pp. 62–63)

Job recognized the genius of God when he said, "With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding" (Job 12:13). How

can recognizing and then living according to the truth that God knows everything influence our daily lives?

First, we can trust the all-knowing God. The prophet Isaiah challenged Israel to trust God. “Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God’? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable” (Isaiah 40:27–28). Job, in great trials and difficulties, could trustingly say, “But [God] knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold” (Job 23:10). We can trust our all-knowing God in times of need, as Jesus taught, “Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.” Do you trust God to know what is best for you and to provide your needs? Doing so brings great peace.

I remember one time wondering what we were going to eat and praying for God to provide when we did not have much money and no food as we traveled in ministry. In this particular church in Oregon where I was supposed to fill in for the pastor who was on vacation, housing was provided in a part of the church building that was an old house. So, after the service, everyone left, and no offering was given to us. The fridge was empty and the cupboards bare, except for some communion juice and crackers. I started to worry but then talked to God. “Lord, will we have to go to bed hungry?” I had left something we needed in our car and went out to get it. When I opened the door, the groceries started falling out on the ground. Relief and praise filled my heart, for God had provided through some generous person. Another time, we were trying to drive across the country and only had \$150. That time, God provided a place to stay and a monthlong job being the hands for a drain-cleaning plumber who had broken three fingers. I learned a skill that has blessed many people over the years and made the money we needed to get back across the USA. I can testify that God has always met my needs. He knew what I needed, and he knows what I need now. I can be at peace and find comfort and hope always!

Secondly, we cannot hide anything from the all-knowing God, so

why do we try? I know for me it happens when I compartmentalize to a fault and am not willing to let God into an area of my life. I justify my besetting sin, believing the lie that God does not really care. But he does care and gives me deliverance from my pet sin when I invite him in to take charge as I yield to him.

Korah, in the Bible story from Numbers chapter 16, knew that he was not in the line of the priesthood but reasoned that since he was holy, he and others should be allowed to serve as priests too. God had already made his will clear to Korah. The right thing to do was for Korah to obey and serve God in the calling that God had given him. God gave judgment on him and his followers in swift execution as an example to the children of Israel. Generations afterward, the sons of Korah rightly sang out of their family history concerning their grandfather's exposed sin, "If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart" (Psalm 44:20–21). Avoiding the temptation to compartmentalize and justify sin by remembering and then acting on the fact that God knows everything should move us to quick confession and repentance of sin. Furthermore, God's unlimited and complete knowledge should be a deterrent to any decision to commit sin. God warns us through his prophet, "For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory" (Isaiah 66:18). Are you trying to hide something from God? Please stop—it's impossible! Talk to him about it; he already knows. I found it humbling and very personal to find in scripture that God's knowledge is often connected to our heart (the innermost part of our being), our mind, and our thoughts. If you take the time to read and meditate on the scripture meditation verses (see below), you will find this out for yourself. Please notice as you read Romans 8:26–31 how personal the Holy Spirit is as he searches our hearts, helps us to pray, and even prays for us.

David, the psalmist of Israel, expressed his awe of God's knowledge of him in a very personal way. As you pray, "Come, Holy Spirit," you too can relate to his song more deeply:

O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern

my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. (Psalm 139:1–6)

May God richly bless you as you meditate on the following scriptures about our all-knowing God! Let's acknowledge him, honor him, love him, and worship him with submissive and obedient choices throughout each moment of the day.

Reflection:

- Are there some things you want to change in your life in light of the fact that God knows everything?
- How do you feel and what do you think about the power of God knowing all things?
- Does the omniscience of God help you to trust him? Why or why not?
- Reread the quote by A. W. Tozer and think about what amazed you about God's knowledge.

Scripture Meditation: God Is All-Knowing

- Exodus 3:7
- Deuteronomy 2:7
- 1 Samuel 2:1–3
- Psalm 94:7–11
- Jeremiah 1:4–5
- Jeremiah 29:10–13
- Ezekiel 11:5
- Daniel 2:20–22

- Matthew 6:7–8
- Matthew 9:4
- Luke 16:14–15
- Act 15:7–9
- Romans 8:26–31
- 1 John 3:18–20

Notes:

8

HE IS ALL-POWERFUL



Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength! We
will sing and praise your power.

—PSALM 21:13

One of the major characteristics of religious cults is that they humanize God and deify man. In other words, in their theology and thinking, they magnify man to be more than he is and minimize God to be less than *He is*. What is your reaction? One common response would be to say, “I would never do that!” But don’t you and I, to some degree, humanize God in our minds when we fail to trust God to follow through with his promises and prophecies recorded in the Bible?

Regardless of whether we believe it or not, God has the power to carry out what he plans in the ways and time frames he chooses. Balaam, moved by God, once said, “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?” (Numbers 23:19). God will carry out his words because he has the character and power to do so. This is clear from his very first act of creation. God spoke, and creation happened (Genesis 1–2). Jeremiah marveled at such power. “Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you” (Jeremiah 32:17). Have you come to Jeremiah’s conclusion? Are you resting in the truth that God is so powerful that

nothing that is good, right, and within his character is too hard for him to accomplish?

Doubting the power of God results in grave error. When the Sadducees were disputing with Jesus, trying to show the absurdity of the resurrection in which they refused to believe, Jesus responded, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). Throughout history, many have read the Bible and simply discounted it as false because they could not conceive of a God that powerful. So, they explain away or discount the miracles recorded in scripture by elevating their own limited understanding over God’s revelation. Then, if they still believe in God, they humanize him in their minds to make him less powerful than he really is. They ought not do this, nor should we! The Bible reveals God as supremely and unreservedly powerful.

The Christian hope of future bodily resurrection after death, when Christ returns, is wholly based upon the power of God. Paul attests to this in his letter to the church at Corinth, “And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power” (1 Corinthians 6:14). I remember talking with a director of a funeral home once by the side of a grave, who by his own testimony believed in God but scoffed at the Christian teaching that the bodies he placed in the ground would someday rise as transformed glorified bodies. Like this man, do you have doubts about God’s power, or have you by experience accessed God’s power in your life? You can receive assurance of eternal life and a resurrected physical body as God has promised by believing the Gospel (good news) as Paul says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). Truly, the salvation of man from sin and its penalty is based upon the power of God! The disciples of Jesus, being astonished at Jesus’s words concerning how hard it would be for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, said, “‘Who then can be saved?’ But Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’” (Matthew 19:25–26). Salvation is possible because God is powerful! I have appreciated and benefited from the writings of two men who having started out as atheists, and upon study of the scriptures have testified of how God powerfully worked in their lives to bring them to faith in Christ. I am

thinking of Josh McDowell, who as a bright college student studied Christianity to prove it false and full of errors, who humbly submitted to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and later wrote the book *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, and Lee Strobel, a skeptical news journalist, who wrote of his conversion to faith in Jesus in his book, *The Case for Christ*. I have also personally seen God's power in my own life to bring me to faith, as well as others whom I have known. The apostle Paul explains this transformation of mind and heart that happens by the power of God as follows:

God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the *surpassing power belongs to God* and not to us. (2 Corinthians 4:6–7; emphasis added)

Furthermore, we see the power of God when he miraculously heals and protects people. Jesus healed people during his ministry on earth as a testimony of the power of God:

On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the *power of the Lord* was with him to heal. (Luke 5:17; emphasis added)

God is still at work healing people in our times as well. Just recently, a friend of mine asked for prayer on Facebook because he was fighting cancer. Many prayed as he prepared to go into the operating room to have it removed. Doctors were shocked to find that the cancer was not there—not one trace! One flabbergasted doctor said in a voice of shock, "It's a miracle!"

I certainly believe in divine healings but not in divine healers who set themselves up in TV healing ministries, who are often no more than charlatans trying to get your money. In contrast, there are

legitimate ministries that pray for God's spiritual and physical healing in people's lives and see his power manifested in miraculous ways. Craig Kenner has done actual research and verified many healings around the world that have occurred when believers pray. He compiled his research and findings in a two-volume set called *Miracles*. I will share one more example from my experience in praying for God's healing over a young girl who suffered a brain trauma. A number of years ago, I was with her parents when they were told by a doctor and hospital administrator that their beloved daughter, who was on life support, was brain-dead. In shock, bewilderment, and with many tears, I watched them sign the papers for her to be unhooked from life support the next morning and permission given for her body parts to be donated to help save or improve the lives of others. We prayed again that God's will would be accomplished. That night, she miraculously started breathing over the ventilator, and her brain activity renewed. God still had a purpose for her life on earth, and by his power, she lived.

Through hardships, griefs, and divine interventions, we have the choice to have faith and continue to trust and seek God or not. One thing remains clear. God demonstrates his power by healings on earth, while at other times he demonstrates his power by bringing people through death into eternity. Either way, it is a clear display of his power that we can choose to grow in faith or turn away in disbelief.

Interestingly, we live in an era of Marvel superheroes who have seemingly come to life on the big-screen movie theaters, who within the story line can do marvelous acts of bravery and good with their particular superpower. Why are these heroes such as Spider Man, Wonder Women, and others so popular? Well, there is something in our human nature that loves the story of a superhuman who has the power to save people from harm and do good in the world. It brings hope to our hearts that there can be good in a world that seems so out of control, dark, and evil. The common theme always seems to be that good overcomes evil because that is the way it should be. In reality, the true and living God, the Creator of this world, is the only true and real superhero. His power is all around us when we open our eyes of faith to see and behold it. As we have seen, God is always present, has all

knowledge, and is all-powerful. His superpowers have no equal. Can you believe it and trust in him? I do and hope you do as well.

Let's join David in worshipping our omnipotent God:

O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God; sing praises to the Lord, to him who rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens; behold, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice. *Ascribe power to God*, whose majesty is over Israel, and whose power is in the skies. Awesome is God from his sanctuary; the God of Israel—*he is* the one who gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God! (Psalm 68:32–35; emphasis added)

However, let's not stop there. Will you join the psalmist in making a commitment to proclaim the power of God to future generations?

O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, *until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come*. Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you? (Psalm 71:17–19; emphasis added)

There is no one more powerful than our Creator God—the Eternal I AM!

Reflection:

- Do you sometimes doubt the power of God?
- If so, has doubting led you into error or hardship?
- In what ways would thinking more of God's power help you?
- Will you pause and worship our Creator and all-powerful God?
- Do you want to proclaim his power to others?
- Who?

Scripture Meditation: God Is All-Powerful

- Exodus 14:31
- Exodus 15:6
- 1 Chronicles 29:10–13
- Psalm 147:5
- Luke 5:17
- 2 Corinthians 4:6–7
- Revelation 4:11
- Revelation 11:17

Notes:

9

HE IS ETERNAL



The LORD will reign forever and ever.

—EXODUS 15:18

Can you remember some of your first impressions and thoughts of God? For me, it was in the third grade when my teacher introduced the class to the concept of infinity numbers in mathematics. She captivated my mind with the thought that you could count forward forever. Then she explained negative numbers and counting backward without end. I was dumbfounded to think that that was even possible. I knew in my heart right then and there that only God could do it. I smile now with joy in my heart that infinity numbers caused me to think of God. Truly, there is so much in this world that points directly to our Creator. I did not know it then, but infinity is another word for eternity. What has caused you to think of eternity?

People groups and individuals around the world think about eternity, and that should not be surprising, for the scripture says that God “put eternity into man’s heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Furthermore, the Bible teaches that man is without excuse because God reveals his eternal power through creation:

For what can be known about God is plain to them,
because God has shown it to them. For his invisible
attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature,

have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Romans 1:19–20)

Back in the first few books of the Bible, the prophet Moses writes of God’s rule as “forever and ever” (Exodus 15:18), and he calls him “the eternal God” (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Because God is eternal, his purposes revealed in the Gospel (the good news message of Jesus Christ) are eternal, as explained by the apostle Paul:

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the *eternal purpose* that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. (Ephesians 3:7–11; emphasis added)

I am in awe that this “eternal Gospel” (Revelation 14–6–7) includes the following never-ending blessings or gifts:

- eternal comfort (2 Thessalonians 2:15–17)
- eternal life (1 Timothy 1:15–17; Titus 1:1–3; 1 John 1:1–3)
- eternal glory (2 Timothy 2:8–10; 1 Peter 5:10)
- eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:6–9)
- eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:11–12)
- eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15)
- eternal covenant (Hebrews 13:20–21)
- eternal kingdom (2 Peter 1:8–11)

You will not regret looking up these passages and meditating on the gifts God has for you as a child of God through trust in Jesus Christ. The believer's future is filled with eternal gifts; truly amazing experiences await us. That last statement reminds me of a memorable experience I had in high school. As a new believer in my youth group, I was selected to represent our church at a youth leadership planning committee at beautiful camp Tadmore nestled in the trees of Oregon. The purpose was to help plan a yearly youth conference and mentor teens. I was all new to this type of stuff, so I did a lot of listening and felt not a little out of place. However, when one of the adult leaders asked us to pray and read our Bibles to come up with ideas for the theme God would have us choose for the conference, I took the challenge seriously. I remember opening my new NASB Ryrie Study Bible that my mom had recently purchased for me and asking God to reveal what theme he wanted. I was reading in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and came to verse 7, "so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ." The phrase "awaiting eagerly" jumped off the page, and I felt the Spirit of God urge me to share that verse with the group when we next would meet. I timidly did, and to my surprise, the group chose the conference theme to be *eagerly awaiting*. Yes, I still am after forty-plus years.

It was not always that way in my life. The truth that I naturally came to know as a child in third grade I tried to suppress in my early teen years. I foolishly endeavored to convince myself that there was no God. The Bible warns, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14:1). I was running from and rebelling against God and at that point was destined for a different kind of eternity. Because God is eternal, his judgment and justice are eternal as well. He gives unending retribution to those who reject him. This sobering truth is made clear in 1 Thessalonians 1:5–12. In this passage of scripture, we see that God's righteous judgment will someday come and that those who do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ "will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (vs. 9). God gives each person a free will, and if they do not respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction of "sin, righteousness, and judgment to come" by turning to God, but

rather in hardness of heart choose to spurn God's revelation of himself, he gives them their desire in eternity—eternal separation from him, which is called “eternal destruction.” Some struggle with reconciling how a loving God could send people to hell, because they fail to see his other attributes, such as the reality that *He is* also just, righteously angry, not partial, a consuming fire, Judge, and perfect in justice. We will consider all these attributes in more detail in future chapters. It is clear in numerous places in the Bible that God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Repentance is a change of thinking, feeling, and deciding in one's heart and mind about who God is and consequently who we are. It is a humble coming to God and a leaving behind of sin—a new direction. Without this coming-to-God experience, which Jesus described as a “born again” experience to Nicodemus the Pharisee (John chapter 3), one faces, with the fallen angels (Satan and his demons), what the Bible calls “eternal fire” (Jude 1:5–7). Jesus warned in his teachings of the veracity of hell. He came to save humankind from that self-inflicted end. The apostle Paul in the New Testament book of Romans explains God's plan of salvation clearly for anyone to read, heed, and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin's penalty.

Thankfully, I did not continue down that path to eternal damnation too long; God brought me to himself before my heart was so hardened that I came to complete self-delusion and destruction. By God's grace and mercy, I came to a belief in the eternal God who put eternity in my heart and reveals his eternal nature through creation and the Holy Scriptures—the Bible.

Reflection:

- In what ways have you been able to comprehend eternity or at least catch a glimpse of it?
- Are there situations or events that caused you to think of God and eternity at an early age? Or a later age in life?
- Having spent some time reading over the passages that refer to God's eternal gifts to us, respond to God by expressing your

thankfulness by writing out a prayer that comes from your heart.

- What do you think about God's retribution being eternal as well?
- Does this truth about God move you in any way? How?
- If you have never read the book of Romans, please do! It explains how God saves us from an eternity in hell through the atoning sacrifice of his Son on the cross as a just payment for our sin.

Scripture Meditation: God Is Eternal

I suggest that you read the eternal gifts and eternal judgment passages mentioned above and think about eternity this week. An eternal perspective really changes our approach to life.

- 1 Chronicles 29:10–11
- Galatians 1:3–5
- 1 Timothy 6:13–16

Notes:

10

HE IS LOVE



But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

—ROMANS 5:8

In the first *God Is* manuscript, the *God is love* meditation was near the end of the book. I have moved it to follow others that I also moved to the front. In the rewrite, I wanted to present near the beginning the attributes of God that are known as noncommunicable, followed by the communicable attributes. But now having done so, I am questioning the complete validity of this distinction made by theologians. In review, we have covered three *God is* statements that are more introductory in nature concerning God: *God is*, *God is beyond us*, and *God is knowable*. Then, we considered two mysterious or mind-blowing characteristics: *God is light* and *God is one yet triune*. Next, we looked at what some theologians label God's noncommunicable attributes: *God is all-present*, *God is all-knowing*, *God is all-powerful*, and *God is eternal*. However, while I do not have those attributes in the completeness, fullness, or mega-degree that God does, I am present in one place at a time, I have some knowledge, I have a little power, and I am forwardly eternal. What I have is limited yet like God, in accordance with the creation account, "Let us make man in our image." Much like these mega-attributes of God, the other *God is* statements to come that are more relational in nature are mega as well.

God's attribute of love is just as beyond us as the super-relativeness of his omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, and eternalness. While God's love is beyond measure, we do have the capacity to love and grow in our love for God and others. Scripture says, "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Furthermore, we are commanded by God to grow in our love (1 John 4:11). This leads us to two questions: 1) what is this love of God?; and 2) how are you and I to love?

In pondering over an answer to these two questions, I prayed for God to give me help to do an adequate summary in this chapter. It just so happened that I took a couple of weeks off in writing to travel back to what I call my hometown, Roseburg, Oregon, to run in the Jim Bright Memorial Run. Jim had cared for my soul by inviting me to church many years ago. Before attending his memorial service on Sunday afternoon, I attended church with his widow at a local congregation. That morning, the Bible teacher brought a message from Ephesians 5:1–14 titled "Imitating God." My ears perked up when he said, "An imitator of God loves sacrificially." He then defined love as follows: "Love: seeking the best for another, regardless of the cost to you or the worthiness of the recipient." In answer to my prayer, God gave me a summary definition of his love and the love we are to have toward others that helps us understand more fully key verses on God's love for us and subsequently our love for others:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have
eternal life. (John 3:16)

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still
sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if
you have love for one another. (John 13:35)

One way to more deeply understand a word is to look it up in a dictionary, and when you are studying biblical terminology, it is often helpful to look up the original meaning in the languages in which the

Bible was written. The common word for love in Hebrew is much like our English word *love*. It has a range of meanings depending on the context, from something you like to something or someone you really love. No real profound help there. However, one of my professors in Bible college would often speak glowingly about another Hebrew word that also carries the concept of love—*hesed*. I later found out why; I stumbled upon his doctoral thesis in an out-of-the-way place in the library that was reserved for graduate students. He had written a whole book on the word, explaining how this word for love was based upon God’s covenantal promises to his people and his willingness to be faithful to them in sacrificial love. Thus, it is not surprising that newer Bible translations have improved the translations of *hesed* from simply *mercy* (KJV) to the fuller meaning of *steadfast love* (ESV). This is the kind of love that God portrayed over and over to the children of Israel. Psalm 136 has a beautiful and powerful refrain about the LORD: “For his steadfast love endures forever.” This psalm graphically tells of God’s acts that showed his steadfast love. Another example is found in the Old Testament story of Balaam’s attempt to curse Israel for gain. Moses reminded Israel, “But the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam; instead the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you” (Deuteronomy 23:5). True love always motivates a person to action. In this case, God turned a curse into a blessing. Love does more than talk; it acts, as scripture clearly encourages: “Let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

The sacrificial *agape* love of the New Testament is best described in what is known as the love chapter in the Bible:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4–7)

The apostle Paul’s inspired description of love depicts God’s love for us and the kind of love we are to have for others. I often fall short of

this kind of love, but when I do love in this sacrificial way, it is because of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit of God, as John, the apostle of love, taught so clearly:

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. *God is love*, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. (1 John 4:13–18; emphasis added)

Have you recognized and believed the love that God has for you and started down the path of faith in his Son and God's subsequent path of perfecting his love in you? If you have, you have entered the adventures of being a Christ follower, and you are learning to love as God loves you. If you have not, please start and stay on the path of eternal life through Jesus Christ and join in the worship of our loving God, Creator, and Savior.

Throughout the book of Psalms, God's people respond to his loving acts with praise. God's love was the basis of David's worship when he said, "But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you" (Psalm 5:7). Overwhelmingly, God's steadfast love is referred to approximately 123 times in the psalms, and Psalm 136 is completely dedicated to the steadfast love of God. Every verse has the refrain, "for his steadfast love endures forever." Read it over and over to bask in God's love for you.

