

God is Holy

09/23/2018

God's Holiness cannot be underestimated or underemphasized. This (RE)Cap installment will not be an attempt to consider God's Holiness, but instead thoughts on why reconsidering His Holiness is imperative.

The Good and Beautiful God Chapter 5 - God Is Love

09/23/2018

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(Re)cap

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Chapter 5 - God Is Love

Summary

It is true. God's love is central and core to His Person - we cannot read His Word and conclude otherwise.

We've all been schooled on the problems of 'romantic love', the idea that love centers around often blind, warm feelings. Is this a true basis of love? Perhaps not, if we look to the essential issue behind love - a willful commitment, per God's law, to another who we have no expectation to repay us. Consider Jesus' discourse in **Lk 6.32-36**. It ends with the commandment to "be merciful,

just as your Father also is merciful.”

The last time we met, John walked us through the problem of assuming that Father’s love is as performance-based as the fallen-Human love around us, expressed in the way our world teaches us to expect to be treated.

In this (RE)Cap, let’s look at an aspect of our Father’s willful commitment and mercy towards us. Let’s look at how a devoted love is expressed to a people who can’t but fail to show Him a worthy response, and who by our very nature, often begin our trek to the Cross kicking and screaming against Him. We go to the Cross for the first time, even as His enemy. Against all of this, He demonstrates how His devoted and merciful love overcomes the worst we have to offer.

Spoiler alert: God’s Offer, in love, has conditions.

Key points

Conditional love is usually cruel - but why?

Life, and our peers, both teach us about the often conditional use of what is called love and acceptance. This is no secret. But, let’s also recall Paul’s words - he knew of God better than most anyone - that we see through a glass dimly (**1 Cor 13.12, Job 36.26**). Let’s recognize that starting even now, the remainder of our existence in Christ will be spent pondering our God and shedding our misconceptions about Him.

We grow to see His worth.

We could likely agree that conditions for acceptance can be distasteful to us. But why? It’s likely due to fickle or unfair terms, or perhaps a person’s disingenuous motives that result in our being rejected. But, are conditions and their use the problem, or could it be that the one in charge of the conditions misuses them?

We approve of conditions with those we call friends, those we invite into our home, or share personal information with, or give help, money, care, love. God Himself prescribed conditions for guests to join His people Israel in worship and even nationhood.

While God's Offer is conditional, His resultant relationship-Love is unconditional. This flawless, God-branded love is possible through Christ's fulfilling those conditions and sharing (imparting) Father's satisfaction of those conditions, to us who accept the Offer.

The conditions of Father's Offer cannot be cruel, because He's not cruel.

We might recognize the conditional nature of the relationships around us, and see inconsistency and inequity. The chain of relationship between us and Father is also conditional, but with an important difference - the conditions required for our relationship with God have been borne by Jesus. The conditions were God's intent even before Creation, before we existed. As God unilaterally carries His Covenant with Abraham (**Gen 15.9-11, 17-18a**), Jesus also is the sole Author of our Salvation once we have answered His irresistible Call. We who will accept the Offer were already intended to be included without a chance of failure. Father ensured we could not escape, that His Goal would be met, by His assuming responsibility for His Conditions. Father's demand for sin's payment, and the sinless Man-Vessel Who would satisfy Him, are non-negotiable to us. To answer that Condition, He specifically gave Jesus to accomplish the job of Sacrifice. Father's terms being 'finished', Jesus revealed the New Covenant allowing us forgiveness, and so satisfaction of God's Wrath against us who accept. Father intended the overall plan before anything began.

Jesus alone would perfectly satisfy Father's Wrath and impart the benefitting result to us. Jesus, as our High Priest, will protect and keep us safe in that Covenant. It is God's to Offer - but He will never, never take it away from His children, once received and cemented in His holy Salvation.

So, yes, conditions exist in all relationships. The difference between the relationships we know with our peers and the one we know with God are that God is perfectly wise, righteous, loving, and without sin. Our peers, fellow sinners like us, are not. Therefore, we cannot rightly project our peer-relationship expectations upon God. We must shed what we think we understand of relationship, embrace the truth of His Conditions, and believe Him - even when we fail Him, even when the Enemy tempts with "Did God actually say..?".