God's love is characterized as "abounding" four times in the following psalms, where we see many of God's other attributes and actions flowing from his steadfast love:

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, *abounding in steadfast love* to all who call upon you. (Psalm 86:5; emphasis added)

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and *abounding in steadfast love* and faithfulness. (Psalm 85:15; emphasis added)

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and *abounding in steadfast love*. (Psalm 103:8; emphasis added)

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger *and abounding in steadfast love*. (Psalm 145:8; emphasis added)

Our only hope of forgiveness and redemption is to respond appropriately to God's steadfast love:

[The Lord] loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD ... Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, ... Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you. (Psalm 33:5, 18, 22)

Hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. (Psalm 130:7)

The apostle John testifies of God's love: "So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever

abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16). How did John come to know God’s love? He was an eyewitness to God’s love demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus Christ. He writes much about God’s love in the Gospel that bears his name. However, in the context of his first letter to believers in 1 John chapter 4, John focuses on one event (God sending his Son), which leads to three benefits (highlighted in italics) that dazzle us with God’s amazing love:

God sent his only Son into the world, so that *we might live through him* (vs.9),

... but that [God] loved us and sent his Son to be *the propitiation for our sins* (vs.10),

... the Father has sent his Son to be *the Savior of the world* (vs.14).

Furthermore, in the previous chapter of John’s letter, we see the extent of this loving act of sending his Son into the world when John writes, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1). In Christ, we not only receive new life, payment for the penalty of our sins, and the gift of eternal salvation, but also the gift of adoption into God’s family.

Amazing love! Truly, God is love.

Reflection:

- How has God shown you his personal love?
- If you have never read the Gospel according to John, or if it has been a while, please give it a thoughtful read to see why John could write so knowingly about the love of God.
- What is an appropriate response to God’s love for you?
- How do you demonstrate your love for God? And your love for others?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Love

- Exodus 34:6–8
- Psalm 51:1
- Psalm 52:8
- Psalm 136
- John 15:9–10
- Romans 8:38–39
- 2 Corinthians 13:11–14
- Ephesians 2:4–5

Notes:

11

HE IS SLOW TO ANGER



But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

—PSALM 86:15

The emphasis in our era that God is loving may make it hard for some to conceive that God can become angry. This difficulty comes from a faulty understanding of true love and righteous anger. Anger can be a loving and proper response when betrayal and unfaithfulness occur within a relationship. How strange if a husband or wife were not angered by the infidelity of a spouse, if an employer was not angered by an employee embezzling, and if parents were not angered at a person who abused or murdered their child. Righteous anger is appropriate in such cases, as God created us to have this emotion as well as many other good emotions that, because of our sinfulness, can digress into mishap. The problem with human anger is that it tends to mingle so often with sinful responses as well. That is why we are warned to “be angry and do not sin” and not to “let the sun go down on your anger” (Ephesians 4:26). Human anger slides quickly into the sins listed in the context of this verse: stealing, corrupt speech, bitterness, clamor, slander, and malice. Can you remember how anger led to any of these sins in your own life? I can in my life and suppose that you have such humbling memories as well. But not so with God! His anger is never bitter or malicious. God’s anger is always honest, pure, and right. His anger and wrath are always

under the complete control of his other divine perfections, so he can choose to say, “I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath” (Hosea 11:9).

Many of the references in the Bible to God’s anger and wrath come in a context where the nation of Israel had been unfaithful to Yahweh—they had broken their covenant relationship with him. Scripture often refers to the fact that they “provoked the LORD to anger.” Judges 2:12 is such an example:

And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger.

God’s anger over their spiritual adultery should not have surprised the children of Israel. God had warned them numerous times through his prophet Moses:

You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you—for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 6:14–15)

About nine times in the Bible, we are reminded and comforted with the fact that God is “slow to anger.” The prophet Moses was the first:

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means

clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:5-7)

The final time that the scriptures mention that God is slow to anger is in a context of God's powerful and righteous judgment upon the wrongful acts of a nation:

The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither; the bloom of Lebanon withers. The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it. Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him. (Nahum 1:2-6)

The knowledge that God will deal justly in anger and wrath with those who reject and turn from him is sobering. However, his provision of mercy that allows us to come to him for forgiveness is amazing. But coming for forgiveness takes humility on each person's part! It would be wise if individuals and nations today would follow the instruction of King David:

Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Psalm 2:10-12)

For example, the reluctant prophet Jonah proclaimed to the wicked people of Nineveh of God’s impending judgment; they repented and turned from their evil ways. God graciously spared them. Jonah was selfishly angry at God because he wanted them destroyed. He spoke to God out of his knowledge of him—testifying, “I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.” May God help us all to be like the people of Nineveh when it comes to turning to God from our sin and not like Jonah, who was bitter and unforgiving. I encourage you to read this short book for lessons about God and our sinful ways. The one good thing we can learn from Jonah is to be honest with God about our feelings.

Back to King David’s admonishment on how to receive God’s blessing, have you “kissed the Son”? Which is to embrace Jesus for refuge from God’s rightful punishment for sin. Jesus Christ took upon himself the wrath of God as your substitute. The purpose of Jesus Christ’s death on the cross was made clear by the prophet Isaiah about seven hundred years before Jesus was condemned and crucified:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and
afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the
chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes
we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we
have turned—every one—to his own way; and the
LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah
53:4–6)

Do these verses help you to understand the teaching of Jesus?

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have
eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world
to condemn the world, but in order that the world might
be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not

condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:16–18)

According to this passage, are you condemned or not condemned? It really depends on what you have done with the Son, Jesus Christ. *He* is the one who bore the punishment of your sins and my sins, that you and I might have eternal life and not receive the rightful wrath of God. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36). Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come so that “he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). God’s loving conviction brings us to himself for unmerited salvation, kind correction, and wise guidance when we believe in Jesus. Through faith, we are lovingly adopted into God’s family, and he as our heavenly Father disciplines us for our own good. “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives” (Hebrews 12:6; read Hebrews 12:3–11 for more understanding).

I remember an angry look my mother once gave that caused me to make a vow that has protected me for many years. It happened when I was in the seventh grade. We had moved to Central Point, Oregon, from Medford, and I was going back to Medford with a friend to go to a neighborhood party. Right before I was to be picked up, my stepdad pulled the Black Velvet whisky bottle off the shelf and handed it to me, saying, “Take a swig of this, Mark; it will help you have a good time at the party!” I tipped the bottle. Liquor burned all the way down into my tummy. My mom shot us such a look that it put fear in me of ever messing with alcohol or drugs again. My stepdad never offered me another lick of alcohol, and I told several people in my teen years, “No thank you!” to their offers of drugs and booze. That angry look, motivated out of my mom’s loving protection, saved me from much harm and heartache, for which I am thankful to this very day. Healthy anger can be an appropriate emotion in loving relationships.

For years, I had wrongfully felt that all anger was sinful, having been on the receiving end of sinful anger enough times to feel severely

the physical and emotional pain it caused. This led to a wrongful suppression and denial of my own anger, which sometimes led to angry outbursts that were sinful, while at other times to sinful passive-aggressive behavior toward others. I am now learning to accept and even welcome my feelings of anger as a normal and right response to the sins of others. I try now to deal with my anger in a healthy way by taking it to God and being motivated to do what is right when I am feeling angry in a situation that rightfully merits anger. If the situation does not merit anger, I am learning to be honest with myself and God by admitting my unjustified sinful anger and receiving his correction and forgiveness. May God help our appropriate anger to be worked out in love like our heavenly Father's righteous anger. Lord, please help us to be as slow to anger as you are and to do good when we are angered for a right cause or holy reason.

A dream recently helped me feel God's profound love as my heavenly Father.² In my dream, my whole body was covered with the filth and slime of my sin. My Father God was grievously angry at my choices to continue wallowing in the filthy slime pit of my sin. I confessed my sin, and he lifted me from the slime pit of sin and lovingly cleansed me and clothed me in shining white, clean clothing. I awoke and felt the presence of God's love as never before. I vividly remember the look of God's loving anger that grieved for me because of my willful choice to sin. He had so lovingly warned me to avoid the pit of sin through his loving instructions given to me in the Bible for my own protection and well-being. "[The Father of spirits] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10b). "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights" (Proverbs 3:11-12). Thankfully, God is slow to anger, and it is part of his steadfast love for each of us. Let's sing his praise!

² This dream may have been influenced by Psalm 40 and Revelation 3:5. See also the fourth point in chapter 3 about dreams.

Reflection:

- God's righteous anger may not be an enjoyable truth to think about; however, what benefits will it bring to you?
- I would encourage you to read and meditate on all of Isaiah 52:13–53:12 to help you grow in your understanding of the wrath of God that Jesus bore for your sin. What is your response to this passage?
- Can you discern the difference between righteous anger and sinful anger? If so, can you remember an example of each in your life?
- Have you come to a place in your understanding of God that you can accept the truth of his loving anger and be thankful for this demonstration of his love? You may want to make this a matter of prayer.

Scripture Meditation: God Is Slow to Anger

- Joshua 23:16
- Nehemiah 9:17
- Psalm 78:37–39
- Psalm 103:8–13
- Isaiah 13:9–13
- Joel 2:13
- Micah 7:18–19
- Colossians 3:5–6
- Hebrews 12:3–11
- Revelation 14:10

Notes:

12

HE IS MERCIFUL



But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

—TITUS 3:4–5

In the last two meditations, this one, and the two to come, we are considering a group of five attributes of God that are often lumped together. Psalm 86:15 lists them all together, so I have followed the psalmist’s example in keeping them together but not in the same order: “But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” Let’s muse for a while about God’s mercy and its implications in our lives as we live each day.

A simple way to think about mercy is the fact that when it is given, we don’t get what we deserve for our wrongs. Mercy is defined beautifully by Noah Webster as follows:

That benevolence, mildness or tenderness of heart which disposes a person to overlook injuries, or to treat an offender better than he deserves; the disposition that tempers justice, and induces an injured person to forgive trespasses and injuries, and to forbear punishment, or inflict less than law or justice will warrant. In this sense,

there is perhaps no word in our language precisely synonymous with *mercy*. That which comes nearest to it is grace. It implies benevolence, tenderness, mildness, pity or compassion, and clemency, but exercised only towards offenders. *mercy* is a distinguishing attribute of the Supreme Being. (Noah Webster 1828)

God's mercy is clearly revealed throughout the biblical record and all of subsequent history. We can see and feel his mercy in the first few pages of the Bible. God knew of Adam and Eve's sin and approached them with questions to draw out confession because *He is* not only a just judge but also a patient and merciful Savior. The consequence of eating the forbidden fruit was death. However, their death was not immediate. God did not give them what they deserved instantly; he gave them time to repent and turn to him for forgiveness. Then, the first hint of the gospel message was made in the promise of a descendent (seed) that would break Satan's head and whose heel would be bruised by Satan (see Genesis 3:15, Geneva Bible). Furthermore, God clothed Adam and Eve in skins from a substitute that died in their place, foreshadowing the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah on Calvary's cross. This earliest foreshadowing of the Gospel would be expanded upon and clarified as God progressively revealed his plan of salvation through the redemptive history recorded in the Holy Scriptures—the Bible.

Over and over again in the Old Testament narrative, God demonstrated the truth expressed by the apostle Peter, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). The prophet Moses wrote, "For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them" (Deuteronomy 4:31). You don't have to read long in the history of God's chosen people and the lineage of the Messiah to behold the merciful hand of God. Ruth of the Moabites, enemies of the Jews, and a harlot from Jericho, named Rahab, are each in the lineage of the Messiah. As with them, so it is with us. We would have no hope of salvation from sin without the mercy of God. Listen to this Old Testament plea

for wayward souls to turn to God for mercy: “For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him” (2 Chronicles 30:9).

King David, who had a heart for God according to scripture, certainly messed up big-time when he got another man’s wife pregnant (adultery) and then schemed to have him killed in battle (murder). The penalty for breaking these commands is death, according to God’s law given by Moses to the twelve tribes of Israel. Why was he not swiftly executed? Psalm 51 gives us the answer; he called upon God for mercy. Can you feel and hear the agony and humility in his voice in admitting what he had done, when he called out in prayer?

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!” (Psalm 51:1–2; please read the whole psalm)

David looked good on the outside as the king of Israel, while hiding his sins. It took a prophet sent by God to confront him before he humbled himself before God, as we just read. What did it take in our lives? Or what will it take? When we prop ourselves up through external pharisaical standards to be better than we really are, we rob ourselves from the humility needed to see ourselves as who we truly are, and thus, we fail to properly acknowledge our sin and seek God’s mercy. Jesus told a parable, recorded in Luke 18:9–14, about a self-righteous Pharisee and a humble tax collector. May God help us to be like the sinner, as we really are, and plead for mercy and not be like the “saint” in his own eyes, which we may be more often like than we want to admit:

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated other with contempt: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed this: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God. Be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:9–14)

God’s mercy is a heartfelt motive for loving him, as the psalmist testifies, “I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy” (Psalm 116:1). Do you love God because of his mercy to you? Do you rejoice in God’s mercy? Jesus commended a woman before a critical Pharisee when she had been kissing his feet, saying, “Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little” (Luke 7:47). When we realize how much we have been forgiven and how far God’s mercy has been extended to us, we are free to love God with profound appreciation and affection. Adam and Eve, Moses, the children of Israel, David, and many others in biblical history found the mercy of God. Have you? You only have to ask humbly to find his mercy that brings forgiveness and hope. Honestly, it is one of the hardest things in our lives to do. Scripture says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain *mercy*, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrew 4:16). It makes complete sense in light of our sinfulness to heed Jude’s admonishment, “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 1:21).

Furthermore, once we have experienced God’s mercy, we are encouraged to show mercy to others. Jesus in his profound teaching, in what is often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, said, “Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy” (Matthew 5:7). Jesus challenges us to love our enemies and extend mercy to them because our Father God is merciful with us.

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for *he is* kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:35–36; emphasis added)

Is there someone to whom you need to extend mercy, as one who is under God’s mercy?

My high school cross-country and track coach, Mr. Robinson, was an example to me of merciful forgiveness when I owned up to my wrongdoing—well, only after I was caught. It happened during my senior-year track season. Coach had entrusted to me a key to open and lock the locker room each morning under the stadium stands of the football field—a big responsibility and one that I took seriously. I always made sure I arrived early and the door was locked back up when I was the last one to leave before first-period class.

Well, for a few mornings for several weeks, some of the guys were starting to horse around with the water-filled fire extinguishers. They would grab them and pretend to spray people. However, one morning, things got out of hand. I joined in and grabbed one myself. My friend Jimmy sprayed me. In retaliation, I pulled the trigger to spray back, when I walked an assistant track coach. I was caught in the very act. He said, “Put those away! You guys know better. I’m reporting you to Coach Robinson.” He then left more quickly than he came in.

My heart was smitten. I had betrayed the trust of my coach. What should I do? I was guilty. I had been foolish! I was caught! As I dressed for school, I resolved in my heart and mind on what to do. *I must find Coach immediately.*

I walked quickly across the field to his office in the men’s main locker room. As I walked, I took the key off my key ring and rubbed it nervously. I walked into his office and saw his serious eyes meet mine. Holding up the key, I said in shame, “I am sorry for betraying your trust. Here is the key.” He gave me a stern look and did not say anything for a moment that seemed like eternity as I held that key extended in the air. He then asked, “Did you learn a good lesson?” “Yes, sir!” He slightly smiled and firmly said, “Keep the key! Don’t let it happen again!”

I received unmerited mercy and grace when Coach let me keep the key. I did not deserve it. I had learned a good lesson, and to the best of my knowledge, I never betrayed his trust again.

When God and others show us mercy, let's learn to show mercy ourselves, for we are to be merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful. Mercy and grace are like the two sides of the same coin. They come together. We will consider God's grace in our next meditation.

Reflection:

- Has someone extended mercy to you?
- Have you experienced God's mercy in your life? If so, explain when and how.
- Are you thankful for God's mercy?
- Why or why not?
- How do you express your appreciation to God for his mercy?
- Is there someone to whom you need to extend mercy?

Scripture Meditation: God's Faithful Mercy

- Romans 9:15–18
- Romans 11:30–32
- 1 Timothy 1:13
- Titus 3:5
- James 5:1
- 1 Peter 1:3

Notes:

13

HE IS GRACIOUS



But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

—PSALM 86:15

The graciousness of God is often linked in scripture to the mercy of God. While God’s mercy gives us time to repent because we don’t immediately get what we deserve, God’s grace speaks out to encourage us to ask for help that we do not deserve. Grace is often described as unmerited favor. However, that is just the beginning of understanding and experiencing God’s grace. God’s grace enables us to have and do things that we could not have and do without his gifts and help.

A gracious person is “favorable, kind, benevolent, and disposed to forgive offenses and impart unmerited blessings” (Noah Webster 1828). Whether received from God or man, “gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body” (Proverbs 16:24). When Coach Robinson mercifully forgave me, he graciously let me keep the key to the locker room. He enabled me to keep on serving my teammates and helping the other runners to do their early-morning workouts. Can you see how mercy and grace worked together as a powerful gift for the betterment of all? God’s grace is always a gift for our betterment and the good of others. We can safely say that grace has a domino effect, because it spreads for the betterment of others and ultimately for the glory of God.

Grace-filled speech comes from pure thoughts, as King Solomon indicates, “The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD, but gracious words are pure” (Proverbs 15:26). It is from holiness and purity that our Almighty God speaks words of grace to rebellious sinners. Listen to how God calls out to the wayward children of Israel through his prophet Joel:

For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it? “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for *he is* gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? (Joel 2:11–14; emphasis added)

The prophet Isaiah makes much of God’s grace that is given to those who cry out for help. When we feel far from God because of the consequences of sin, we should pay attention and follow this counsel from scripture:

Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore he waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; how blessed are all those who long for him. O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer. *He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry*; when he hears it, he will answer you. Although the Lord has given you bread of privation and water of oppression, he, your Teacher will no longer hide himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher. Your ears will hear a word behind you, “This is the way, walk in it,” whenever you turn from the right or to the left. (Isaiah 30:18–21 NASB; emphasis added)

This passage clearly suggests that to access or receive God's grace, we have to cry out for it. This truth is clarified in the New Testament, where we learn that our cry for grace in prayer should be with confidence, because our Savior understands our weaknesses and wants to help:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace,* that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15–16; emphasis added)

The psalmists plead for God's grace over and over again throughout the psalms. For example, Psalm 4:1 says, "Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer."

I have found four passages of scripture that showcase the work of God's grace in our lives:

1. God's grace provides salvation at a costly but free gift to humankind through faith:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, 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 coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. *For by grace you have been saved through faith.* And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we

should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:4–10; emphasis added)

2. God’s grace enables followers of Jesus to do the good works he desires them to do:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, “He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (2 Corinthians 9:8–15; emphasis added)

3. God’s grace helps us through the hard times of life that God allows for our betterment and his glory, as demonstrated by the apostle Paul’s testimony:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7–10; emphasis added)

4. God's grace empowers believers to serve others through imparting special gifting within the body of Christ:

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us*, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:3–8; emphasis added)

We, like the apostle Paul, can testify that any ministry or good that we can do in this life for the glory of God is truly through his grace (see further 1 Corinthians 15:10). Yes, we have to choose to serve, but for our service to bring glory to God and to truly be effective with fruit that lasts, it has to be done while calling upon God's grace to guide, sustain, and empower the work.

I remember a situation that happened while I worked with my Brazilian brothers in Manaus, Brazil, that was filled with God's grace. A thief had stolen or found the wallet of one of our Bible school students who lived in a student dorm on campus. He had used the name on the student's ID to get access to the campus, through the night watchman, to visit his "friend" in the dorm. Well, that worked so well the first time that he came back for a second time to lift some more goods. The night watchman and the dorm supervisor were ready the second time, and they caught the thief in the dorm in the act of stealing. After receiving a call for my assistance, in some fear I

prayed for God's help. I soon arrived to find the thief crouched in the corner, surrounded by my students, not being beaten to a pulp as his frightened eyes feared but being beseeched to come to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sin. They were preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ to him. This needy young man was shown mercy by not being physically harmed as was customary. We also showed him grace, while driving him to the police station, by swinging by his mother's home at his request, so he could inform her of what he had done and where we were taking him. At the police station, we asked the attending officers to not beat him as we made our report about the robberies. Apparently, he cooperated with them, and many of the stolen goods were returned, which is very uncommon. Mercy and grace diffused a situation where the testimony of Jesus could shine in a dark situation. I wonder what eternal fruit has come in the lives of everyone involved in that incident in the dorm. I know for the student who lost his wallet, he testified that he was learning to forgive others as his heavenly Father had forgiven him. For the thief, I hope that he came to Jesus. For the mom, she seemed moved by the kindness of her son's captors. For the rest of us, I think we felt the love of God flowing through us to help another, not mere retribution. Jesus tells us to do good to even those who would do us harm. God gives grace in every situation when we ask, and sometimes even when we don't ask.

Can you remember the times you have implored God for grace and found help in your times of need? Do you need to appeal to his graciousness in a present life situation that you are encountering? If so, call upon him soon, because *He is* full of grace and gives grace for the asking.