Conditions from God can't be confused with conditions between peers. We are not God's peers.

Does Father have Conditions over our eternal life with Him? Yes: We would choose Jesus, else we will suffer Judgment and endless torment in Hell.

Are a Fireman's conditions of "Climb down the ladder from the burning building - only the ladder, there's no other choice available" - cruel?

Does Father have Conditions over His children adopted under the Blood of Jesus? Yes: He fully accepts us into His family and loves us no matter what. Bound tight under His love and life's Sovereign circumstances, is escape from the call to trust and obey possible? We are, as glad bondservants of Christ (**Eph 6.6b**), conscripted into learning obedience to His ways as His Law is written on our new heart.

There are no conditions excluding us from God, once

we've met The Condition of confessing Christ.

Will He swivel from us and turn away? He cannot, because He adheres to the Conditions met by the Son He gave, into Whom we can be grafted. Does He tend to us, watch us, correct us? Does He sit with us as we mend from the hurt of life, either anonymously at the hands of a fallen world or from self-inflicted pains as we went the way He didn't hope for us? Yes: He is our Father, He loves us, He won't quit us. (**2 Sam 7.14-15, Heb 12.5-11**)

Disappointed with His children? Apparently, not possible.

Devoted to His reputation and to seeing His designs through? Absolutely.

Is God ever disappointed with us?

Perhaps a strong argument could be made that the answer is no. Consider Webster's definition of '**disappointment**': *The feeling of dissatisfaction that follows the failure of expectations or hopes to manifest.*

Disappointment happens when the expected, doesn't.

Note: Disappointment is different than yearning or longing. Consider Jesus' appeal in **Matt 23.37** - "O

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See!

Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me

no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' " Jesus demonstrates His knowing the future in

saying 'you

shall see Me no more till you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'. He also states His desire

to see this sure end brought forth in 'How often I wanted to'. This is not disappointment, but His urging the people forward in a knowing, patient concern.

Is disappointment possible for a God of Omniscience - *all* knowing, including of future

events - Who knows the end from the beginning?

If God cannot be surprised, that would mean His hopes cannot be dashed when something doesn't happen. He already knew that would be the case.

And, no, this doesn't give us license to do nothing - we're here under His sanctified training for our benefit, not God's. He needs nothing from us, but intends to use

life and opportunities to teach us obedience and peace.

If He cannot be surprised, then God is not disappointed when His child fails, due both to Christ's Blood and His seeing it prior. Our sin elicits His dissatisfaction, and

moves Him to correct us. But, the Gift

of Christ's Atonement has freed us from Father's Wrath, and in exchange, we

have been bought into a relentless, loving path of Sanctification. Our job is to pursue Him, repent and cooperate

with Him, learn to know and to trust Him, to live in the Spirit and not the flesh - "I

thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the

Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." **Rom 7.25-8.3**

Never surprised, but knowingly patient and diligent in making us better Worshippers.

Jesus our High Priest has compassion for us and our failures. Father intimately knows who we are, and we

never surprise Him. This 'program' of

Salvation is not capable of nor is designed to put us under God's

disappointment, (For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. **Jn 3.17**) but to allow boundless room for us to maneuver under God's instructive care (For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. **Eph 2.10**) and learn how to see Him, ourselves, and Creation as He does. We are granted time to learn what it means to be a child of the King, and to grow in our capacity to love and Worship Him for it. (But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. **1 Pet 2.9**)

Therefore, as we will certainly discover ourselves opposing God (sinning), let us believe Him and not the Enemy who lies and accuses. Instead, we must search His Word for the truth, reform our thinking to His, confess our fault, and move ahead in already-assured love and forgiveness through our Brother and Friend Jesus.

A hard life, but not a hardened Father.

The Fallen world is a hard place to reside, but the difficulties suffered by a child under his Sovereign God cannot be attributed to His turning away. Instead, ask:

Do I belong to Him through faith alone in Christ?

If so, is this hardship the natural outcome of not following Him?