Are there gracious words that you need to speak to someone soon? The priests in Israel were told to speak the following blessing of grace upon others:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, "Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you; *the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;* the LORD lift up his countenance

upon you and give you peace.’ So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”
(Numbers 6:22–27; emphasis added)

Reflection:

- Is there a situation in your life in which you need to appeal to God’s grace to help in your time of need?
- Express your feelings and reaction to God’s graciousness in prayerful worship.
- In what areas of your life have you experienced the grace of God?
- Is there someone to whom you need to speak gracious empowering words?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Gracious

- Review the four passages that showcase God’s grace mentioned in the chapter.

Read Psalms where people ask for God’s grace:

- Psalm 9:13–14
- Psalm 25:15–18
- Psalm 26:11
- Psalm 7:7, 31:9
- Psalm 41:4
- Psalm 41:10
- Psalm 56:1
- Psalm 67:1
- Psalm 86:3
- Psalm 86:15
- Psalm 119:58
- Psalm 119:132

Other passages:

- Exodus 33:19
- Exodus 34:5–8
- Nehemiah 9:17

Notes:

14

HE IS FAITHFUL



The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

—LAMENTATIONS 3:22–23

Have you ever been hurt by a person who was not faithful in the role he or she had in your life? No doubt you have been disappointed by people who have let you down. Perhaps a father or mother walked away from a marriage and the responsibilities of parenting. Possibly someone abused you emotionally and/or physically when he or she should have been protecting you. Maybe a boss promised you a promotion, only to overlook you while others moved up. Perhaps a pastor or church leader did not live up to his own preaching and took advantage of God's flock. Whatever the case in your life, the truth is that people will fail us in their commitments and duties. However, it is also true and greatly comforting to know that God will never fail us—*He is faithful!*

Starting with Moses and ending in the book of Revelation, God's faithfulness shines radiantly through the stories and teaching of the Bible:

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to

a thousand generations, and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. (Deuteronomy 7:9–10)

“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.” (Revelation 19:11)

What can we learn about God’s faithfulness from these two passages?

First, we discover that God is faithful to keep all of his covenants or promises. Which, by the way, is one of the definitions for faithfulness, “Strict performance of promises, vows or covenants” (Noah Webster 1828). As you read the Bible, you can see for yourself that God has been faithful in all of his relationships. God was faithful to Adam and Eve (Genesis 1–3), to Noah (Genesis 6–9), to Abraham (Genesis 12–15, 17, 22), to Moses (Exodus 3–4), to David (2 Samuel 7:8–16), and to Jesus Christ (John 17). God will be faithful to you as well, just like Paul told Timothy, “If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13).

Secondly, we realize that God is faithful in keeping steadfast love. Truly, God is the textbook definition for faithfulness because another definition for faithfulness is “constancy in affection” (Noah Webster 1828). David wrote, “He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies” (Psalm 25:9–10).

Thirdly, we understand with reverence that God will be a faithful judge. Therefore, we should confess and forsake our sins, pleading for God’s mercy, knowing that “if we confess our sins, *he is* faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9; emphasis added).

Do you see God’s faithfulness to you? The psalms are full of worship and praise of God for his faithful steadfast love. Can you give testimony of God’s faithfulness in your life? We need to be like David, who would not keep God’s deeds of faithfulness to himself:

I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation. As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me! (Psalm 40:10–11)

I have found three passages that speak volumes about God's faithfulness. The first shows how God is faithful to provide a way of escape when we are tempted to sin:

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

The second encourages us to trust God during times of suffering and hardship in this life because we are followers of Jesus Christ. Resting in God's faithfulness as the righteous judge enables us to continue to do good and glorify God during times of mistreatment.

Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (1 Peter 4:16–19)

The third passage sums up God's faithfulness of bringing us into fellowship with him through his Son. Notice how the apostle Paul unites God grace and faithfulness in his relationship to repentant sinners who are enriched with knowledge and spiritual gifts when they turn to God:

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. *God is faithful.* (1 Corinthians 1:4–9; emphasis added)

In my life, I can look back and see God’s faithfulness in every one of these ways. Without exception, his faithfulness is connected to people of faith who God used in my life as they ministered God’s love and truth to me. Sometimes the way of escape from sin’s temptation was a person who God brought into my life to pray with me, or give me an encouraging word, or just be present when I needed support. Sometimes God used a word fitly spoken and at just the right time from a brother or sister in Christ when I was suffering and ready to quit. Their testimony of God’s faithfulness in their lives encouraged me to keep entrusting my life to God’s care and faithfulness. God’s faithfulness to me was greatly demonstrated by those who showed me the love of Christ by their life and words that planted seeds of God’s truth, ultimately bringing me to put my faith in him and his Son, the Savior of mankind.

In my deepest trials and hardships of life, it was my church family that God used to show his faithfulness to me. Are they perfect saints? Certainly not, but they were there to counsel me, encourage me, speak truth to me, pray with me, cry with me, listen to me, and to put their loving arms around me in my times of deepest loss and hurt. God uses his followers to show his faithfulness to those who are willing to receive it. Be humble enough to receive it, for they are gifts of God’s faithfulness to help in times of need.

Meditating on God’s faithfulness will help us to have a trusting attitude, peaceful spirit, and joyful heart whatever our circumstances. To God be the glory!

Reflection:

- How has God demonstrated his faithfulness to you? Be as specific as possible.
- Is there someone you need to share with about God's faithfulness?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Faithful

- Psalm 33:3–5
- Psalm 36:5
- Psalm 69:13
- Psalm 71:22–23
- Psalm 92:1–2
- Psalm 145:13
- 2 Thessalonians 3:3

Notes:

15

HE IS HOLY



“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

—EXODUS 15:11 (MOSES)

In the second meditation, we considered how much God is beyond us. Another way scripture describes this truth is the revelation of God’s holiness. Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, expresses beautifully the uniqueness and set-apartness of God as she testified concerning God’s holiness:

My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. *There is none holy like the LORD*; there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. (1 Samuel 2:1–3; emphasis added)

The value of holiness, purity, and separateness can quickly be recognized in our everyday lives with a simple question. What do you like to purchase that is labeled *pure*? I am sure that you can think of many

things for which you would pay more if it was certified *pure*. If you are like me, you like pure drinking water. Water tainted with chemical and mineral impurities can taste rather nasty. I remember going to Lithia Park in Ashland, Oregon, with my grampa, and he would always take a deep draft of the Lithia Mineral water, saying it was good for his health. I tasted it and gagged. We also don't want our food to be contaminated with germs or harmful substances that would compromise our health. While you probably esteem the purity of many things in this world, have you ever given thought to the value of moral and spiritual holiness? If so, somewhere in the process, perhaps you started thinking about God. God tells the children of Israel twice in back-to-back verses, "You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44–45). What does it mean when God says, "I am holy"?

Many sources would concur with the *Noah Webster 1828* dictionary definition of holiness. *Holy*, when applied to God, "signifies perfectly pure, immaculate and complete in moral character." This description of God's holiness may impact us more if we use opposite terms—God has no impurity in his character; all his attributes are untainted by evil. *He is* not contaminated by any sin! How amazingly beautiful God is in all his perfections! This is why the psalms call for us to worship God in the splendor of holiness:

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship
the LORD in the splendor of holiness. (Psalm 29:2)

Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble
before him, all the earth! (Psalm 96:9)

In Psalm 99, the psalmist calls God *holy* three times:

The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
The LORD is great in Zion; *he is* exalted over all the peoples.
Let them praise your great and awesome name!

Holy is he!

The King in his might loves justice.

You have established equity;
you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.
Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool!

Holy is he!

Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel also was among those who called upon his name.
They called to the LORD, and he answered them.

In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them;
they kept his testimonies and the statute that he gave them.

O LORD our God, you answered them;
you were a forgiving God to them,
but an avenger of their wrongdoings.

Exalt the LORD our God,
and worship at his holy mountain;
for the LORD our *God is holy!*
(Psalm 99; emphasis added)

How should we respond to God's holiness? The apostle Peter encourages us to be pure and holy based on the truth that God is holy:

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:14–16)

The beauty of God's holiness should motivate us to live pure and obedient lives for the glory of God. In our men's fellowship, after reading a rough draft of this meditation, our pastor shared that it is helpful for him to see God's holiness and the command to be holy as *He is holy* as an invitation to draw closer to God in intimate fellowship. It is natural to desire to be like the one we love. I believe that we can give God praise for any holiness that we have in our lives because it comes from his power and work in us. *He is* our holy example, which we should long to emulate.

The angels worship God for his holiness, and I think we should as

well. They repeatedly testify in heaven to God’s holiness. Isaiah told of how in his vision he heard the Seraphim saying, “*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!*” (Isaiah 6:1–3; emphasis added). And the apostle John testifies about something very similar:

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, “*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!*” And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” (Revelation 4:8–11; emphasis added)

It has been suggested by numerous people that these beings say, “Holy,” three times in reference to each person of our triune God: God the Father is holy, God the Son is holy, and the Holy Spirit is holy. This makes perfect sense to me, and since hearing it, I always think of our triune God when I hear or read the three holies together. I encourage you to pause and take time this week to say, “Holy, holy, holy,” as you think about the glory of our holy triune God.

Reflection:

- Read Psalm 99 enough times to thoughtfully make a list of the following:
 - God’s attributes associated with his holiness
 - our appropriate responses

- Is there an area of personal purity where you have failed or are struggling? If so, read the following verses in context:
 - 2 Corinthians 7:1
 - Ephesians 4:17–24
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8
- According to the above passages, what does God want you to do about impurity in your heart and mind?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Holy

- Exodus 15:11–1
- Leviticus 11:44
- Psalm 71:22–23
- Psalm 77:11–14
- Isaiah 6:1–3
- Revelation 4:8–11

Notes:

16

HE IS THE CREATOR



In the beginning was the Word, and the Word
was with God, and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through
him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

—**JOHN 1:1–3**

The Bible begins with the assertion that God is the creator: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Belief in this statement affects the way people live and think. Can you think of some ways belief or unbelief in God as your Creator would shape your life? I’ll share three ways on belief that I have considered. I am sure you can think of more.

First, if God is our Creator, he alone is sovereign over our lives; therefore, *He is* worthy of our reverence and what the Bible calls respectful fear. God determines when we are born and when we die. We should acknowledge and take comfort in his powerful sovereignty over life. A person’s birth and death are no accident with God! King David makes this crystal clear in song:

When you [God] take away their breath, they die and
return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit,
they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works. (Psalm 104:29–31)

Furthermore, the “Time Poem” of Ecclesiastes explicitly states that there is a “time to be born and a time to die.” Then the writer draws an appropriate conclusion and application: “I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him” (Ecclesiastes 3:14). Do you have a healthy fear of God your Creator? Jesus explained our need to have a healthy fear of God:

I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! (Luke 12:4–5)

Secondly, if God is our Creator, *He is* supremely wise in all he does; therefore, *He is* worthy of our trust. This is true especially when we don’t understand the trials and difficulties of life that he purposefully designs for our good. This is what God through the prophet Jeremiah beautifully portrays by analogy for the children of Israel:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: “Arise, and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.” So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the LORD came to me: “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done?” Declares the LORD. “Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.” (Jeremiah 18:1–6)

The apostle Peter encourages followers of Christ with these words, “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (1 Peter 4:19). Is there a difficulty or trial in your life in which you need to trust your faithful Creator? He deserves your confidence.

Thirdly, if God is our Creator, *He is* gloriously powerful; therefore, *He is* worthy of our worship! The apostle John wrote, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Revelation 4:11).

Sometimes we may be tempted to question God because of the circumstances of life, but as we wait upon him in reverence, trust, and worship, he will surely help! Isaiah’s words are a challenging comfort:

Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, “My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God?” Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:27–31)

Reflection:

- In what ways do you show God the respect he deserves as your Creator?
- Are you trusting in God’s sovereignty, wisdom, and power as you make the decisions of your life? If so, give some examples; if not, what have been the consequences of not trusting in him?
- How do you worship your creator God in private and public?

- Since God created us all, how should this understanding influence our thoughts and actions toward others?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Our Creator

- Psalm 33:6
- Isaiah 40:28
- Colossians 1:15–17
- Romans 1:25
- Hebrews 1:2
- Hebrews 11:2
- Thoughtfully read God’s conversation with Job about his creation—Job 38 and following.

Notes:

17

HE IS GOOD



Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD,
for *he is good*, for his steadfast love endures forever!

—PSALM 106:1 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

When I would read the creation account to my four wonderful grandchildren, they would sometimes join in on the repeating phrase after each day of creation, “and God saw that it was good.” And at the end of his creating, God said, “It was very good.” I believe it was good because God is good.

Have you ever questioned the truthfulness of the statement “God is good”? If not, you have probably heard others cast doubt on the goodness of God. Normally when people mistrust God’s goodness, they have experienced or witnessed something horrible and can’t conceive of a good God having allowed it—for example, a devastating tsunami or earthquake; a murder or terminal illness. However, there is a big problem in questioning God. *He is* the Creator, and we are his creation. *He is* the potter—we are the clay. We err when we reverse the order, as the prophet Isaiah warns:

You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker, “He did not make me,” or the thing formed say of him who formed it, “He has no understanding”? (Isaiah 29:16)

Our viewpoint of life is so limited compared to God's infinite wisdom and eternal perspective! Simply trusting in the sovereignty of a good God who knows best is a great comfort. Dave, a friend of mine in our Thursday-morning men's prayer fellowship, said, "I have always found comfort in the following statement I heard many years ago, 'If it is not good, it is not the end.'" It would be good to think on this truth for a while.

Joseph in his Old Testament story certainly had human reason to question God's goodness to him. His brothers hated him. Some planned to murder him, but instead they impulsively sold him into slavery. Then, as a slave in Potiphar's house, his master's wife falsely accused Joseph of sexual assault. He was unjustly cast into prison. Would this cause you to doubt God's goodness? Amazingly, Joseph chose not to have misgivings—but to trust God! His statement to his brothers, who feared his retribution for their cruelty to him, helps all of us who have suffered wrongfully. He said, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Genesis 50:19–20). God has a way of using evil and wrong things in our lives for good. His promise to believers who love him is extremely comforting when bad things happen that don't make any human sense: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). A good God brings good out of evil. The next time you are confronted with the evil of this world, trust and love God—rest in the truth that he will bring good from it. This is who our God is! *He is good!*

If you take refuge in the goodness of God, God will know it. The prophet Nahum said, "The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him" (Nahum 1:7). If you savor the goodness of God like the psalmist, you will be blessed. "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!" (Psalm 34:8). Like Joseph, you have a choice. If you choose to trust in the goodness of God, you will certainly have reason to sing praise like the psalmist, "Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing to his name, for it is pleasant!" (Psalm 135:3). At various occasions, the people of ancient Israel sang these words, "Oh give thanks

to the LORD, for *he is* good; for his steadfast love endures forever!” (1 Chronicles 16:34). God’s love, as well as his forgiveness, are rooted in his goodness, as King David points out, “For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you” (Psalm 86:5; emphasis added).

The apostle Peter certainly had tasted of God’s goodness. He admonishes his fellow disciples with these words, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:2–3). The spiritual milk is the Word of God and will help us to know our good God. Does your desire for God and his Word reveal that you have tasted of the goodness of God and have begun the process of maturing in God’s gift of eternal salvation? If so, continue to taste and feast upon the truth of God’s Word and goodness. If not, pray that God will give you an appetite to taste his goodness for yourself.

Reflection:

- In what ways has God demonstrated his goodness to you?
- What role has the Bible played in your discovery of the goodness of God?
- What song(s) remind(s) you to respond to God’s goodness with praise and thanksgiving?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Good

- 2 Chronicles 7:3
- 2 Chronicles 30:18
- Ezra 3:11
- Psalm 100:5
- Psalm 145:9
- Mark 10:17–23
- Philippians 2:12–13
- 1 Timothy 4:4–5

One of my editors, Patsy Skeels, shared the following comment in her note to me: “One of the first things to be taught to children is this prayer before meals: ‘God is great, God is good. Let us thank him for our food. Amen.’”

Notes:

18

HE IS KIND



But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for *he is* kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

—LUKE 6:35 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

The Bible describes love as being patient and kind (1 Corinthians 13:4). While we should not feel surprised when we experience the kindness of God, because “God is Love” (1 John 4:8), shouldn’t we sometimes stand in awe of God’s kindness?

What does it mean to be kind? Noah Webster’s first dictionary defines kindness as follows: “disposed to do good to others, and to make them happy by granting their requests, supplying their wants or assisting them in distress; having tenderness or goodness of nature.”

How has God been kind to you?

The psalmist magnifies God’s kindness to us in all of his works:

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. (The LORD is faithful in all his words *and kind in all his works*). (Psalm 145:13; emphasis added)

The LORD is righteous in all his ways and *kind in all his works*. The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all

who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them. (Psalm 145:17–19; emphasis added)

The Lord, speaking through the prophet Hosea, refers to his guidance of Israel as kindness: “I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them” (Hosea 11:4). Since God’s leading is a kindness, we can consider all the instruction of his Word, the Bible, as a gift of kindness. Truly, it is a privilege to have a Bible in our language and so readily available to give us truth and hope in God.

God is certainly kind to us when he offers forgiveness of sin and eternal life:

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3–7)

God is kind to answer our prayers, not only giving us what we need but often going beyond what we would hope. Jesus taught:

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"
(Matthew 7:7–10)

As a father, I enjoyed watching my daughter use her musical giftings as she developed her flute playing with the instruction of an excellent music teacher. She became passionate about music and practiced diligently. As her skills developed, her beginner's flute was holding her back. She needed an upgrade to grow. I spent weeks researching flutes and finally purchased the best possible flute that I could afford for my daughter. I found much joy in giving her a good gift and was rewarded with beautiful music in our home. Good gifts have a way of blessing not only the recipient but others, too, as the blessings multiply; recently, I was blessed to hear two of my grandsons play their flutes in a junior high band concert.

God kindly wants to give us good gifts too! One of my passions is fly-fishing, and I had always wanted a drift boat to share with others the experience of a river float and fly-fishing adventure. I asked my Father God about it, and he provided a way for me to not only purchase a good drifter but also to become a fishing guide. Did I need a boat? Certainly not, but by his blessing to me, I have also been able to bless brothers and sisters in Christ as we worship God together while drifting down a Montana river surrounded by his creation, including the amazingly colorful trout that we are privileged to catch and then release.

Do you have a passion that you would like to pursue? Our kind God, as your heavenly Father, wants you to talk with him about it. Prayer is really a conversation with our kind, heavenly Father. Jesus encourages us to ask him for good things.

By God's grace, we can also be kind because our God has been graciously kind! When Christ rules in our heart through faith and we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's grace in our lives will produce kindness toward others. One of the fruits of the Spirit is kindness:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22–23)

Disciples of Jesus are commanded to be kind based upon God's kindness to us: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Kindness is often associated with acts or words of kindness. A challenging test is to listen to your speech and observe your actions for a day. This can be humbling. Then keep evaluating yourself to see if you are being kind to others. May God help us to be growing in kindness to others in our speech and our deeds. Our kind God will graciously enable us as we ask for his help!

Lastly, God's grace is a kindness that we will be learning about for eternity:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, 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 coming ages he might show the *immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*. (Ephesians 2:4–7; emphasis added)

Reflection:

- List some specific ways in which God has been graciously kind to you.
- Spend some time in prayer responding appropriately to God's kindness to you.
- What are some ways God is working in you to be kind when your inclination is to be otherwise?
- What are some ways that you can model kindness to your children, spouse, coworkers?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Kind

- Micah 6:8
- Zechariah 7:8–10
- Romans 2:2–5
- Romans 11:20–23

Notes:

19

HE IS FORBEARING



Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

—ROMANS 2:4

God's kindness is linked to his forbearance and patience, as we see in Romans 2:4. Like we have noticed earlier, it is hard to just focus on one quality of God at a time.

When people truly see their great offenses against a holy God, they become aware that they are deserving of immediate judgment. Then we can really appreciate the forbearance of God! But what about people who are persisting in their own self-righteousness and sinful rebellion against God and are not thankful for God's patience? The apostle Paul answers this question for us with a warning by saying that they are presuming upon God:

We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to

repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. (Romans 2:2–5)

What is forbearance? Webster's 1828 dictionary says it is "the cessation or intermission of an act commenced, or a withholding from beginning an act." Forbearance is a "command of temper" or a "restraint of passions." The Greek word for forbearance, *anochē*, basically means "restraint in judgment"³ or simply "a holding back."⁴ God is withholding from us the judgment we deserve. Scripture clearly states that the "wages of sin is death." Death is what we deserve for our sin! God's forbearance moves and enables him to withhold his judgment. God's restraint provided the time for God's redemptive plan to work out in human history:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, *because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.* (Romans 3:21–25; emphasis added)

God's restraint can be seen over and over again throughout the redemptive history as revealed in the Bible. His withholding of immediate justice started with Adam and Eve and continued right to the crucifixion of Christ and then beyond into our present age. God gives each of us time to repent and trust Christ because of his

³ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.*

⁴ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.*

“divine forbearance.” Jesus Christ has not returned yet because of God’s forbearance. Scripture says:

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:9–10)

I wonder how many church attendees think they are ready for Judgment Day and are not? Jesus said to self-righteous religious people:

Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (Mathew 7:21–23)

Thankfully, God’s loving forbearance extends to the ungodly pagan as well as to the self-righteous godless. He gives more time for repentance than people deserve. I know that he certainly did so for me.

Reflection:

- Are you ready for Judgment Day? Share why or why not.
- What thoughts and emotions fill your mind and heart when you think about God’s forbearance?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Forbearing

- Romans 2:2–5
- Romans 3:21–25
- Jeremiah 15:11–15

Notes:

20

HE IS PATIENT



But according to his promise we are waiting
for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these,
be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.
And count the patience of our Lord as salvation.

—2 PETER 3:13–15A

What is the difference between God’s patience and his forbearance? While forbearance refers primarily to God’s withholding of righteous wrath and judgment, God’s patience includes the attitude he maintains and the work he does while restraining his judgment.

The apostle Peter encourages believers to “count the patience of our Lord as salvation” (2 Peter 3:15). Noah Webster lists one of the connotations of patience as “perseverance; constancy in labor or exertion.” God, in loving perseverance, has been working his plan to redeem humankind from the penalty and power of sin. Therefore, God’s patience with us includes his plan of salvation for humankind by sending his Son into this world to complete his redemptive work on the cross. Jesus was born to die upon Calvary! All of this reveals God’s patience with us.

While sharing his own salvation testimony in a letter to Timothy, Paul clearly says that in Jesus Christ we see the perfection of patience:

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. (1 Timothy 1:15–16)

How did Christ show his “perfect patience” toward Paul as an example to us who would believe in Christ for “eternal life”?

In meditating on this, we should consider another connotation of the word *patience*: “the suffering of afflictions, pain, toil, calamity, provocation or other evil, with a calm, unruffled temper; endurance without murmuring or fretfulness” (Noah Webster 1828). Certainly, Jesus demonstrated this kind of patience in the events that led to the cross and in the very act of hanging on the cross in agonizing death. However, the context of Paul’s letter to Timothy does not seem to point to Christ’s patient suffering on the cross. Then to what does it point? It must point to Christ’s patience with Paul when he persecuted Christians, even to death! Jesus taught that how people treat his followers, those who bear his name, is in reality how they are treating him (Matthew 25:31–46). When Paul consented to the death of Steven (Acts 8:1), he was in reality persecuting Christ. Furthermore, by the grace and power of Christ, Steven patiently suffered as a testimony to his Savior, Jesus Christ, who patiently suffered with him in suffering. After this, Jesus appeared to Paul on the Damascus Road and displayed his patience with Paul as a testimony to all that there is forgiveness in Christ when we turn from our sin to Christ in repentance—changing our minds and hearts about who we are and who Christ really is (Acts 9). That day on the road to Damascus, Paul called him Lord and obeyed his instructions. Jesus Christ had been perfectly patient with him when he did not deserve it.

We have also sinned against God. I am ashamed to remember my arrogant ridiculing of Christians before I came to Christ. If God could forgive Paul, he can also forgive me. How about you? Have you felt that your sins are so bad that God would certainly never forgive you? Then find comfort in Christ’s perfect example of patience with Paul. God is not a respecter of persons and will certainly be patient with you as well.

Reflection:

- Have you realized God's patience with you?
- If not, why?
- If so, list some of the ways he has been patient with you.
- Does God want you to be patient with someone in particular right now?
- Will you worship the Lord with me today and praise him for his patience and then go the next step and pray for his grace to enable you to be patient with others as you wait for his coming?
- Remember, scripture admonishes us, "Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord" (James 5:7) and "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

Scripture Meditation: God Is Patient

- 1 Corinthians 13:4
- 1 Timothy 1:15-17
- 1 Peter 3:18-20
- 2 Peter 3:4-9
- James 5:7-11
- What did you learn about God and yourself from the meditation verses?

Question for discussion: should a person confess their lack of patience with a person by asking for his/her forgiveness and stating that they will try to do better with the Lord's help?

Notes:

21

HE IS NEAR



The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

—PSALM 145:18

Have you felt the sting of the impossibility of being near all the people you love and enjoy at the same time? If so, you have probably experienced that foreboding feeling when you have to say goodbye. Frankly, I would rather just leave instead of having a long, drawn-out parting. However, with God, we don't ever have to say goodbye. *He is* always near!

In Paul's sermon to the intellectuals of his day on Mars Hill in Athens, Greece, he tried to introduce them to the God they identified as "The Unknown God." His argument reveals much about the sovereignty of the one true God as well as the fact that *He is* near even though one may not realize it. Let's consider his teaching:

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined

allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. *Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being.”* (Acts 17:24–28; emphasis added)

The fact that you and I are alive is a testimony that God is near and that he wants you to seek him and find him! Whether people realize it or not, God “is actually not far from each one of us.” In fact, one Bible poet emphasized that fleeing from God’s presence is impossible:

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven,
you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol,
you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
(Psalm 139:7–10)

God spoke this message through his prophet Jeremiah, “Am I a God at hand,’ declares the LORD, ‘and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?’ declares the LORD. ‘Do I not fill heaven and earth?’ declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:23–24).

God’s nearness is a fact because of his omnipresence, which we meditated on in chapter 6, but when we think of God being near, it seems to feel more personal to me. It seems that the testimony of the psalmist indicates that God is especially near to those who seek God and want to be close to him:

The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.

*The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.*

He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;
he also hears their cry and saves them.

The LORD preserves all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.

(Psalm 145:17–20; emphasis added)

But why do we not always feel God’s closeness? While we could just thoughtlessly blame God, I think it would be better to look into our own hearts. We should ask, “Is there something in my life that hinders me from being conscious of God’s presence? Could it be my unfaithfulness to God, my own sense of self-sufficiency, and/or my finding satisfaction in other things or beings?” The promise of scripture is that when we humble ourselves before God by drawing near to him, he will draw near to us (James 4:8). This week, spend some time reading over James 4 and asking God to help you remove anything in your life that has become a wall to his nearness:

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.* Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. (James 4:4–10; emphasis added)

Jesus also said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). Blessings to you in Christ as you seek to draw near to God. He has promised to draw near to you.

Reflection:

- When do you sense God’s closeness?
- When do you feel that God is far from you?

Scripture Meditation: Nearness of God

- Psalm 10
- Psalm 73:21–28

This week, try to remember that God is near at all times. Pause to remember the presence of God as often as you can.

Notes:

22

HE IS SPIRIT



God is spirit, and those who worship him
must worship in spirit and truth.

—JOHN 4:24

When Jesus talked with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well, the conversation became personal rather quickly. Jesus knew her tragic history. She perceived that he must be a prophet and promptly asked him one of the hot theological questions of her day: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." Jesus's response showed that the location of worship would soon be unimportant because God was seeking "true worshipers" who would worship "in spirit and in truth." He supported his claim with the statement "God is spirit" (John 4:24). What does the statement *God is spirit* mean? Think on that awhile, and you might experience the same brain cramps that I have been feeling.

Let's back up a step and simply define *spirit*. Most of the sources I checked generally agree with Noah Webster's 1828 definition: A spirit is "an immaterial intelligent substance. Spirit is a substance in which thinking, knowing . . . and a power of moving do subsist. Hence, [a spirit is] an immaterial intelligent being."

So, the statement "God is spirit" communicates, at the least, that God is a real person and not just a force or power. He thinks, knows, and moves. However, this moving, knowing, and thinking is not confined

to a physical body or object. As spirit, God is outside of the space, time, and material dimensions within which we as humans have been created to live. Peter warns us not to misjudge God because of this difference in our nature: “But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Furthermore, Paul’s profound statement about God to the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill can only be understood within the truth that God is spirit:

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet *he is* actually not far from each one of us, for “in him we live and move and have our being,” as even some of your own poets have said. For we are indeed his offspring. Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. (Acts 17:24–29; emphasis added)

As an all-present spirit, God can be near each of us at the same time. This is mind-boggling when we consider the billions who inhabit the earth! David brings out this omnipresent nature of God’s being as spirit in an enlightening and meaningful way:

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts

of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139:7–10)

The fact that the Lord is spirit can bring us much comfort and peace in the trials of life because we know that we can call upon him in any place or at any time. I find it easier to trust in God when I remember that *He is* not bound by my limitations of time, space, and material world.

The fact that *God is spirit* reassures us that we can worship him all the time and in every place. Furthermore, as we are made in God's image, he has given to each of us a part of our being that is a spirit. True worship must come from within our spirit as we connect with God's spirit and truth. Lord, God, please help us to worship you in spirit and in truth. This week, read Romans chapter 8 numerous times. As you do, invite the Holy Spirit to reveal himself in more clear and powerful ways in your life.

Reflection:

- Does the fact of God being a spirit affect your daily living? If so, how? If not, why not?
- Does God desire a change in the way you relate to him as spirit?
- What comfort and wisdom can you receive from the truth that God is spirit?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Spirit

- I also encourage you to read Acts 17 over and over again this week. Read slowly and thoughtfully and think about God, whom Paul is describing.
- The following verses are good for meditation as well:
 - Genesis 1:1–2
 - Psalm 143:10
 - Romans 8:14

- 1 Corinthians 2:9–11
- 1 Corinthians 6:11
- 2 Corinthians 3:16–18

Notes:

23

HE IS NOT A MAN



God is not man, that he should lie,
or a son of man, that he should change his mind.
Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he
spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

—NUMBERS 23:19

Religious teachers sometimes blur the distinctions between God and humankind. Have you noticed how some cults deify man and humanize God? You may be able to name a few. However, we need to take care not to just focus on the errors of others and neglect to see our own tendencies to slide into this same trap. If we are honest, I think we can easily confess that we sometimes expect God to act like we would in certain situations.

Apparently, the prophet Balaam and King Balak expected God to be like them. Balak, king of Moab, feared Israel because they had defeated the kings of the Amorites. He sent and asked for Balaam to come and curse Israel. Balaam sought the LORD about the matter. Then God said, “You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed” (Numbers 22:12). Well, Balaam did send the inquirers home. But others, more prestigious, were sent a second time, so Balaam asked God about the matter again. Had not God already spoken? Yes, certainly! Why was Balaam asking again? The apostle Peter gives us a window into Balaam’s heart as he teaches

about unrighteous and covetous people using him as an infamous example:

Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. (2 Peter 2:15–16)

As a result of this experience, Balaam committed himself to only speak God's Word; however, his heart was not in it. Balaam and King Balak persevered in wanting what God made clear he did not want. Apparently, they thought that by persistent demands, they could influence God to change his mind about the matter. Then God spoke to Balaam and King Balak these powerful words:

God *is* not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do *it*? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? (Numbers 23:19)

Sometimes we want to bless what God has cursed and curse what God has blessed—and we expect him to change to our way of thinking. This is a dangerous position. Is not this blasphemy? While we would never allow such blasphemous thoughts to enter a creed or doctrinal statement, do not our words and actions sometimes show how easily we can slip into the “way of Balaam”?

Seeking the mind of God on all the issues of life takes constant vigilance. However, thinking like men and not accepting what God says is so very easy. In doing so, we could find ourselves fighting against God even though we think we are right and well intentioned.

The apostle Peter found this out, as scripture records:

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the

elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’” (Matthew 16:21–23)

O Lord, help us to accept you for who you really are, to hear what you are really saying, and to obey you and love you for who you really are.

Reflection:

- What do you find hard to accept about God because *He is* not like you?
- Do you want to accept all the truth about who God is? Why or why not?
- Will you make your responses to the above questions a matter of prayer to the Lord?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Not a Man

- Please take time to read the story of Balaam for yourself in Numbers 22 and 23.
- Genesis 2:7
- Hosea 11:7–12
- Mark 10:24–27

Notes:

24

HE IS UNCHANGING



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

—JAMES 1:17

Have you ever noticed that the people in your life, as well as you, are always changing? This can lead to frustration with oneself and others! In fact, one of the major complaints in marriage is that one's spouse is not the person he or she thought that spouse was. Similarly, you will find out as you get to know God better that *He is* not the person you thought he was. However, unlike man, this is not because God is changing! It is because we are changing in our knowledge of him. The Bible makes it absolutely clear that God does not change in nature or attribute. God is not growing or becoming something new or better. Jesus's half-brother James explains, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17). Perfect gifts can only come from a perfect person. This perfect person is called the "Father of lights" because he created light and does not vary in his thoughts or actions due to any change in character. Theologians call this the immutability or unchangeableness of God's nature.

The word *shadow* in the verse is very illustrative. While driving home one evening, I took notice of the shadows being cast across the

highway. It was amazing to see how long a shadow a small object could make because of the changing position of the sun as it lowered into the horizon. Shadows are constantly changing! We can take great comfort in the fact that “there is no shadow due to change” in God. His position on every issue is always consistent, unchanging, and completely dependable. God’s clearly stated will for our lives in scripture is not going to change. *He is* not on again, off again. *He is* not one person today and another person tomorrow! When you go to bed tonight, you can rest assured that God will be the same in the morning when you wake up.

Now, at times God seems to us to be changing. But in reality, we are the ones who are changing. God, being consistent within his nature, will only change the way he deals with us. For example, when we as children of God sin against our heavenly Father, he will lovingly discipline and correct us. God’s disposition toward us did not change; however, his dealing with us was different because we changed. In some translations, you will find verses that indicate that God “repented” from having done something. The word *repentance* in English does carry the idea of a change of mind. For example, Moses records, “And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart” (Genesis 6:6 KJV). This word for “repentance” can also be translated “sorrowed.” Clearly God was grieved that he would have to change his dealings with humans by bringing them to justice and destruction because of their rebellion. God’s nature did not change; his relationship with humankind changed because of the change in humans. Similarly, when King Saul habitually disobeyed God, it is recorded that “the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel” (1 Samuel 15:35). This grieved God and resulted in his purposes changing for Saul. God’s nature did not change. What changed were his dealings with an individual person.

Because God is unchanging, we can have complete confidence in him even though we are prone to change. We can marvel at who our God really is, as the psalmist did:

Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment.

You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end.
(Psalm 102:25–27)

The next time you see the shadows lengthening, remember that in God “there is no variation or shadow due to change” and join in adoration of the eternal self-existent one whose love for us does not change! We can take great comfort in the fact that God does not change. Furthermore, we see this truth revealed about Jesus Christ as well in Hebrews 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” While it is comforting to know that God and Jesus Christ do not change in their attributes, followers of God through Jesus can be encouraged to know that as we get to know God and yield ourselves to him, he will change us to be more like Jesus.

While God does not change, we eagerly wait for the ultimate change in our lives:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory” (see Hosea 13:14). “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (see Isaiah 25:8) The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:51–58)

Reflection:

- How does the knowledge that God does not change affect you?
- What changes have you seen in yourself as you have matured in your relationship with the unchanging God?
- Have you found God to be different than you originally assumed he was? If so, in what way?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Unchanging

- Psalm 102:25–27
- Psalm 110:4
- Malachi 3:1–6
- Titus 1:1–3
- Hebrews 7:20–25
- Hebrews 13:8
- James 1:17–18

Notes:

25

HE IS WISE



The LORD by wisdom founded the earth;
by understanding he established the heavens;
by his knowledge the deeps broke open,
and the clouds drop down the dew.

—**PROVERBS 3:19–20**

I remember a time when I had the privilege of sharing James 1:5–6 with a brother in Christ who sensed his lack of wisdom. I’ll never forget the expression of enlightenment and encouragement that shone over his face as he read for the first time, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.” We then bowed our heads and prayed, taking heed to the warning to ask with pure trust and confidence. Sensing our lack of wisdom and praying for wisdom are good. By doing so, we will see and experience more of God’s wisdom.

Wisdom comes from God because God is wise. What is wisdom? According to J. I. Packer:

Wisdom is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it. Wisdom is, in fact, the

practical side of moral goodness. As such, it is found in its fullness only in God. He alone is naturally and entirely and invariably wise. (*Knowing God*, p. 90)

Solomon asked God for wisdom, and wisdom was granted. His writings in the Bible are known as wisdom books, where we are told various times, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Proverbs 9:10).

Can you see the wisdom of God around you? Knowledge of God brings insight! The psalmist saw God’s wisdom in creation: “O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great” (Psalm 104:24–25).

God’s wisdom never fails because God is also powerful. I was amazed in my Bible research at how often God’s wisdom is paired with his power in the Old Testament witness:

With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding. If he tears down, none can rebuild; if he shuts a man in, none can open. If he withholds the waters, they dry up; if he sends them out, they overwhelm the land. With him are strength and sound wisdom. (Job 12:13–16a; cf. Job 9:4 and Job 36:5)

Daniel answered and said: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might.” (Daniel 2:20)

J. I. Packer also points out the significance of God being all-wise and all-powerful: “Wisdom without power would be pathetic, a broken reed; power without wisdom would be merely frightening; but in God boundless wisdom and endless power are united, and this makes him utterly worthy of our fullest trust” (*Knowing God*, p. 91).

Do you trust in the wisdom of God? When trials and difficulties fall on us, trusting him can be more difficult because we don’t see the

end from our limited human perspective. However, an all-loving and all-wise God has a loving and wise purpose for every hurt and pain in our lives, as the apostle Paul clearly experienced and testified:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:7–9)

No wonder Paul could worship and praise God for his wisdom and power:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33–36)

The psalmist acknowledged God’s wisdom in creation, Paul recognized God’s wisdom in daily providence, but God’s wisdom shines most brightly in the Gospel message. A loving, just, merciful, and wise God reached down from heaven to save humankind from sin. In the Gospel, we see God’s wisdom contrasted with convoluted human wisdom:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and

the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18–24)

Are you embracing the wisdom of God by trusting in Christ to save you from your sin? Or are you still considering this truth? If you have in faith received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, please join me in echoing with a shout the words of Paul, in praise and worship of God—all-wise and all-powerful.

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Romans 16:25–27)

Reflection:

- When you don't ask God for wisdom, what does it reveal about you?
- Should you be asking God for wisdom more often?
- If so, in what areas of your life?
- Tell God how you feel about his wisdom.

Scripture Meditation: God Is Wise

- Isaiah 11:1–4
- Isaiah 28:29
- Daniel 2:20–23
- Luke 2:40
- Luke 2:52
- Revelation 7:11–12

Notes:

26

HE IS KING



For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver;
the LORD is our king; he will save us.

—ISAIAH 33:22

It is reported that England’s King George II, while attending the first performance of Handel’s *Messiah*, stood upon hearing the Hallelujah Chorus—a moving tribute to Jesus Christ the King of kings. To sit in the presence of a standing king is disrespectful, so the whole audience rose with him. Now, after many years, it is still customary to stand at the beginning of the Hallelujah Chorus. If you were attending a performance of the Hallelujah Chorus, what would be your motive for standing? Would you stand out of tradition, the influence of the crowd, or reverence for Jesus Christ the King of all kings? The apostle John was told by an angel to worship God:

Then I fell down at [the angel’s] feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire,

and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. *He is* clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which *he is* called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, *King of kings and Lord of lords*. (Revelation 19:10–16; emphasis added)

Another word for king is monarch. The word *monarch* is made up of two Greek words that give us a picture of who a king is—the sole chief or ruler. While human kings come into power by birth, appointment, or usurpation, God is the supreme king by his eternal existence and creative power. Furthermore, while human kings are prone to abdicate their responsibilities and duties, God never abandons his role as supreme ruler. *He is* the perfect king! What God the king says is always true, what he promises will be fulfilled, and what he declares will always come to pass. Now that is one powerful king! The truth that God is king gives us great reason to bow immediately in humble homage. I marvel at the times I have tried to usurp God as king to rule my own life—what unreserved foolishness!

The psalms often reveal humankind in relation with God the king. Because *He is* king, we can call upon him during times of need, “Give ear to my words, O LORD; consider my groaning. Give attention to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray” (Psalm 5:1–2). Furthermore, we are called to worship God as King, “Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm! God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne” (Psalm 47:6–9). Without doubt, God is king:

For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights

of the mountains are his also. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! (Psalm 95:3–6)

Do you reflect on God as king in heartfelt worship and adoration? Paul gives us a powerful revelation in the New Testament of God the king when he wrote to Timothy:

To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17)

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time--he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:13–16)

Will you bow with me in reverence, honor, and love of our king?

Reflection:

- How would acknowledging God as your king change your thoughts and worship of him?
- Do you want to live a life of submission to God the king? Why? How?
- Based upon your responses above, write out a prayer to the King of kings.

Scripture Meditation: God Is King

- For an extended study, read 1 Samuel chapters 10–12 about Israel’s rejection of God as their king and the strong admonishment that God gave them in 1 Samuel 12:12–20.
- Psalm 84:3
- Psalm 145:1–3

Notes:

27

HE IS SOVEREIGN



[God] is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

—1 TIMOTHY 6:15B–16

Kings are often referred to as sovereigns. What does the word *sovereign* mean? As a noun, it refers to a supreme lord, ruler, magistrate, or king. As an adjective, it qualifies someone as being supreme in power and possessing absolute dominion. Our God has ultimate power, authority, and dominion. *He is* the ultimate Sovereign!