If so, He loves me and I must still repent, obeying His Word.

If not of my own consequence, shall the clay question the Potter? Shall we accept

only the good and bemoan the bad? Instead, follow the Rabbi Who was blameless and remember “though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.” (**Heb 5.8**), learning of the Spirit’s Fruit, bearing instruction as He did, and asking Him for the necessary peace and strength He promises to complete the task. (And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” **2 Cor 12.9a**)

Either way, I will not call Him a liar and question His devotion to His child, and I will ask for and expect His sure help (**Joshua 1.9, Matt 6.25.33, Phil 4.11-13, Heb 5b-6, Rom 8.28**). All the while, I know my God loves and cares for me, working as the author and perfecter of my faith (**Heb 12.1-2**).

So, Christ follower - have you too skinned your knee (or broken your leg) on Life, even crashed and burned, even found yourself opposing the God Who loves you? Seek Him and His directions, know yourself, repent and ask forgiveness - and move ahead in the unconditional love of the Father Who delights in the contrite heart of His child, Who He intends to see succeed. Let’s revel in His generous conditions, and His boundless love.

Final thoughts to consider.

The above might read like a Calvinist’s TULIP tract. Whether it does or not, let’s be faithful to the plain reading of His Word and let the labels fall where they will. In fact, Scripture threads together the Effectual Call to the predestined soul, yet of a person who has responsibilities as a free moral agent (who cannot escape God’s Sovereign influence). Our ‘heart’ is the only thing

in Creation that God allows to oppose Him.

Perhaps, we have our choice of 'will', yet it is never outside of a God

Who steers it sovereignly: "The king's heart is in the hand of the

Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever

He wishes." **Prov 21.1**. I suspect His joy is in capturing and winning

the affection of that otherwise hopeless, hateful heart. In the end, God's love conquers all.

His willingness and sure ability to suffer our rejection, even under

forgiveness in the Blood, is held in place by the Conditions He has offered, fulfilled,

and abides by. Is that not the greatest

love, worthy of Worship?

Finally, if how our Father deals with us is true, then how might this

teach us to treat others - especially those who we are to love (everyone), yet

who disappoint us (everyone, given enough time and opportunity)? The

parable of the 'unforgiving servant' is one good illustration (**Matt 18.23-35**). I

know I have (decreasingly?) been that

servant, and I praise God that He continues in loving patience to train, even

discipline, me to be like Him instead.

Praise to Him whose love will never quit His children.

God is Love

09/23/2018

We've all been schooled on the problems of 'romantic love', the idea that love

centers around often blind, warm feelings. Is this a true basis of love? Perhaps not, if

we look to the essential issue behind love - a willful commitment, per God's law, to

another who we have no expectation to repay us.

The Good and Beautiful God

Chapter 4 - God Is Generous

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Chapter 4 - God Is Generous

A forward note

This chapter's (Re)Cap is a bit different, in that we've considered a scope of thought and Scripture beyond what the chapter addresses. The chapter addresses God's Generosity; the (RE)Cap addresses God's Wrath and His Generosity. In one way, we might question having more than a summary of filler thoughts to expand on this month's discussion. On the other hand, this subject as a whole should burn in our souls, and it seems right to discuss it. Many have observed that we suffer a Post-Christian environment that threatens to strip us of our worship and joy in God, because it's easy to gravitate to the more attractive parts of His story that this environment selectively promotes.

If we're not very careful, every one of us, as mere humans, is prone to settle into the parts of His story that bring us a false ease in a grandfather-god - or an incorrect slavery to malicious-god. He is neither of these, but He is instead a

Righteous God Who demands perfection, and Who offers incredible Love and Grace beyond measure to answer His demand of perfection.

And so, He offers His Son.

I perceive our group is rather rounded in the Wrath/Grace mix. This chapter (and perhaps this book) assumes the reader has been overexposed to Wrath, and so promotes the Grace. In this (Re)Cap we don't take either part for granted, but gaze beyond the Chapter's focus, looking to include the balance of Scripture's mix in an effort to consider how Gracious God Is. Proportions of anything that differs from God's Word only brings loss. My hope is that through considering this topic, we can grow in our reverence, hope, joy, faith, love and trust in God.

Summary

I admire this book we are pondering.

The author's works have brought relief to many people as he reveals topics on God. However, his book is not intended to be a complete work, but actually a nudge to awaken us to the basics of knowing, understanding, and trusting Father.

This is a book bringing some core topics to study, engage, and pursue in the Word given to us. In today's Church,

the problem of Biblical illiteracy is often woeful, and the Body suffers incredibly for it. This book is not

intended to instruct on the Whole of God, but instead is a sampler platter to whet the appetite. Father wants us to

dig deep, Jesus made the way, and the Spirit stands ready to teach. **(Psalm 27:4)**

"One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, **to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple**". The issue rests on our willingness to engage Him.

Key points

God is indeed Generous

A sense of His generosity through too narrow a view including only 'He loves me', or simply 'Jesus died for me' - without acknowledging the whole range of Truth He gives us in His Word - is a weak and incomplete foundation to build an appreciation of His generosity.

How much more is a cup of water to a man who knows he is dying of thirst than to another who is just a bit parched?

To have a better appreciation of His Generosity, we need to step back and seek full sight of His care, beyond a view of only our personal concerns that naturally occupies the majority of our thoughts. We are rightly concerned about our life and circumstances, but it is easy to make this the center and whole of our attention. Yet we are not the majority and center of God's Goals - there is far more at play.

Immutably Holy, God's Wrath towards sinners rightly burns, demands to be satisfied. His Wrath is inescapable, inevitable, necessary. As God cannot change - and as there is no reason to do so (great news) for He is complete and flawlessly Perfect, and as He is the Source and Basis for everything because nothing is above Him - everything under Him must be brought into agreement with Him. Sin must be purged, the sinner's right wage must be paid through death, His Realm must be purified, and everything out of His Perfect alignment, removed.

Hinge Verse: Rom 2:4 - Or do

you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience?

Do

you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

It's easy to miss what lies below the surface

Ice - both bergs and cubes - show only 1/7 of the whole in plain view. The majority of the reality lies hidden under the surface.

God's Word reveals the whole of reality He would have us understand, including that beyond what we would otherwise perceive. For this we are given His Word, reliable and true. It is not completely everything about God, but completely everything God would reveal to us.

His Word is reliable

So how can we hope to know the truth about God's Realm and His involvement, about the whole of what's in play, in Creation and beyond? God graciously has provided us with everything He knows we need to have, to understand His views, expectations and promises. Is the Word reliable? While there is an exhaustive number of reasons we can say 'yes', consider:

Of everything recorded during Mankind's history, Scripture is uniquely reliable:

- No parts of the Bible are found to be contradictory to the Whole
- It continues to be supported, not disproven, by history and archeology
- Later duplicates of original Scripture are found to be true to more ancient editions
- The Hebrew duplication processes was exhaustive, ensuring true accuracy
- The number of prophecies made prior to their fulfillment are numerous
- Mankind has realized a high degree of universal agreement, in accord with the effort and faith invested, of wisdom/guidance/peace/relationship. This is called Orthodoxy.

Another good starting point is Moody's Erwin Lutzer, who is one skilled scholar addressing this in '[7 Reasons Why You Can Trust The Bible](#)'.

Biblical unawareness and its consequences

We willingly live with Biblical unawareness and disregard for God. This doesn't have as much to do with one's capacity to understand, but instead an unwillingness to strive to understand all one can in his capacity. God offers to teach and enlighten us, and the Holy Ghost is promised to always help us when we seek Father's Wisdom - If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. **(Jas 1.5)**, and But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. **(Jn 14.26)**, and Show me Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day. **(Psalm 25.4-5)**. Our Enemy encourages disregard and unawareness, tempting on all fronts. Trials in our lives give opportunity to withdraw from God, to seek substitutes, to stoke our disregard.

We can agree that God is perfect, with no speck or blot. We can also find agreement He loves us in Christ, reconciled to Him. But what fills our understanding between Him and us? The more narrow our understanding His Word, the more unproportioned we see ourselves.