While under the threat of imminent attack by a great army, King Jehoshaphat acknowledged the absolute dominion of God when he prayed, “O LORD, God of our fathers, are you not God in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. In your hand are power and might, so that none is able to withstand you” (2 Chronicles 20:6). The king continued in prayer asking for God’s deliverance, and his request was granted. The attacking troops turned upon one another and destroyed themselves—not Israel.

Paul worshiped God as the ultimate ruler in a letter to Timothy, “He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen” (1 Timothy 6:15–16).

Do you acknowledge and testify of the sovereignty of God in your life? If not, why not? Are you in agreement with Jehoshaphat that no one is able to withstand God? Don't you think that we should stand in awe of God like Paul, who after highlighting just a few of God's marvelous attributes exclaimed, "To him be honor and eternal dominion"? Perhaps we would speak more of God's lordship over our lives by taking some time and reflecting upon our lives and how God has intervened in powerful ways in the past. A passage of scripture that helps me to recognize God's sovereignty in my life is what some call the "Time Poem." It shows how God rules over every area of our lives and helps us to view the things of this world from an eternal perspective:

For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.
What gain has the worker from his toil?
I have seen the business that God has given to
the children of man to be busy with.
He has made everything beautiful in its time.
Also, he has put eternity into man's heart,
yet so that he cannot find out what God has
done from the beginning to the end.
I perceived that there is nothing better for them than

to be joyful and to do good as long as they live;
also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil
--this is God's gift to man.

I perceived that whatever God does endures forever;
nothing can be added to it,
nor anything taken from it.

God has done it, so that people fear before him. (Ecclesiastes 3:1–14)

The apostle Paul wrote poignantly about God's sovereignty in his letter to the church at Rome:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:28–31)

Because God makes "everything beautiful in its time," we can rest in his sovereignty. When you don't understand what God is doing, you can be at peace because our Lord and supreme King can be trusted. He knows best, and that brings comfort and peace.

What joy, awe, wonder, and love as we behold our sovereign King!

Reflection:

- Looking back over your past experiences, can you see the sovereign hand of God at work? If so, list some of the times! If not, ask God to help you see his sovereignty in your past.
- Write about any experiences where God brought good from evil, as described in Romans 8:28.

- Read the “Time Poem” of Ecclesiastes 3:1–14 over and over again until God speaks to your heart concerning his sovereignty in your past, present, and future. Then write about his message to you.

Scripture Meditation: God Is Sovereign

- I suggest opening your Bible and turning to Acts 4:13–30 and looking for how God’s sovereignty is acknowledged.
- Proverbs 16:9
- Jeremiah 32:17–19
- Revelation 6:9–11

Notes:

28

HE IS JUDGE



The heavens declare his righteousness,
for God himself is judge! Selah.

—PSALM 50:6

The speed limit in Yellowstone National Park is forty-five miles per hour. While coming down a hill in the park, I passed a patrol car going the other direction. I was shocked to see the officer make a quick turn and start the lights flashing. I began to look for a place to pull over and glanced at my speedometer. I was going forty-eight miles per hour—three miles per hour over the limit. The officer wrote me up for exceeding the limit by ten miles per hour because she said I was catching up with the other cars. She gave me the choice of paying the fine to her, sending my fine in by mail, or appearing before a federal judge in Denver, Colorado. I chose to pay the fine by mail and not appear before the judge, because the fine was cheaper than the trip to Denver. While we sometimes have a choice to appear before a human judge for traffic violations, we will have no choice when it comes to standing before God as the Judge.

Scripture makes God’s authority as judge absolutely clear in the following two passages:

For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;
for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall

bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Romans 14:10b–12)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Every person will someday stand before God as judge. What will he be like? J. I. Packer makes the following four points to explain who God is as judge:

1. The judge is a person with authority,
2. The judge is a person identified with what is good and right,
3. The judge is a person of wisdom, to discern truth, and
4. The judge is a person of power to execute sentence. (*Knowing God*, main points from p. 141–142)

Therefore, we can conclude that no person will be outside the jurisdiction of God’s good and righteous judgment, that nothing will be hidden from him in making judgment, and that nothing can hinder him in carrying out his sentence.

Again, we turn to the psalms, where we see God and humans in relationship. This time, the psalmist is praising God as the coming king and perfect judge:

Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns!
Yes, the world is established;
it shall never be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.”
Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it!
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD,
for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness,
and the peoples in his faithfulness.
(Psalm 96:10–13)

Are you prepared to stand before your judge? Will you be rejoicing like the heavens and earth? Or will you want to flee and hide in fear and trepidation?

Through a story, the Lord Jesus Christ illustrated the attitude needed to love and look forward to the coming judge:

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:13–14)

Are you humbly looking for God’s mercy as the ultimate judge, or are you trying to offer up your own self-righteousness?

How you answer this question will affect how you spend all of eternity.

Reflection:

- Are you prepared to stand before your Almighty Judge?
- Why or why not?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Judge

- Psalm 7:11
- Psalm 75:7
- Ezekiel 18:30
- Acts 10:38–43

- 2 Timothy 4:8
- Hebrews 10:29–31
- Hebrews 13:4
- Revelation 6:10

Notes:

29

HE IS THE LAWGIVER



For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver;
the LORD is our king; he will save us.

—ISAIAH 33:22

God is not only our judge; *He is* our lawgiver. It was the reading of God’s law that brought spiritual renewal and revival to the people of Israel when “all the ears of all people were attentive to the Book of the Law” (Nehemiah 8:3c). We as people seem to be attentive to whatever we delight in. Proof of this characteristic in our nature is revealed in observing fans at any sporting event when it comes down to the championship playoffs. Many people, including myself, get very delighted with attentive focus during a championship game, especially when our team is winning. One of my greatest sport memories of all times was when Brazil won the World Cup in 1994. I have rarely experienced such emotional and joyous abandonment as I did with my Brazilian friends in Manaus, Brazil. The sky was filled with exploding fireworks, and hundreds of firecrackers thundered throughout my neighborhood. Such delight and celebration had spread through every city of Brazil.

What has it taken or will it take to get us as individuals and as a nation to delight in God’s Word more than all the other attractions in this world that compete for our attention, focus, time, and delight? The answer to this question is rather personal and will be different for each

of us, but I think we can each look back and testify to times when God reached down and tried to get our attentions or absolutely got it. It may have been a difficult time or a blessed time in your life, but whatever the case, God was and is trying to get us to delight in him and his law for our own good.

I began to understand the word *delight* when I held my first grandchild in my arms. At that point, the emotions in me that had been damaged and suppressed were partially revived. I began to take great pleasure in a lot of things that I had been taking for granted and found new joy in our life-giving God.

How do we guard our hearts from finding more delight in anything other than God? How can we release ourselves to fully enjoy and delight in God? It comes down to our moment-by-moment choices. We need to make continual choices through life of who we will allow to influence us. The psalmist warns us of the negative sway of some types of people and encourages us to choose God's influence over sinful humans' influence:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.
 He is like a tree planted by streams of water
 that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
 In all that he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:1–3)

As the judge and lawgiver, God gives his law to us for our own good—protection and blessing. His law is not repressive but liberating, as King David reveals:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
 the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
 the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
 the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;

the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.
 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
 sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
 in keeping them there is great reward. (Psalm 19:7–11)

This passage discloses the nature of the law and the lawgiver: perfect, certain, righteous, pure, and truthful. It also shows what the law can do personally in our lives in relationship with the lawgiver: it revives the soul, gives wisdom, rejoices the heart, enlightens the eye, gives warning, and brings reward when followed. No wonder the psalmist says that God’s law is his delight four times in the longest psalm in the Bible, Psalm 119.

Furthermore, for your meditation, there is a correlation between delighting in God’s will for our lives and the law of God. David expressed in prophetic foreshadowing, “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8). This quotation is attributed to Jesus Christ by the writer of Hebrews in chapter 10. Clearly our Savior delighted to do the will of the Father because God’s law was in his heart. We cannot expect to be satisfied in God and his will for our lives until we learn to delight in his law.

Our God is a good and loving lawgiver in whom we can take pleasure! May God grant us the ability to grow in our satisfaction in him. “For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us” (Isaiah 33:22).

Reflection:

- What brings you delight?
- Do you delight in the law of the Lord? (Read Psalm 119:70, 77, 92, and 174).
- Why or why not?
- If so, how did you come to this delight? If not, do you want to delight in God and his law? Why?
- Write out a prayer based on your answers above.

Scripture Meditation: God Is the Lawgiver

- Read Nehemiah 8:1–8 in your own Bible for a blessing about God’s law.
- For further meditation, read all of Psalm 119 this week.
- Ezra 7:10
- Isaiah 5:24
- James 4:12

Notes:

30

HE IS PERFECT IN JUSTICE



For the word of the LORD is upright, and all
his work is done in faithfulness.
He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is
full of the steadfast love of the LORD.

—PSALM 33:4–5

One of my beloved Bible college professors would often quote Deuteronomy 32:3–4 with a reverent, awe-filled voice:

Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe
ye greatness unto our God. *He is* the Rock, his work *is*
perfect: for all his ways *are* judgment: a God of truth and
without iniquity, just and right *is* he. (KJV)

God is great because he alone is perfect in every aspect of his being. As our Creator and judge, he never errs in judgment; he never misunderstands; he always does right by every person. *He is* perfectly just in holding us accountable for every thought, word, and action.

God is perfectly just, and every person will someday stand before him to receive retribution for the way he or she has lived. *Retribution* means the giving out or the receiving of a justly deserved penalty or reward. J. I. Packer clarifies God's retribution as follows:

Retribution is the inescapable moral law of creation; God will see that each person sooner or later receives what he deserves—if not here, then hereafter. This is one of the basic facts of life. And, being made in God's image, we all know in our hearts that this is right. This is how it ought to be. (*Knowing God*, p. 147)

God's giving people what they deserve is pure justice. After the Great White Throne judgment of those whose names were not written in the Book of Life, Jesus declares:

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death. (Revelation 21:8)

Hell is just retribution for those who persist in these offences against a holy and righteous God.

Paul gives an even more detailed list of humankind's awful rebellion, including some sins that we might classify as not so bad. Please read this list carefully:

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. (Romans 1:28–31)

He then concludes with this sobering and condemning statement in verse 32, "Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them." What depravity we find in our hearts!

Furthermore, Paul makes it clear that it is just for God to bar the ungodly from heaven:

For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. (Ephesians 5:5–6)

To the Corinthians, he wrote,

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9–10)

When we see humans' heartfelt resistance against a holy and righteous God, we quickly ask the question that Job raised, "But how should man be just with God?" (Job 9:2). Jesus told his disciples as they marveled at the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom of God, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." Paul told the Corinthian believers, after listing the sins that justly keep one from God's kingdom, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). What hope—the Gospel is God's way of justly forgiving sinners! Have you embraced the Gospel message of salvation from the just penalty of sin through Jesus Christ? The Gospel is defined very well in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 10. I would encourage you to prayerfully read these chapters if you have any doubt. Paul said in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ..."

Reflection:

- Do you find comfort or alarm in knowing that God is perfect in justice? Why?
- To what should God's justice bring you?

Scripture Meditation: God's Justice

- Psalm 37:27–28
- Isaiah 5:15–16
- Isaiah 61:8
- Ezekiel 33:17–20
- Jeremiah 23:4–6
- Revelation 15:3
- Revelation 16:7

Notes:

31

HE IS RIGHTEOUS



The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.

—PSALM 145:17

Righteousness and justice are like two sides of the same coin; if you have one, you have the other. You really can't separate them. I learned this lesson in college when it came to following my professors' instructions. Some exacting professors strictly taught their formatting requirements for theme papers, which I sometimes neglected to follow. Mostly, I deviated by carelessness, but once by choice. My paper had turned out to be half a page too long. I was unwilling to rewrite it because I liked it the way it was, in spite of the fact that he had warned us of a half-a-grade deduction for noncompliant page length. My professor was just and righteous to dock my paper points for my disregard of his clear instructions. My stubbornness missed the mark; I had not met his clear standard. I was unrighteous. While I had hoped for leniency, I justly got what I deserved—a lower grade!

The word *righteousness* simply means doing right. It means conforming to a given standard or adhering to a law in consistent practice. For instance, in most cultures, there is a standard of measurement for the purpose of business. If a certain seller of produce or fruit used an inaccurate scale of measurement, it would be an unrighteous scale because it did not conform to the standard. If the seller did it on purpose for his own advantage, he would be an unrighteous person because he

broke God's law forbidding theft. Solomon wrote, "A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight" (Proverbs 11:1). God delights in just weights of measurement because he himself is righteous.

This leads us to a probing question concerning our Creator God: to what correct standard or law does God conform himself in order to do right? Because God is the eternal self-existent one, he has no standard or law outside himself; he himself is the standard. His righteousness is his pure and perfect conformity to all that *He is*. God is light, love, holy, eternal, faithful, good, just, merciful, gracious, all-powerful, all-knowing, sovereign, true, wise, and much more. God adheres to all of his attributes in perfect union and harmony. He always does right and never does anything wrong, regardless of those who charge him with wrongdoing. The problem is not with God; it is with us and our limited perspective of his ways. As we grow in knowing God, we will increasingly see his righteousness in every facet of his being, in his creation, and in his relationship with humankind.

The psalmist proclaimed his personal knowledge of God in worship of his righteousness:

My mouth will tell of your *righteous acts*,
of your deeds of salvation all the day,
for their number is past my knowledge.
With the mighty deeds of the Lord GOD I will come;
I will remind them of *your righteousness*, yours alone.
O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.
So even to old age and gray hairs,
O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation,
your power to all those to come.
Your righteousness, O God, reaches the high heavens.
You who have done great things,
O God, who is like you? (Psalm 71:15–19; emphasis added)

Do you think of God like the psalmist: “*Righteous are you, O LORD, and right are your rules. You have appointed your testimonies in righteousness and in all faithfulness*” (Psalm 119:137–138; emphasis added)? Knowing that God is perfectly righteous in who *He is* and what he asks of us should command our reverence and respect. Do you desire to listen to his instructions? Are you desirous to comply with God’s righteous commands for your life?

When we are caught up in the worries and cares of daily living, Jesus reminds us to “seek first the kingdom of God and *his righteousness*, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33; emphasis added). Furthermore, Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount that there is a reward of satisfaction for those who greatly desire righteousness: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” O Lord, please help us to desire greatly your righteousness, which we receive by grace through faith:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the *righteousness of God* is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “*The righteous shall live by faith.*” (Romans 1:16–17; emphasis added)

Reflection:

- What do you appreciate about God being righteous?
- Do you love righteousness? Why or why not? How?
- To what standard of righteousness do you aspire?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Righteous

- 1 Samuel 12:6–7
- Psalm 7:9–11
- Psalm 119:137–138

- Isaiah 5:16
- Isaiah 45:21
- Jeremiah 12:1
- Romans 2:5
- Romans 10:1–3
- 2 Timothy 4:8
- Revelation 15:4

Notes:

32

HE IS A CONSUMING FIRE



Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:
For our God *is* a consuming fire.

—**HEBREWS 12:28–29**

Fire has a way of getting our attention; it is both scary and fascinating at the same time. Fire is also dangerous. It burns fingers, shoes, and toes. Fire hurts when you are burned. Fire also sadly destroyed my uncle’s house when I was nine years old. I learned young that fire is powerfully destructive. Subsequently, I came to respect fire from an early age but also learned to enjoy its warmth and beauty around a campfire on cool evenings. As a young boy, I played with fire around the campfire by catching sticks on fire and waving them in the air. I confess that I still play with fire. My favorite trick is to place a paper cup filled with water into the hot coals and then watch the water come to a roaring boil. The paper only burns as the water evaporates. However, in time, it is all consumed.

Shockingly, the Bible reveals God as a “consuming fire” in both the Old and New Testaments. What is God teaching us about himself when scripture says that *he* “is a consuming fire” in Deuteronomy 4:24 and Hebrews 12:29? By looking at the scriptural contexts of this somewhat puzzling statement, we can begin to grasp its truth.

In Deuteronomy 4, God is reminding the children of Israel of how he had spoken his commandments “out of the midst of the fire” on Mount Horeb. *He is* warning them to obey, follow, and worship only him and receive his blessing or his judgment and chastening if they forget and choose to disobey. God’s pillar of fire had given them light by night in the wilderness, and he had spoken to them from the fiery mount, but he also would bring a fire of judgment upon them if they turned from following him to worship idols. In time, they did turn from the one true God. He sent stern warnings of his righteous and just judgment of fire:

Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of hosts:
“Because you have spoken this word, behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them. (Jeremiah 5:14)

And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none. Therefore I have poured out my indignation upon them. I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath. I have returned their way upon their heads, declares the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 22:30–31)

In Hebrews 12, the message is also one of warning: look to Jesus so you don’t faint in your faith, receive God’s fatherly correction, don’t fail of God’s grace, and listen to his voice. The chapter closes with this application and statement of who God is:

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:28–29)

Is this the kind of respect you give God?

Is your worship acceptable?

The fact that God is a consuming fire should strike a healthy fear in our hearts. Every person will have to stand before God's judgment seat! The works of believers in Christ will be judged by fire to determine reward:

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for *the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.* If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. *If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.* (1 Corinthians 3:10–15; emphasis added).

Furthermore, the works of those who reject God and his mercy will be judged (Revelation 20:12–15). They will receive their just retribution and receive the fiery judgment of God in Christ, as scripture reveals:

Since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that

day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. (2 Thessalonians 1:6–10)

Have you believed the testimony of the apostles and prophets and obeyed the Gospel?

May the Lord help us to be ready for his promised day of judgment by fire as the apostle Peter teaches:

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening *the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!* (2 Peter 3:9–12; emphasis added)

Reflection:

This week, please prayerfully read Deuteronomy 4 and Hebrews 12 to see this truth in its context and think about its implications for your daily living.

- What does the truth that God is a consuming fire do in your heart?
- How does God want you to respond to this sobering reality about who *He is*?

Scripture Meditation: God Is a Consuming Fire

- 1 Kings 18:22–24
- 2 Kings 1:2–10
- Ezekiel 22:28–31
- Amos 7:4–6

Notes:

33

HE IS JEALOUS



They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods;
with abominations they provoked him to anger.

—DEUTERONOMY 32:16

The Bible contains apparent contradictions. Please note that I said *apparent* contradictions. The Bible never really contradicts itself, even though it may seem to do so because of our lack of understanding. For instance, we find in the Bible that God is jealous and also that jealousy is sin. This seems to contradict the biblical teaching that God is holy, righteous, and without sin. However, when we understand that there are two types of jealousy, righteous jealousy and sinful jealousy, there is no contradiction.

The distinction between righteous and sinful jealousy is a matter of motive. What is the reason for your jealousy? To be jealous *of* someone is sin; however, to be jealous *for* someone is not. This contrast in motive is clearly seen in the following passages:

But if you have bitter jealousy and sinful ambitions in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. (James 3:14–16)

For I (Apostle Paul) feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ, but I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2–3)

A practical and heartfelt illustration will help at this point. If a spouse is gifted in a certain way, it would be wrong to be *jealous of him or her* for having such a gifting from God. However, if your spouse was truly being pursued by another person, it would be right for you to be *jealous for him or her* (see Proverbs 6:32–35).

Noah Webster defined jealousy in this dual way:

That passion of peculiar uneasiness which arises from the fear that a rival may rob us of the affection of one whom we love, or the suspicion that he has already done it; or it is the uneasiness which arises from the fear that another does or will enjoy some advantage which we desire for ourselves. (1828 *Noah Webster Dictionary*)

God is never *jealous of us*; *He is jealous for us* when we love something else more than him to our own harm. The Old Testament gives us many examples where God is said to be jealous for the children of Israel. They almost always refer to the fact that Israel had gone after other gods and had turned their back on the one true God. David explained:

Yet they tested and rebelled against the Most High God and did not keep his testimonies, but turned away and acted treacherously like their fathers; they twisted like a deceitful bow. For they provoked him to anger with their high places; they moved him to jealousy with their idols. (Psalm 78:56–58)

God had commanded Israel about idols and in doing so revealed his righteous jealousy:

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God. (Exodus 20:3–6)

Our jealous God gives this warning and instruction to Israel through Moses:

Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods. (Exodus 34:12–15)

We can take comfort in knowing that God's love will go after us when we are tempted to give our love and allegiance to another. *He* is jealous for us for our own good and betterment. As the apostle Paul was jealous for those whom he ministered the Word of God, we too should be jealous for people to draw close to God and grow in Christ.

I don't know about you, but I need to guard my heart from being jealous of others who have things I don't have. Years ago, I learned this lesson while rooming with a classmate on a summer mission team. I looked up to Peter and was awed by his musical talent. He was a gifted pianist. I was very jealous of his musical abilities. As time went on, it is not surprising that we had a hard time getting along, until we had a breakthrough conversation that sealed our friendship. In that conversation, I learned that Peter was jealous of my gifting in using my hands to make things out of wood as a craftsman. I also confessed my jealousy of him concerning

his musical giftings. Confession is sweet to the soul. We were now at peace and no longer in competition. We prayed together, thanking God for our own unique giftings and confessed our sinful jealousy. Jealousy died that evening, and a bond of brotherhood was born as two young men became content with the giftings God had given each of them. It is not wise to compare ourselves with others. May God help us not to be jealous of others but to be jealous for them when it is right and appropriate to do so.

Does God have reason to be jealous for you today? If so, will you not give him your sincere and pure devotion and turn away from your other loves? *He is* worthy of our faithful loyalty and highest love!

Reflection:

- Does God have reason to be jealous for you today? Why or why not?
- Is there sinful jealousy of someone in your life for which you need to repent?
- Read James 3:13–18.
- Do you have righteous jealousy for someone for which you need to pray and reach out?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Jealous

- Numbers 25:10–11
- Joshua 24:18–20
- 1 Kings 14:22
- Proverbs 6:32–35
- Zechariah 8:1–2
- 1 Corinthians 10:21–23
- James 3:13–17

Notes:

34

HE IS THE GIVER OF LIFE



The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath
of the Almighty gives me life.

—JOB 33:4

In the creation account of Genesis, God is the supplier of life. Moses described the beginning as follows: “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (Genesis 2:7).

Life is a gift from God, for God provides life!

How interesting and sad to know that we created beings have the audacity to deny the existence of the very person who gives us our breath! As I shared before, I tried for a time in my life to deny the reality of God. I cannot speak for others, but I know the reason I did so was because I strongly desired to be in control of my own life. I didn’t want God messing with it. The irony in my former thinking is that the very life I did not want God messing with was in reality a gift from him—it was not my own! A very precious gift that I value more deeply the longer I live.

Various scriptures teach that humankind is born with a rebellious heart toward their Creator. However, the desire of our life giver is to reconcile us to himself. This is clear in many passages throughout the Bible. One that we have looked at before is one of my favorites—Paul’s message to the intellectuals in Athens:

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet *he is* actually not far from each one of us, for, “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.” (Acts 17:24–28; emphasis added)

Human life is still supplied from God. We are still made in his image, although that image has been marred by the fall of the first man, Adam, into sin (Genesis 3). Albeit, we still should be in awe of the gift of life. When my daughter gave birth to her third child, a precious little girl, we all marveled at the gift of life. The doctor said, “How can anyone not believe in God after witnessing the birth of a child?” Each newborn I hold causes me to give thanks to the giver of life. The awe and wonder about this powerful God who desires for us to seek him and know him permeates the room of a newborn. It is a feeling that is hard to describe until you experience it yourself.

This adventure of learning to know God begins with faith, a believing trust in a Creator God. Hebrews 11:3 explains, “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” And then Hebrews 11:6 declares, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Are you believing in God and seeking him? It would surely help if we would remember Paul’s words of wisdom: “in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Furthermore, the life we now experience is just a shadow of the life to come. Jesus came that we might have abundant life, and much of that life is yet to come, as Paul taught:

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be *swallowed up by life*. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. (2 Corinthians 5:1–5; emphasis added)

What an amazing life we can anticipate with God in eternity! But how then shall we live now? Paul goes on to answer that question in the rest of the chapter. I will quote just a few verses and encourage you to read the whole chapter from your own Bible:

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. (2 Corinthians 5:6–9)

Lord, because of your gift of life, please help us to have as our utmost desire a will and heart to please you. Thank you for the gift of earthly life and the promise of eternal life to come.

Reflection:

- If you have ever been present during the birth of a child, what were your thoughts and feelings?
- If you are thankful for the gift of life, express your thoughts and feelings to God.

Scripture Meditation: God Is the Giver of Life

- Deuteronomy 30:19–20
- Job 24:22
- Job 27:8
- Psalm 30:2–3
- Psalm 42:8
- Psalm 54:4
- Ecclesiastes 5:18
- Isaiah 38:5
- 1 Timothy 6:13
- 1 John 5:16

Notes:

35

HE IS THE TRUE GOD



And we know that the Son of God has come
and has given us understanding,
so that we may know him who is true;
and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ.
He is the true God and eternal life.

—1 JOHN 5:20 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

Have you ever talked with someone who is adamant that believing in God is absurd? I have known a few people over the years who are on a crusade to convince people that God does not even exist. If you can look past their veneer, you often find someone who is really hurting, searching for something, and running from God. Most of the declared atheists that I have befriended have eventually agreed with me that their position is logically fallible and that they are really agnostic—one who believes that we cannot know if there is a God or not. Once we get to that acknowledgment and they know that I truly care about them as a person, we often keep in touch for a while and have ongoing conversations about God.

While agnosticism questions the reality of God, there is another error that may be equally dangerous—believing untrue things about God. God exists as he really is! We need to understand him as he truly is. The problem is that humans like to create gods of their own make-believe. God warns:

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them. (Psalm 115:4–8)

When a person makes up something about God that is not true, he has made a false god and has become untruthful or false himself. This is why it is critically important that we derive our understanding of God from his revelation of himself and not by our own thoughts or willful ignorance, as Paul said to the church in Rome:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:18–25)

In our secularized society, we don't often observe idols of stone or wood. However, if you listen to conversations, you will quickly hear about imaginary gods. For example, you may have heard someone say, "A loving God would not send anyone to hell!" Well, truly God is love, but *He is* also truly just. Would God be truly loving if he did not punish evil in a just way? Obviously not. When you are greatly wronged, you know that justice is part of true love. This is just one example of myriads of ways in which it is easy to take a truth about God and twist it into falsehood because it excludes other attributes of God.

If we are to know God truly, we must accept all the truth that he reveals about himself and his creation, whether we fully comprehend it or not. Jesus taught that a person's willingness to obey affects their ability to know God. He said to those who questioned his doctrine:

My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me. If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. (John 7:16-17)

Do you want to know whether Jesus's teaching is true and of God? Then be willing to respond with trust and obedience. Accept all of his instruction, and then you will grow in knowing the true God. This is the attitude I desire to have when I open the scriptures to learn about who God is. I pray that it is your desire as well. Will you join me in asking God to give us willing hearts to do God's will and know of the doctrine concerning his nature and ways?

May the Lord bless you as you seek him with all your heart!

Reflection:

- Are there times in your life that you have questioned the existence of God?
- If so, what helps you to keep coming back to a belief in God or at least a willingness to seek for him?

- Are there some teachings of the Bible that you have not wanted to obey, which contribute to your doubts?
- Would you be willing to obey in that area to test the words of Jesus in John 7:16–17?

Scripture Meditation: God Is True (Real)

- 2 Chronicles 15:3–4
- Jeremiah 10:8–11
- John 17:1–3
- 1 Thessalonians 1:9

Notes:

36

HE IS TRUE TO HIS WORD



This God—his way is perfect; *the word of the LORD proves true*;
he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.

—2 SAMUEL 22:31 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

A completely righteous, just, and faithful person will always be consistent and faithful to their word. Such a person is our Creator God. He can be trusted completely. He is absolutely sincere.

David expounds about God in a beautiful psalm of praise: “This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him” (2 Samuel 22:31). David learned this by revelation and experience. Often David narrowly escaped the attack of Saul and his army. For instance, one time David chose one side of a mountain, and Saul the other side. Twice, while hidden in caves, David could have taken the life of his adversary Saul, but he resisted the temptation to take vengeance into his own hands. God was his refuge; God would keep his word to him to make him king in Saul’s place.

How has God kept his word to you? Have you had some doubts along the paths of life?

I can certainly remember some doubts and times when I had to follow God’s encouragement, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5–6). I remember wondering if we would ever have enough financial backing to serve

God in Brazil as missionaries. It had been over three and half years of pre-field ministry, and we still only had 60 percent of our needed support. Why was the support not coming in? Hadn't God called us? Didn't scripture say, "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24)? Well, that was exactly the point God was trying to teach me. I was depending on my own efforts of networking and keeping an overcapacity, stressful schedule in order to help God out. When I finally trusted God and had a reasonable schedule that took the needs of my family into consideration, the remaining financial support came within a month, and we were soon off to Brazil in God's timing.

The book of Proverbs exhorts us, "Every word of God proves true; *he is* a shield to those who take refuge in him" (Proverbs 30:5; emphasis added). My friend, do you believe this? Your thoughts and your actions will show if you do! A person who takes refuge in God will be at peace and not worry about the future. He or she will live out Paul's message to the believers of Philippi on a daily basis:

Rejoice in the Lord always;
again I will say, Rejoice.
Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.
The Lord is at hand;
do not be anxious about anything,
but in everything by prayer
and supplication
with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.
And the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:4-7)

God's desire is that people trust him. In sovereign wisdom, he designs trials so that we will learn to call trustfully on him and experience his peace and provision.

We can learn from a future time, during the great tribulation, when those who have "conquered the beast and its image" will worship:

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” (Revelation 15:3–5)

Will you join me in thanking God for always being true to his word?
Selah—meditate on these things!

Reflection:

- What are you tempted to fret and worry about?
- Will you commit yourself to take God at his word and receive the peace he offers by following the instructions of Philippians 4:4–7? If so, how? (Be specific.)
- Are there other promises and words of God that you struggle to live out as true?
- If so, will you ask God to help you trust his words and build your confidence in him?
- You may want to read about the man who told Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief!” in Mark chapter 9.

Scripture Meditation: God Is True to His Word

- 2 Samuel 7:28
- Psalm 18:30–31
- Psalm 25:5
- Proverbs 30:5
- Isaiah 65:16–17
- Revelation 16:7

Notes:

37

HE IS NOT PARTIAL



For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords,
the great, the mighty, and the awesome God,
who is not partial and takes no bribe.

—DEUTERONOMY 10:17

Unfortunately, partiality between humans has come to be rather expected. When I was a young man trying to get a job, I heard a number of my elders saying, “It’s not what you know; it’s who you know that gets you the job.” Politicians are often partisan, and when they are nonpartisan and actually work together for the good of the nation, we are surprised. Sadly, the ugly head of partiality rears itself up at the schools, workplaces, and even the churches of our communities.

Thus far, most of the “God is” statements have been stated in a positive way; however, when it comes to being impartial, this characteristic of God is stated negatively in the Bible—God is not partial! Possibly, God chose to reveal himself as not partial to get our attention. I sense that depending on your situation and heart attitude, this truth could be either fearsome or comforting.

Moses wrote to the tribes of Israel:

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for

the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. (Deuteronomy 10:17–19)

What a comfort to some and possibly a distress to others to know that God does not take bribes and that his judgment of us is not influenced by our position, class, or race! His judgment is never clouded or misguided by partiality! *He is* always just and righteous.

The King James translators chose the phrase “the respect of persons” to communicate the sinful attitude of partiality, which leads to sinful actions and judgments. Albert Barnes gives this good explanation:

The word thus rendered means “partiality,” in pronouncing judgment, in favoring one party or individual more than another, not because his cause is more just, but on account of something personal—on account of his wealth, or rank, or function, or influence, or by personal friendship, or by the fear of him.

How might this knowledge of God, as being impartial or having no respect of persons, affect you? Let’s explore three possibilities out of the many responses to such a question.

First, if you have a heritage of which you are proud (ethnicity, religion, wealth, intellect, beauty, athleticism, etc.), realizing that it gains you nothing with God could be humbling. You personally will stand before a righteous and impartial judge—an everywhere-present and an all-knowing God! This makes Paul’s statement to the church at Philippi most radical, because he had much of which to be proud:

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth

of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:4–11)

Have you come to a mindset where you can say the same thing about your heritage so that you might have a steadfast focus on Christ?

Secondly, if you have a heritage of shame and humiliation, be encouraged! You can be perfectly accepted in Christ and be all that God wants you to be. Take comfort and courage from Paul’s admonition to the believers at Ephesus:

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11–14)

Thirdly, if you are given to partiality and respect of certain people in your judgment and treatment of others, you should stand rebuked by God’s example. Please take heed to the words of Jesus’s half-brother James:

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into

your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. (James 2:1–7)

When it comes to our relationship with our Creator, we are all on the same level playing field. I love what Peter concluded about God when Gentiles were coming to Jesus Christ: “Truly I understand that *God shows no partiality*, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34–35; emphasis added).

In our relationship with others, we need to guard our hearts from the sin of partiality. May the Lord help us to do so.

Reflection:

- Is it humbling or liberating to know that your heritage has no influence over God’s thoughts and judgment of you? Why?
- Can you think of some more ways in which the impartiality of our Creator God can influence us?
- Are there certain individuals or groups of people to which you are partial?

- As they come to mind, make a list of them and ask yourself why.
- What does God want you to do about your attitude and actions toward them?
- In what ways has God already helped you to grow to be more impartial?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Not Partial

- 2 Chronicles 19:5–7
- Romans 2:9–12
- Galatians 2:3–9
- Ephesians 6:9
- Colossians 3:23–25

Scripture Meditation: Warnings from God about Being Partial!

- Exodus 23:1–6
- Leviticus 19:15
- Deuteronomy 1:16–17
- Deuteronomy 16:18–20
- Proverbs 18:5
- Proverbs 24:23–25
- 1 Timothy 5:21

Notes:

38

HE IS OUR WITNESS



And no creature is hidden from his sight,
but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of
him to whom we must give account.

—**HEBREWS 4:13**

During Christmas break my junior year in college, I was unable to return home for the holidays. I had secured a temporary campus job as a night watchman, and as the nights grew long, I slipped into a resentful spirit. After making the rounds one lonely night, I handed my report, which was illegible due to my poor attitude, to my commanding officer at six o'clock in the morning. Having looked it over, he reprimanded me appropriately about my work being a poor reflection on my testimony for Christ. He kindly reminded me that God was watching me all night and that I was to be living and working in such a way as to glorify him.

How would your life be different if you consciously lived with the truth in mind that God knows everything and is everywhere? *He is* a witness to everything we think, say, and do. The Old Testament poets point out that God is watching us all with the following testimony:

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. (Psalm 34:15)

For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths. (Proverbs 5:21)

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good. (Proverbs 15:3)

We cannot hide what we are, what we do, or what we say from God. He knows! *He is* witness! So why do we even try? Isn't our natural response to our own wrongdoing to hide and cover our sin? That is what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. That is what King David did with his adultery with Bathsheba. And that is what you and I do, until God intervenes like he did with Adam, David, and myriads of others throughout history to our present day. When we sin against God, *He is* witness. We should quickly follow David's right example of repentance:

For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Psalm 32:3–5; cf. Psalm 51)

Can you think of some situations in your life where the thought of God being a witness sobered you into obedience? Let's be mindful of God's watchfulness and be quick to acknowledge our need for God's help to do right. Call upon him for help in your time of temptation, turning to God from sin.

God is also witness when we do right even though others may misjudge our motives and even malign us with false accusations. In such situations, the truth that God is a just and true witness can bring much comfort. Various characters in the Old Testament appealed to others for various reasons with a reference to the fact that God is witness: Laban to Jacob to secure that he treat his daughters right (Genesis 31:50); the elders of Gilead to Jephthah in a pledge that they would keep their commitment to him (Judges 11:10); Samuel to the children of Israel to

emphasize that he had never wronged them (1 Samuel 12:5–6); children of Israel to Jeremiah as a pledge of their future obedience (Jeremiah 42:5); and Micah to the people to stress their accountability to God (Micah 1:2). In the New Testament, the apostle Paul appealed to the fact that God is witness to attest to the truth of his conduct concerning his prayer life (Romans 1:8–10), his itinerary (2 Corinthians 1:23–24), his relationship with other believers (Philippians 1:8), and his motives in ministry (1 Thessalonians 2:5).

Are there some situations in the past where you should have called someone's attention to the fact that God is witness? Can you foresee some situation in the future where you may need to point out that God is witness to get someone's attention and remind them that God knows?

The fact that God is witness can be both convicting and comforting, depending on how you are living!

Reflection:

- Is the fact that God sees everything you do a comfort or a fear, or some of each? Why?
- Will you be open with God about anything you want to hide from him? Why or why not? Remember, he already knows!
- Have you experienced a situation where the fact that God sees everything brings comfort?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Witness

- Judges 11:10
- 1 Samuel 20:12
- Jeremiah 29:23
- Malachi 2:13–14
- Romans 1:8–10
- Philippians 1:8
- 1 Thessalonians 2:5
- 1 Peter 3:12

Notes:

39

HE IS OUR SHEPHERD



The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

—PSALM 23

Psalm 23 may be the most read and most beloved psalm of all ages. David starts the psalm with a very personal statement, “The LORD is my shepherd.” Then we learn that, as a shepherd, God provides necessities, heals souls, leads in right paths, is near, comforts, feeds, cares, and gives. If you read Psalm 23 thoughtfully, noting these amazing benefits of relating to God as your shepherd, you can’t help but conclude and exclaim, “God is a good shepherd!”

We can see others relating to God as their shepherd in the Old Testament as well. Jacob, whom God renamed Israel, considered God his

shepherd. In blessing his grandsons, he said, “The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys” (Genesis 48.15–16a). Furthermore, the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel each referred to Jehovah God as Israel’s Shepherd (see Isaiah 40:10–11 and Ezekiel 34:12–15). Other psalmists acknowledge and plead for God to be their shepherd:

The LORD is the strength of his people; *he is* the saving refuge of his anointed. Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! *Be their shepherd and carry them forever.* (Psalm 28:8–9; emphasis added)

Give ear, *O Shepherd of Israel*, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. (Psalm 80; emphasis added)

Know that the LORD, *he is* God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the *sheep of his pasture.* (Psalm 100:3; emphasis added)

I remember preaching a message a number of years ago, when a young lady stood right up in the service and objected to the Bible’s teaching that we are sheep and in need of him as our Shepherd. She said, “In our enlightened times, this is old-fashioned; we have moved past such degrading analogies.” Well, I must admit that it is humbling to think of ourselves as sheep. However, in my experience, it has been very beneficial to lay aside my pride and realize my need for the Shepherd as his lost lamb.

In the New Testament, Jesus reveals himself as the good shepherd—the shepherd who will give his own life for his sheep. He says:

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf

snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.” (John 10:11–14)

God personally shepherds us when we know Jesus and are known by him. Jesus later said:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” (John 10:27–30)

So, how can God be our shepherd? We must hear Jesus’s voice, be known by Jesus, and follow Jesus. We find great security in being known by Jesus Christ and being brought into his fold, hearing his voice and following him.

Be careful! There is a great danger in knowing the religion of Christianity without knowing the Savior of Christianity—Jesus Christ. Can you say as David said, “The Lord is my Shepherd”? Are you experiencing the blessings of Psalm 23 as a lamb in his fold? Do you hear and follow the voice of Jesus as your loving and caring shepherd?

Reflection:

- Spend some time reading and thinking about Psalm 23 and John 10. Can you truthfully say that Jesus is your shepherd and that you are following his voice?
- If so, write a testimony of how you began to follow the good shepherd. If not, what is keeping you from hearing and following Christ the shepherd?
- How are you following the good shepherd right now?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Our Shepherd

- Isaiah 40:1
- Ezekiel 34:11–15
- Matthew 2:6
- Hebrews 13:18–20
- 1 Peter 2:25
- 1 Peter 5:2–4

Notes:

40

HE IS OUR GUIDE



This also comes from the Lord of Hosts,
who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance.

—ISAIAH 28:29 (NKJV)

One of my favorite quotations from the Old Testament comes from an unnamed man—Abraham’s servant. He had returned to Abraham’s homeland to take a wife for Isaac. After experiencing God’s clear guidance in answer to prayer, he exclaimed, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the LORD has *led me in the way* to the house of my master’s kinsmen” (Genesis 24:27).

Can you look back in your life and see how God has led you “in the way”? You might want to start making a mental list to record later. After beginning your list, praise and bless God for his guidance that Abraham’s servant attributed to God’s “steadfast love” and “faithfulness.” God certainly leads us in his love and faithfulness, for *He is* an excellent guide.

One memory I have on my list of times in which God led me “in the way” is when we followed the Lord’s direction in teaming up with a certain mission board to go to Brazil as missionaries. We had just finished their required seminar classes in Ohio and needed to travel back across the country to Washington State to start deputation in the west. We only had \$150. We prayed for God’s guidance and provision

for the trip. We decided to look up a friend in Minnesota, whose father happened to offer me a temporary job on the spot. He needed someone to be the hands for his plumber, who had just broken three fingers. So, I learned how to clean drains and sewer pipes, a skill that God would use in Brazil, as I maintained mission property. God's leading also opened up a door to witness to the plumber for three weeks. Having had opportunity to serve others and learn new skills, we were back on the road and on the way heading west. On a Sunday, we came to a small town in eastern Montana that bears my family name—Worden, Montana. It so happened as we were being led "in the way" that we pulled into town about the time that evening church services would be starting. I found a church with open doors, and I was glad to have an opportunity to attend. We met and had great fellowship with the pastor and congregation. Without any solicitation on our part, the pastor took up a love offering after the service to help us on the way. I still give God thanks and praise; he provided for us and led us while we were "in the way."

God's guidance may not always be so obvious. However, *He is* always directing those who trust him and look to him even in the mundane routines of daily life. God leads us daily by giving us wisdom and truth. He even gives his Spirit to believers to guide them into all truth, as Jesus told his disciples, saying, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come" (John 16:13). We still have the truth that the Spirit of God revealed through the prophets and apostles in the Word of God, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105).

Many of the psalms contain examples of how to call upon God for guidance:

Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me. (Psalm 5:8)

Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. (Psalm 25:5)

Previously, when we reflected on the truth that God is eternal in chapter 9, we marveled at God’s eternal gifts. Well, we need to add one more eternal gift—guidance. The Sons of Korah sang of God’s guidance as eternal, “You may tell the next generation that this is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever” (Psalm 48:12–14).

Will you wait for God’s guidance as you are “in the way”? He will surely guide you if you call upon him and seek truth and wisdom from his Word—the Bible.

Reflection:

- Can you remember some times when God led you “in the way”?
- Have you neglected to wait for God’s guidance in the past and suffered by going down difficult and even dangerous paths?
- Is there an area of life where you need to ask God for guidance and wait upon him? If so, what area(s)?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Our Guide

- Exodus 13:21
- Psalm 27:11–14
- Psalm 31:3–4
- Psalm 73:24–25
- Proverbs 3:5
- John 16:13
- James 1:2–8

Notes:

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HE IS OUR PROVIDER



Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

—REVELATION 4:11

When you are in need, to whom do you turn? Is your first thought or natural response to turn to God as your provider, or do you turn to someone or something else?

Abraham is an example of someone who looked to God. He testified of God's provision for him in a big way. God had asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac as a test of his faithfulness. Having reached the place of God's clear command, Abraham laid his son upon an altar and raised the knife to slay him. God stopped him and supplied a substitute sacrifice for Abraham's son. Afterward, in worship, Abraham coined a name for God that told of what he had done for him in that place of testing—Jehovahjireh. Moses recorded this in Genesis 22:14: "So Abraham called the name of that place, 'The LORD will provide'; as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.'" The New Testament gives us some insight into the thoughts of Abraham while he carried out God's instructions:

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac:
and he that had received the promises offered up his

only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. (Hebrews 11:17–19)

What trust in God!

Can you testify of a place where God was your Jehovahjireh? The Bible is full of examples of people who looked to God to provide for their needs in difficult times, places, and situations. Can you think of other examples of people who trusted in God's provision that will encourage you to greater confidence in God to supply your needs?

Let's think about some of the areas where we should be looking to God for his provision:

- He provides a place of rest (Joshua 1:13–15; Hebrews 4).
- He gives life (Job 33:4).
- He gives counsel (Psalm 16:17).
- He provides for the needy (Psalm 68:7–10).
- He gives power and strength to his people (Psalm 68:35),
- He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children (Psalm 113:9).
- He provides food for those who fear him (Psalm 111:4–5).
- He gives food to the hungry (Psalm 145:5–10).
- He gives wisdom (Proverbs 2:6–8; James 1:5).
- He gives light (Proverbs 29:13; Jeremiah 31:35).
- He gives good things to those who ask him (Matthew 7:11).
- He will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).
- He gives his Holy Spirit to you (1 Thessalonians 4:7–8).
- He gives life to all things (1 Timothy 6:13).
- He richly provides us with everything to enjoy (1 Timothy 6:14–19).
- He provides gifts and strength that we might serve him (1 Peter 4:10–11).
- He gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

Would you agree that this list covers just about every need we might have in a general way? Everything we need really comes from God, and we should praise and thank him for his many provisions that are tailored just for our benefit.

While everything ultimately does come from God, often God uses his children to be a means of grace or mercy to provide for those in need. God wants us to be willing instruments in his hand to give others a helping hand. I was once attending a worship service in our community, and it was evident that the pastor was missing. He came into the service late. He shared how God gave him an opportunity to help a needy family who had fallen upon hard times. He had just put gas in their truck to help them on their way back to Texas.

Furthermore, God wants us to help supply more than just physical needs. Maybe God would have us give of our time and heart. As one friend of mine once told me, “Thank you for the gift of your presence.” I thought he was the one who was blessing me with a place to park our travel trailer home while we stayed in the area for a couple months. While there, we shared evenings of fellowship and worship of God—true iron-sharpening-iron friendship. Do you need to give someone a present of your presence? Thoughtful words of encouragement, comfort, and compassion are gifts God intends for us to pass on to others. We need to remember the words of the apostle Paul and our Savior: “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” (Acts 20:35). Have you passed up opportunities to serve others in the name of Jesus? I know I have, to my regret! May God help us to share his provision of treasure, talent, and time with others who are in need. God’s provisions are for sharing!

Reflection:

- In what ways have you experienced God’s provision?
- Are you thankful for God’s provision in your life?
- If yes, how do you express it?
- Will you trust God to provide for you?

- Why or why not?
- Is there someone who God would have you to help now or in the future?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Our Provider! Jehovahjireh

- Deuteronomy 8:17–20
- Joshua 1:13
- Job 33:4
- Psalm 16:7
- Psalm 68:7–10
- Psalm 68:35
- Psalm 113:5–9
- Psalm 111:4–5
- Psalm 146:5–10
- Proverbs 2:6–8
- Proverbs 29:13
- Jeremiah 31:35
- Matthew 7:11
- 2 Corinthians 9:8–15
- Philippians 4:18–19
- 1 Thessalonians 4:7–8
- 1 Timothy 6:13–19
- 1 Peter 5:5
- James 4:6
- 1 Peter 4:10–11

Notes:

42

HE IS OUR PHYSICIAN



Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed;
save me, and I shall be saved, for you are my praise.

—**JEREMIAH 17:14**

As I wrote the first draft of this devotional, I was suffering from an acute sinus infection that left me very weak and with continual pain in my sinuses, ears, and body. At such times, I pray to God and call for an appointment with a health care provider. Being sick is no fun but always helpful spiritually to get my focus more clearly on my Maker.

Pain is a good thing! Hurt from physical injury or illness and from spiritual or emotional afflictions is a warning signal. Pain should cause us to slow down and find out why, and then take measures to deal with the problem(s).

When I am in agony because of sickness, I am reminded of how dependent I am on God for my very life. Sickening pain causes me to look to my Creator God, who is ultimately in control of my life, as God spoke through his prophet Moses, “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand” (Deuteronomy 32:39).

There are many examples in scripture where people prayed for their own healing or for the healing of others:

Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed [King] Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children. (Genesis 20:17)

And Moses cried to the LORD, “O God, please heal [Miriam]—please.” (Numbers 12:13)

And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people. (2 Chronicles 30:20)

Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled. (Psalm 6:2)

O LORD my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me. (Psalm 30:2)

There is a stark contrast in scripture between two kings of Israel who each were sick. We read of King Hezekiah, who called on God in his sickness (2 Kings 20), and King Asa, who did not (2 Chronicles 16). Hezekiah was at the point of death when Isaiah came with a message from God, “Set your house in order, for you shall die.” The prophet left, and Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and sought God in prayer. Isaiah was sent back to the king with a new message, “Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you.” However, it is told of King Asa that “in the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe. Yet even in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but sought help from physicians.”

What kind of person are you when you are sick? Do you seek God? Or do you only seek the help of physicians? The answer to that question reveals who you are really trusting for your healing.

Believers are exhorted to seek the prayers of others when they are sick:

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him

with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:14–16)

Do you recognize that healing from physical disease is a gift from God? Furthermore, can you accept the truth that sickness itself is a gift from God? God has a purpose for our own good and his ultimate glory in every sickness or hardship, as the apostle Paul testifies to the church in Corinth:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7–10)

Ultimately, when we are with the Lord in glory, we will be healed of all of our diseases, as God reveals through one of David’s songs of praise:

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and

mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Psalm 103:1–5)

Will you look to the Lord in confident trust as your Great Physician? It is usually wise to seek the aid of a doctor as well, when faced with serious sicknesses. But to only seek human doctors and not call upon God shows a true lack of faith in God. Your thoughts, words, and actions will show what is really in your heart and who you are ultimately putting your trust in.

Reflection:

- Can you think of a time when a sickness caused you to look to God for healing?
- Do you remember a time when God used a sickness in your life in an unexpected way?
- What did you learn?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Our Physician

- Isaiah 38:9–22
- Isaiah 41:1–4
- Psalm 147:1–3
- Ezekiel 47:12
- Matthew 9:10–12
- Mathew 14:14
- 1 Corinthians 12:8–9
- Revelation 22:2

Notes:

43

HE IS OUR PEACE



Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely,
and may your whole spirit and soul and body
be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

—1 THESSALONIANS 5:23

When you read the Bible, have you ever had a phrase leap off the page and into your mind and heart?

It happened to me for the first time while sitting on a church bus way back in 1978. The church youth group had camped out one night to attend the Oregon State Fair. I got up early that morning and was enjoying the sun on my back as I sat in the bus to avoid a cold breeze. I had opened my Bible to John chapter 14 and started reading Jesus's words as he talked with his disciples, foretelling of his pending death.

When I came to verse 27, I knew that God was speaking not only to the disciples but to me:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (John 14:27)

The world did not make any sense to me until I had come to faith in God through Jesus. God had given me a peace that I had never known and one I didn't fully comprehend. I did not know what was ahead for

me as a new Christ follower. However, according to this promise from Jesus, my heart did not need to be in turmoil, and I did not need to fear. He had given me peace!

God has a long history of bringing peace to people, as the Old Testament story of Gideon reveals. Gideon had recognized God as Jehovahshalom when he built an altar to worship him:

Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, “Alas, O Lord GOD! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.” But the LORD said to him, “Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die.” Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD Is Peace [Jehovahshalom]. (Judges 6:22–24)

In the New Testament, we find five occurrences of the phrase *the God of peace* and twelve occurrences of the phrase *peace from God*. It is absolutely clear that God wants to share his peace with his children. But what does God have in peace to share? What is peace? Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines peace as “freedom from agitation or disturbance by the passions, as from fear, terror, anger, anxiety or the like; quietness of mind; tranquility; calmness; quiet of conscience.”

Are you experiencing peace from God? Or do you need to seek peace from God?

When a spirit of fear or anxiety overtakes you, know that the God of peace wants to help you. Will you follow his counsel? The apostle Paul tells us what to do when anxiety comes:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever

is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:4–9; emphasis added)

Did you notice that God’s peace comes after we seek God in prayer and gratitude? And that peace is beyond our understanding? God’s gift of peace will protect our hearts and minds in Jesus and help us to choose to focus our thinking aright. This brings us back to the passage that jumped off the page and into my heart many years ago. The disciples were troubled about Christ’s soon departure from this world to again be in glory with his Father in heaven. Jesus comforted them with these words, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

God’s peace is still available from Jesus as we confront the trials and agonies of earthly life. Paul believed that Jesus still wants all of his followers to have peace in every situation. He concluded the second letter to the Thessalonians with this blessing, “*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.* The Lord be with you all” (2 Thessalonians 3:16; emphasis added).

When you are not at peace, God is not at fault! Although you may be tempted to blame him, you are responsible to receive the peace that is yours in Christ! Follow Paul’s instructions: rejoice, be reasonable, remember God’s presence, stay confident in prayerful dependence on God, remain thankful, and guide your thinking. If you are obeying these commands, you will surely be receiving the promised peace from God through the troubles and trials of life on earth.

Let’s reflect on the blessing the Old Testament priests were commanded to pronounce on the children of Israel: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; *the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace*” (Numbers 6:24–26; emphasis added).

Shalom!

Reflection:

- What usually robs you of peace?
- What does God want you to do at such times? Be specific.
- Do you remember a time when God gave a peace that was beyond comprehension?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Our Peace

- Please read Psalm 85 in your own Bible. It is a psalm of peace!
- Isaiah 9:6–7
- Romans 1:7, 5:1, 15:13, 15:33
- 2 Corinthians 1:2, 13:11
- Galatians 1:3–5
- Hebrews 13:20–21

Notes:

44

HE IS OUR BANNER



And Moses built an altar and called the name
of it, The LORD Is My Banner.

—EXODUS 17:15

Have you ever noticed that the trials of life seem to come sometimes like the crashing, stormy waves on the beaches of the Pacific Ocean? Each crushing blow of hardship is an opportunity to trust God and see his power, provision, and care. The children of Israel faced some overwhelming surges of adversity as they were cast out of Egypt. They were pinned against the sea, but the power of God parted the sea and destroyed their enemies. The drinking water was bitter, but God gave Moses insight to make it sweet. There was no food, but God provided bread from heaven. There was no water in the desert, but God supplied water from a rock. Then the nation of Amalek came out to fight and destroy them. This time, God asked them to fight in battle. “Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand’” (Exodus 17:9). The next day, Moses held up his hands to God for help. When his hands lowered because of fatigue, the enemy prevailed, and when his hands were raised, Israel triumphed. So, Aaron and Hur held up his arms. Afterward, in worship of God, “Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD is My Banner (Jehovahnissi), saying, ‘A hand upon the throne of the LORD!’” (Exodus 17:15–16). Have

you ever thought of God as your banner as you reached your hands out to God for help?

On the Oregon coast, I have often seen flags with the name of a city or town or business flapping in the wind. A banner is a flag, signal, or ensign that indicates to others who you represent or to whom you belong. It is a sign placed over a tribe, clan, or army, marking their identity and affiliation (Numbers 2:34). Moses, knowing that this was God's battle, demonstrated his dependence on God by reaching out to heaven's throne with outstretched hands. When God is our banner, we look to him for divine empowerment to enter and win the battles into which he leads us. When you enter into spiritual warfare, do you purposefully reach out to heaven's throne to grasp on to God because *He is your banner*? Or do you grasp on to other banners of less importance, such as your own wisdom, self-effort, and devices? May Moses's example encourage us to reach our hands out to God as our banner.

Years later, King David sang in prayer about God being the nation's banner in troubled times:

You have set up a banner for those who fear you,
that they may flee to it from the bow.

Selah

That your beloved ones may be delivered,
give salvation by your right hand and answer us!

(Psalm 60:4–5)

David prayed in another psalm a vivid example of how we can reach out to God as our banner and plea for his help to fly our banners in honor of him:

May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble!

May the name of the God of Jacob protect you!

May he send you help from the sanctuary
and give you support from Zion!

May he remember all your offerings
and regard with favor your burnt sacrifices!

Selah,

May he grant you your heart's desire
and fulfill all your plans!
May we shout for joy over your salvation,
and in the name of our God set up our banners!
May the LORD fulfill all your petitions!
Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven
with the saving might of his right hand.
Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.
They collapse and fall,
but we rise and stand upright.
O LORD, save the king!
May he answer us when we call.
(Psalm 20)

Reflection:

- Do you have any banners for the Lord?
- What in our culture would be similar?
- What is written on your banners?
- In what circumstances have you reached out to God?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Our Banner

- Read Exodus 17:10–16 in your own Bible for a blessing.
- Numbers 2:34
- Song of Solomon 2:1–4
- Isaiah 11:10–13
- Isaiah 62:10–12

Notes:

45

HE IS OUR COMFORTER



Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

—2 THESSALONIANS 2:16–17

When I was about thirteen years old, my sister and I went on a backpacking trip with our father into the Three Sister Wilderness Area in the heart of Oregon's Cascade Mountains. Dad was catching a lot of brook trout on a pristine mountain lake when he snapped off his last dry fly that perfectly matched the hatch way up in a tree. So, he asked me to climb up on his shoulders and get it. As I stood precariously and dangerously over the rocky shoreline and reached up to break off the branch containing the precious fly, I lost my balance and belly-flopped onto a big, round boulder just my size. The fall completely knocked the wind out of my lungs. I thought I was going to die as I fought to get the air back into my throbbing chest. I gasped for air as my dad apologized for not taking my safety into consideration as he realized how fortunate it was my fall did not result in serious injury.

Sometimes life brings blows that knock the wind out of us not only physically but emotionally and spiritually. Can you remember a time when you were without strength, hope, and the will to go on as you sat gasping for breath? A situation where everything seemed to be tumbling

down upon your head and you felt extremely weak? Where did you find comfort in your time of distress and need?

A psalmist testifies that focusing on who God is and what he does during trying times brings comfort to those who trust in him. After dwelling on the righteousness and mighty deeds of God, he says, “You will increase my greatness and comfort me again. I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God” (Psalm 71:21–22a). Hope and comfort came as the psalmist remembered God’s character! Comfort was also something that he expected to experience again.

David shows that meditating on God’s faithfulness to his word brings comfort. “I will lift up my hands toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes. Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life. The insolent utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law. When I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O LORD” (Psalm 119:48–52).

Once you find your comfort in God, you realize that none other gives such comfort as he gives. Under the inspiration of God, Paul makes this point absolutely clear:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and *God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction*, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. (2 Corinthians 1:3–7; emphasis added)

May the Lord help us to experience the blessing of eternal comfort pronounced by the apostle Paul, “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, *who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word*” (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17; emphasis added).

When we allow God to comfort our hearts, we are prepared by him to be a comfort to others. Is there someone God is leading you to comfort? God surely wants his people to comfort one another. Paul testified to this truth when he shared how God’s comfort is passed from believer to believer:

For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. *But God, who comforts the downcast,* comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. (2 Corinthians 7:5–7; emphasis added)

Lord, please help us to receive your comfort and pass it around to others.

Reflection:

- How has God been able to use suffering in your life for good?
- In what ways has God comforted you in your suffering?
- Have you been able to comfort others with the comfort God has given you through suffering?
- If so, give an example.
- Is there presently someone God wants you to comfort with a note, text, or call? Or better yet, in a personal visit?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Our Comfort

- Psalm 86:15–17
- Isaiah 49:13
- Isaiah 52:9
- Isaiah 66:12–13
- Jeremiah 31:12–13
- Acts 9:31
- 2 Corinthians 7:5–7

Notes:

46

HE IS OUR SHIELD



The LORD is my strength and my shield;
in him my heart trusts, and I am helped;
my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.

—PSALM 28:7

A shield protects you from harm. Once, while I was riding a motorcycle, a bee hit me hard in the face; I painfully learned the importance of wearing a shield on my helmet. Shields are also very important while arc welding for obvious reasons. Can you think of some everyday shields that protect you? One that we may not consider as often as we should is God!

In June 2011, I was heading home to Dillon after a trip to Helena, Montana. I had some mechanical problems on the trip up to Helena, so I left much later than intended. And also, since it was Father's Day, I had spent some time talking over the phone and praying with my dad before leaving town. We had each prayed that I would have a safe trip home to Dillon.

Strangely, as I left town heading south on I-15, a vivid picture of hitting a moose head-on came into my mind. I talked with God again, saying, "Lord, if that ever happens, I'm ready to be in your presence, only please take care of my family." I had never done what I did next. I raised the head rest on my seat to its highest setting and then moved the shoulder strap to its lowest setting snug against my shoulder. I was

soon engaged in deep thought as I worshiped God while singing along, listening to Keith Green preach through music over the Jeep's sound system.

About forty minutes later, I was winding up a dark mountain pass when suddenly from the left a huge cow moose flashed in front of me. I just had time to recognize her head before impact. Perfect peace came over me as the windshield exploded in my face. No doubt by God's grace, the Grand Cherokee was brought to a slow stop on the right-hand shoulder of the road. The motor was still running, and Keith Green was still singing. I had just driven through a moose. I was in shock! I was still alive and worshiping God on earth. Steam from the engine began rising from under the hood, jarring me into action. I shut the Jeep off and sat in silence and darkness until I quickly remembered to turn on the emergency lights. I prayed, thanking my heavenly Father for his protection. Another person pulled over and turned on their emergency lights. They must have called 911. The moose now lay dead in the passing lane.

God protected others that night as well, whether they realized it or not. I tried to slow down and warn a station wagon filled with people, but they drove right over the dead moose at high speed, becoming airborne for a short while. Amazingly, they did not even stop but just kept on going with lots of sparks, smoke, and steam following them. Then a small sports car, driven by a strong and good-sized young man, saw my warnings and swerved to miss the moose. He quickly pulled over and offered to help drag the cow off the road. The two of us pulled with all of our might to get the carcass to the shoulder to avoid further incidents. Sometime later, a state trooper and the paramedics arrived, expecting to haul me to the hospital. They were shocked to find out that I helped pull the moose off the road. The only injury I had sustained was a pulled back muscle in the exertion of moving the moose. After examining me and inspecting the Jeep and its totaled condition, they were all amazed that I came through the crash without a scratch. After signing a form refusing any treatment and transport, they all left me in darkness beside the road to await the arrival of the tow truck from Butte. I road into town with a captive audience of the driver and his two school-aged children. I told my new story of God's protection and

shared the plan of eternal salvation with this family that had never heard one of the most well-known verses in the Bible—John 3:16. God gave me the privilege of sharing the truth of Jesus with them, even if it took me hitting a moose to do so.



God chose to shield me physically that night, but what if he had chosen another outcome for me? Death? Hospitalization? Mutilation? In any other scenario, he still would have been my spiritual shield, fortress, and high tower of ultimate protection in this life and the life to come. God shields his saints from Satanic attack, enemies, temptations, and much more. To God be the glory! *He is* everything the Bible reveals him to be. I enter into praise with David, the psalmist of Israel, for God being my shield:

This God—his way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; *he is* a shield for all those who take refuge in him. “For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God? (2 Samuel 22:30–32; emphasis added)

But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you. For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield. (Psalm 5:11–12)

Is God your shield? He is mine! Clearly, my loving heavenly Father has more for me to do on earth for him! How about you?

Reflection:

- Do you remember some times when you recognized God as your shield? If so, list them.
- Is there something right now in your life in which you need to find refuge in God as your shield?
- Will you express to God with words the emotions you have when thinking about his having been your shield or being your shield in the future?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Our Shield

- Genesis 15:1
- Psalm 3:3
- Psalms 18:2 and 30
- Psalm 28:7
- Psalm 33:20–22
- Psalm 84:11
- Psalm 119:114
- Proverbs 30:5–6

Notes:

47

HE IS OUR FATHER



See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

—1 JOHN 3:1

My dad was really good at finding great places to camp and fish. I remember him poring over the topographical maps to find just the right place. When I was in junior high school, we found a section of fishable public land on the Williamson River in Eastern Oregon between two private ranches. It was an adventure just getting there! We hooked lots of fish on dry flies, and dad hooked me on fly fishing. After a rather cool night in the tent that was pitched about thirty yards from the river, I said to my dad as we were snuggled down in our sleeping bags, “Will you give me ten bucks if I run and jump in the river?” He laughed and said, “I won’t have to, because you’re too chicken!” “Will you?” I probed. “Yes!” Instantly, I jumped up out of the warm sleeping bag, quickly slipped off my sweats, and ran and jumped completely in. That plunge took my breath away, and Dad paid up. Decades later, I ask myself, “Why did I do that?” Well, for the most part, my dad was an absent father. I know now that I wanted to prove to my dad that he did not know me very well, and I certainly was craving his affection and approval. I probably also wanted the cash!

There is much brokenness in our world, and we have no further to look than our own families. Many people carry father and or mother wounds—childhood traumas that may be so overwhelming that the memories are deeply buried. I carried some wounds for way too long that affected my relationships for years. I would have a measure of healing and growth in my ability to understand my parents and offer forgiveness, but the temptation to bitterness would rear its ugly head when I was triggered by a bad memory, someone else’s anger, or the family sufferings of others. The process of healing from life’s wrongs has been compared to peeling the layers off an onion. God brings, uses, or allows situations into our lives for us to realize we need to look to our heavenly Father for healing, wholeness, and completeness. A person can never take the place of our heavenly Father, and we will struggle in life and relationships as long as we look to a person to supply what only God can.

It has been a process for me, but I keep finding deeper levels of healing as I peel back the layers of soul hardness by taking each memory of childhood and adult traumas to God, inviting his healing into my life. Oftentimes, bitterness toward a father or mother is a generational sin that is passed down from one generation to another. This can be very distortive in all of our present relationships. Scripture warns, “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled” (Hebrew 12:15). Our human parents may have let us down, but God’s fathering will not, if we allow him into the secrets we often want to keep hidden. *He is* a caring and loving Father who will help us when we ask and are open to his care and healing power. Will you let him in to your pain?

You may have said or heard someone say something to this effect, “I have a hard time accepting God as my Father because I never really had a dad who was a father.” Perhaps this kind of statement leads pastors to say things like, “If you haven’t had a good father, it’s difficult to see God as your heavenly Father.” However, I invite you to consider J. I. Packer’s insightful perspective on the matter:

It is just not true to suggest that in the realm of personal relations positive concepts cannot be formed

by contrast ... the thought of our Maker becoming our perfect parent—faithful in love and care, generous and thoughtful, interested in all we do, respecting our individuality, skillful in training us, wise in guidance, always available, helping us to find ourselves in maturity, integrity and uprightness—is a thought which can have meaning for everybody, whether we come to it by saying, “I had a wonderful father, and I see that God is like that, only more so,” or by saying, “My father disappointed me here, and here, and here, but God, praise his name, will be very different,” or by saying, “I have never known what it is to have a father on earth, but thank God I now have one in heaven.” The truth is that all of us have a positive ideal of fatherhood by which we judge our own and others’ fathers, and it can safely be said that the person for whom the thought of God’s perfect fatherhood is meaningless ... does not exist. (*Knowing God*, pp. 203–204)

Please do not let bitterness at your human father turn your heart from your heavenly Father. Truly, God is the Father of the fatherless:

Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the LORD; exult before him! Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. (Psalm 68:4–5)

Furthermore, King David looked to God when his father and mother abandoned him:

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, LORD, do I seek.” Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake

me not, O God of my salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in. (Psalm 27:7–10)

Have you been taken in by the LORD? Have you become his child? Do you call him Father?

Every person must desire, by the grace of God, to turn to God and be adopted into his family. The apostle John explains how a person is born into God's family by the work of God:

[Jesus Christ] was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:10–13)

Jesus answered [Nicodemus], “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God ... For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (John 3:3, 16–18)

After being born again and coming into God's family by receiving Jesus Christ with believing trust, God's children call God their Father:

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:6–7)

No wonder the apostle John says with awe:

*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as *he is*. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as *he is* pure. (1 John 3:1–3; emphasis added)*

If you are God's child through the gift of adoption, respond to his fatherhood over you by receiving the protection of his loving authority, by appreciating the affection of his discipline, by basking in the comfort of his fellowship, and by rejoicing in the glory of his honor. Spend quality time with your heavenly Father through reading the Word of God and prayer. Get to know your heavenly Father. Grow in your faith in God. Discover who *He is!*

Reflection:

- How do you feel about God being your Father? Or how would you feel if it were true?
- In what areas are you submitting and/or rebelling against his fatherly authority?
- Do you find security and comfort in God's fatherly discipline of you?
- Why or why not?
- How are you in communion with God as your Father daily?
- How do you honor your Father in heaven?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Our Father

- Isaiah 9:6
- Malachi 1:6
- 1 Corinthians 8:6
- Galatians 1:3–5
- Ephesians 4:4–6
- Colossians 3:17
- 1 Peter 1:3–5

Notes:

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HE IS OUR SALVATION



The LORD is my strength and my song, and
he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him, my
father's God, and I will exalt him.

—EXODUS 15:2 (EMPHASIS ADDED)

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

—1 THESSALONIANS 5:9–10

I once asked a neighbor in our apartment complex if he had ever been saved. He emphatically responded, “Yes!” He went on to tell me an incredibly involved story of a car wreck and how he had died two times on the way to the hospital but had been resuscitated back to life by the paramedics. This opened the door for me to talk to him about our need of being saved from sin and to point him to the Savior, Jesus Christ.

The word *salvation* in scripture is used very broadly, as it is in our own language. I like how Noah Webster defined *salvation* in 1828, “The act of saving; preservation from destruction, danger or great calamity.” Many of the psalms talk about God’s physical deliverance from harm. David speaks much of God’s preserving of his life:

I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation. (Psalm 40:10)

When a person experiences God's deliverance, whether it is physical or spiritual, he or she cannot contain it within. They must tell others! Can you see this in David? Have you noticed this in others? Have you experienced it yourself? When God gave me physical deliverance when I hit a moose on the freeway head-on while driving seventy miles an hour, I testified to all those around me whether they wanted to hear it or not! The same was true when I first came to saving faith in Christ. Some of my family members and friends thought I had gone bizarre and was taking this religious stuff too seriously. However, the burden of sin that was lifted, the dawning of new understanding, and the newfound peace I had with God through Jesus Christ was real—I couldn't keep this to myself and told others the best way I knew how at the time. David expresses how I felt then and how I still feel after over forty years:

Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation. Selah, Our God is a God of salvation, and to GOD, the Lord, belong deliverances from death. (Psalm 68:19–20)

The prophet Isaiah makes this prophecy concerning the joy of God's salvation:

You will say in that day: "I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation." With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say

in that day: “Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” (Isaiah 12:1–6)

Out of God’s love springs forth his mercy and grace that bring salvation to those who trust in him:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, 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 coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:4–10)

Noah Webster calls this “the great salvation” after defining *salvation* theologically:

The redemption of man from the bondage of sin and liability to eternal death, and the conferring on him everlasting happiness.

God truly is our salvation!

Reflection:

- In what ways has God saved you?
- Have you come into God's saving grace through faith in Jesus Christ?
- If not, what hinders you from believing and receiving Christ as Savior?
- If so, please take time to write out your testimony of how you came to trust in Jesus. Then be ready to share your salvation story with others.

Scripture Meditation: God Is Our Salvation

- Exodus 15:1–2
- Psalm 18:2–3
- Psalm 85:9–10
- Isaiah 56:1
- Acts 4:11–12
- Romans 1:16
- Romans 10:9–10
- Titus 2:11–14
- Revelation 19:1

Notes:

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HE IS A REWARDER



Watch yourselves,
so that you may not lose what we have worked for,
but may win a full reward.

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not
abide in the teaching of Christ,
does not have God.

Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

—2 JOHN 1:8–9

The verse that motivated me to start looking for and writing about Bible statements that clearly show who God is and what he does is Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV; emphasis added), “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*: for he who comes to God must believe that *He is*, and that *He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*.” Subsequently, I have pondered many, but certainly not all, of God’s attributes and acts. Presently, we circle back around to meditate on the truth in this verse that God rewards those who seek him. If you have made it this far in the meditations, surely you must be seeking him. Have you any rewards?

God revealed himself as the one who rewards to Abram when he directly told him “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great” (Genesis 15:1). He then followed his promise with a gift of righteousness to Abram. Scripture says, “And [Abram] believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

Have you received this gift of righteousness by grace through faith (Romans 3–5)?

Throughout the stories of the Bible, there is much evidence that God rewards those who seek him. God rewarded the Old Testament priests with temporal provision for their service (Numbers 18:29–31). Boaz’s praise and hope for Ruth demonstrated a deep belief that God would reward her for her faith and faithfulness to Naomi. He said, “The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!” King David testified that “in keeping [God’s law, testimony, precepts, and commandments] there is great reward” (Psalm 19:11).

King Solomon taught that “the LORD will reward you” if you care for the needs of your enemy (Proverbs 25:21–22). So, we should not be surprised that the Lord Jesus expanded upon this truth: “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for *he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil*” (Luke 6:35; emphasis added). God’s promise of great reward for loving the way he loves, especially by being kind to evil people, can only be attained by his work of grace in us. Otherwise, it would be impossible. We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:7–21). Are you daily relying on God’s grace to live in such a way that you might receive his rewards?

In Christ, there is a promise of inheritance with all of its rewards, as the apostle Peter exclaimed:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”
(1 Peter 1:3–5)

As we wait, how should we live? Live as Paul admonished believers to live, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,

knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23–24).

Is this how you live, play, and work?

Now that we have begun to come to an end of the meditations presented in this study, can you say that you have come to know more personally the God who rewards those who seek him? Have you experienced some of God’s rewards in your search for him? Are you looking forward to his future rewards with a heart more dedicated to seeking him faithfully each day of your life? Am I? My hope and prayer is that we can say, “Yes!” By the grace of God, let’s follow through because *He is!* But let us take heed to this warning from the apostle John, “For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward” (2 John 1:7–8).

Reflection:

- What rewards are you receiving as you seek God?
- In what ways are you diligently seeking God?
- Are you looking forward to the future rewards God gives? Explain.

Scripture Meditation: God Is a Rewarder

- Isaiah 40:10–11
- Isaiah 62:11
- Matthew 5:11–12
- Matthew 6:1
- 1 Corinthians 3:10–15
- Hebrews 10:34–39
- Revelation 4:9–11

Notes:

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HE IS GLORIOUSLY GREAT



Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling
and to present you blameless before the
presence of his glory with great joy,
to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority,
before all time and now and forever. Amen.

—JUDE 1:24–25

Have you ever stopped watching the fireworks at a New Year's or Fourth of July celebration just to close your eyes and listen to the sounds people make after the rockets burst in the sky? The crowd ooohs and aaaaahs in amazement. Certainly, God has wired us to respond with awe to grandeur. After the crowd has been wowed for a while by the intermittent repetition of a few blasts at a time, they begin to anticipate the grand finale. If it is glorious, with colors and shapes bursting in deafening sound all over the sky, they go away satisfied until next year. If it is a flop, they go away grumbling and hoping for better next year.

We have now come to the grand finale of our meditations on who *God is!* I certainly don't want you to walk away grumbling. Nor do I want you to be merely satisfied. Let me explain. I hope that with a scripturally enlightened mind and a Spirit-warmed heart, you will keep looking for the glory of God. We have just begun to gaze upon his glory in these meditations! The apostle Paul says:

But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:16–18)

Have you turned to the Lord? Has the veil been removed from you? Have you been freed from dead works and chains of sin? Are you seeing the glory of God and being transformed? If so, your appetite will have been whetted by the savoring of the revealed knowledge of God in scripture, and you will feel as the psalmist who exclaimed, “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!” (Psalm 34:8).

Let’s ponder God’s magnificence by listening to what others in scripture have said about the glory of God:

Moses sang in praise at God’s deliverance: “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, *awesome in glorious deeds*, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11; emphasis added).

David publicly prayed before the nation, “*Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty*, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all” (1 Chronicles 29:11; emphasis added).

During the days of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the wall, after the reading of the law, a group of Levites proclaimed, “Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. *Blessed be your glorious name*, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you” (Nehemiah 9:5b–6; emphasis added).

The apostle Paul in worshipful prayer wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless

before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, *to the praise of his glorious grace*, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:3–6; emphasis added).

And the apostle John, who was given a glimpse of heaven, described, “And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘*Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created*’” (Revelation 4:9–11; emphasis added).

Are you in awe of our Creator God’s splendor, glory, and greatness?
Let’s conclude in prayer:

O Lord, please, help us to love you because you have first loved us. Help us to yearn to seek you in our own personal Bible readings each day, week, and month until we see you face to face in glory. We have begun to get a glimpse of your grandeur and glory as our Creator God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Help us to see and muse upon your infinite attributes and powerful works as we continue our search to know you personally and behold you in your completeness. We know that you are great and glorious and agree with the psalmist who says, “May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you! May those who love your salvation say evermore, ‘God is great!’” (Psalm 70:4). So, Lord, we rejoice, we give thanks for your gift of eternal salvation, and we know and testify that you are gloriously great! We want to be with you at your grand finale, at the end of this age, and experience your glory that is yet to be revealed in the new heaven and the new earth that are to come!
Amen!

Reflection:

- As you begin this last reflection, you may find it helpful to review the contents page and read over the *He Is* chapter headings to review how great and glorious our God is.
- What have you learned about God's glorious attributes that has changed your relationship with him?
- What have you learned about yourself in relationship to who God is?
- Do you think your reading of the Bible was influenced by these meditations on who God is?
- If so, how?
- If not, why not?
- Has your love for God increased?
- If so, why?
- If not, do you want to love God more?
- Why? Or why not?

Scripture Meditation: God Is Gloriously Great

- Psalm 145:1–13
- Exodus 24:15–18
- Exodus 33:18–23
- Psalm 72:18–19
- Revelation 5:11–14

Notes:

APPENDIX

Methodology: In writing the devotional meditations, I did not try to start with an idea about God. I did word and phrase searches within a Bible search program to see what the Bible itself said about who God is. Those searches helped me find the many *God is* statements, where I read about each quality or work of God in context. With a list of every verse and passage I could find on a particular *God is* statement, I meditated and wrote a devotional with the goal of letting God's Word speak for itself about who *He is*. I incorporated stories from my life as a grandpa would tell to his grandchildren. The Master Teacher, Jesus Christ, is my example in using stories to teach lessons and using common experiences to teach spiritual truth. I have tried to do so in a way that would honor Jesus and only shed a good light on others, but sometimes they reveal our humanity and sinful tendencies, mostly my own. Any reflection on my family, friends, or people who personally know me is done with love and grace. I have a profound appreciation for those who have spoken into my life through the years of my life. I thank God for how he has used each person to influence me. We grow best in community, as we are like iron sharpening iron for the glory of God.

Scriptural quotations: For the most part, I have quoted from the English Standard Version of the Bible (ESV) approximately eight hundred verses, with about six verse quotations from the King James Version (KJV), eight from the New King James Version (NKJV), and six verses from the New American Standard Bible (NASB). In some instances, I have noted that any italics type was my way of adding emphasis to the subject at hand in a particular devotional. Furthermore, in passages of scriptures quoted, I sometimes arranged the verses in a more poetic

format. I also on purpose left out the verse markings in all passages quoted. I have found that sometimes the breaking up of the text by verse notations can get in the way of understanding. I first experienced the concept of removing the verse notations at a Bible Study Dig-In Retreat hosted by InterVarsity Campus Fellowship at Cannon Beach, Oregon, in 1980, while a student at Umpqua Community College. That weekend of study and fellowship set a fire in me to know Jesus better through the reading of God's Word. It was after this intensive Bible study weekend that my desire to enroll in a Bible college grew exponentially.

A challenge to those in ministry: I once attended a pastor's retreat at a beautiful Bible camp in the mountains of Wyoming. The speaker challenged us pastors to have a God-focused ministry as opposed to a man-focused ministry. This is the admonishment that I recall, "I know you all think your ministry is God focused. Please go back and look over your sermons and Bible lessons for the past year and ask yourselves, 'Is this Bible teaching God focused or man focused?' If your ministry is not God focused, please ask God to help you to become more focused on him personally and in your teaching. People's lives are transformed by getting to know God personally through God-focused teaching from right out of the Bible." That challenge changed the direction of my ministry for good in my life and in the lives of others. If you have a calling to teach the Word of God, I hope that you will consider this challenge for yourself. Preach the Word (2 Timothy 4:2)! Help others to seek God in their lives through his natural revelation and the words of the Bible because *He is!*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

One of the first things we often do when meeting someone is ask, “What do you do?” Presently, I prefer to start my answer by pointing out that I have had the responsibilities and privilege of *being* a son, sibling, husband, father, grandpa of four wonderful grandchildren, and a friend. Unfortunately, in the past, *doing* was sometime more important than *being*. God created us for relationship with him and others, which unfortunately sometimes got lost in my *doing*.

I have put on many hats through life in my *doing*: long-distance runner; mountain climber; Oregon logger; carpenter; undergraduate Bible school graduate; youth pastor; missionary and professor at a Bible Institute in Manaus, Brazil; tradesman; graduate school graduate; pastor; hunter; fisherman; and self-employed as a handyman, Montana-licensed property manager, and fishing guide. Jesus has helped me to do all this better than I would have done it without him. In fact, a lot of this I would have never done without him. He has given me purpose and joy through his grace beyond measure and deepening healing from life’s traumas and forgiveness of sin. I have much for which to give thanks and glorify God!

Life is a gift; I am trying to use that gift by lovingly serving God and others as I grow through the adventures, hardships, trials, sufferings, and victories with the people God brings into my life. It is during and through the hard times of life that I have felt God’s presence most. I have asked God to help me grow better and not bitter through life’s disappointments and failures. He has come beside me and held me up. *He is faithful!*

I am totally humbled to have written about God and shared some of

my stories in the writing of a book that has been a part of God's healing process in my own life. *He is* not finished with me yet (Philippians 1:6). For this, I am thankful. I look forward in faith to what he has for me in the future. Presently, I live in Dillon, Montana, which I regard as my deepening "backside of the desert" period of life. I have always hoped to move back to Roseburg, Oregon, where my spiritual journey began. Presently, I have plans to downsize, sell my home and a business, and live out of an RV, where I can spend winters in Oregon and summers in Montana as a fly-fishing guide. I want to be with people in both states and am open to having more of a traveling ministry of helps as God directs with divine appointments.

I am constantly learning that what is most important is not what I do but what I am in relation to the great I AM. More *being* while I am *doing* is my present goal. I am trying to be freed from the thinking that my acceptance with God is based upon my performance. That brings freedom and peace! I am looking forward to a new heaven and new earth someday.

You can contact me and find more resources for spiritual growth at the *He Is* ministries webpage: <https://heisministries.net>. I hope you have been blessed as much or more than I have in thinking about God. Blessings to you and your family as you seek him because *He is!*

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him”

That passage comes from Hebrews 11:6 in the New King James Version of the Bible—and it’s a powerfully challenging verse.

In his deepest trials of life, Mark embarks on a quest to know God more fully and intimately through prayerful meditation on the Scriptures. He observes that there are three main groups in this world: those who believe in God, those who don’t know if there is a God, and those who deny that God exists.

Each meditation includes reflection questions that ask readers to consider topics such as whether they find comfort in sometimes not understanding God, how they feel about awesome truths regarding God, and how knowing a particular attribute of God might change the way they think and act.

Ignite your faith, learn more about who God is, and help spread the Word with this book of devotional meditation by inviting others to join you in a group study.



Mark R. Worden is a lifelong learner and lover of God and his Word. He received his undergraduate and graduate degrees in Bible and Teaching Bible. He has served as youth pastor, missionary, and teacher at a Bible institute in Manaus, Brazil, and pastored a local Montana church for six years. Along with being a licensed property manager, he is a self-employed handyman and enjoys woodworking on the side.

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