Filling out the reality of God's perspective with Scripture

Does God possess anger? Is He right in having it? Who will receive it?

Directed

towards His People, Israel:

Deut 32:22 For a fire is

kindled in My anger, And burns to the lowest part of Sheol, And consumes the earth with its yield, And sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.

Isaiah 33:14

Sinners in Zion are terrified; Trembling has seized the godless “Who among us can live with the consuming fire? Who among us can live with continual burning?”

Deut 9:7-8 Remember! Do not

forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord. Also

in Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, so that the Lord was angry enough with you to have destroyed you.

Warned of after the Cross:

Matthew 3:12

“His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Matthew 10:28 “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 ...dealing out retribution to those

who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power...

Shown to John,

in the Revelation of Jesus:

Revelation 14:9-11a

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night....

Revelation 20:10

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation 20:11,13-15 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them...The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Does God offer Grace? Is He generous in giving it? Who will receive it?

**Conversely,
consider Scripture of God's Realm and Grace:**

Ephesians 6:10-13

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly

places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Eph 1:13-14 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, Who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Revelation 21:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. **He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.**" And he who was seated on the throne said, "**Behold, I am making all things new.**" Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

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

We all face inescapable Realities where God is concerned - and this is everywhere, because He is Sovereign. The great news is Jesus' offer to bring us into Father's family, fully recognized as His Children, with Christ not only as our Savior, but as our Brother.

God's patience and Jesus' forgiveness are the key issues, but we make a mistake when we view them as the sole issues

Paul explains through Scripture that the New Covenant replaced Moses' Law, providing the Pathway to reconciliation – yet remember, it does not make God wink at sin, but satisfies His Wrath.

His intent – to cast out sinners, unrepentant – remains, and will happen.

Jonathan

Edwards, on the unbelieving Israelites

In Jonathan Edwards' notable 1741 sermon on the Passage '*Their foot shall slip in due time*', "Sinners

in the Hands of an Angry God" observes that the Hebrews were the people chosen by God, protected by Him, sustained by Him, and under miraculous display.

Edwards illustrates the reality of their precarious situation, if not for God's generosity:

- They were always exposed to destruction; as one that stands or walks in slippery places is always exposed to fall.
- As he that walks in slippery places is every moment liable to fall, he cannot foresee one moment whether he shall stand or fall the next; and when he does fall, he falls at once without warning.
- They are liable to fall of themselves, without being thrown down by the hand of another.
- The reason why they are not fallen already and do not fall now is only that God has graciously upheld them.

One takeaway from Edwards sermon is this: Unsaved sinners are in a precarious, dangerous position. But, God graciously cares for us out of His Love and His commitment to His promise to do so through Salvation in Christ. We have a hard time seeing the true risk we face, but an easier time enjoying the general and specific results of His care – even to the point that we see the results but fail to recognize how much from God takes place behind the scenes. And even if Saved through Christ yet not understanding this, we risk becoming glad receivers of Grace who can fail to appreciate and

worship the God Who is responsible – even contributing to Spiritual Idolatry and disregard. It is available to [read](#), or on audio.

One final thought on His Generosity - Inclusion at someone else's party

The Jews, The Church, and our Jewish Savior

Finally, consider that the Church has not replaced Israel, but the Church instead benefits from God's Covenant with Abraham: **Gen 22.18** - In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.

Paul states in **Romans 11:11**

& 14 - I say then, have they (Israel) stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. For

I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.

We are the grafted branch, not the host tree, per **Romans**

11:17: ...you, being a wild olive tree,

were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree... Verse

24 demonstrates that we, while equal in Christ, are subordinate to Jews per the Covenant with Abraham: **Romans 11:24** For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

All who receive Christ will have Salvation. The Gentile Church is a big part of His Plan. Yet, the Jews have the first seat, not the Church; they alone are the chosen people, saved by a Jewish Messiah (**Jn 4:22b** - Jesus to the Samaritan

woman) ...we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.) With incredible generosity, He has included us to their 'party'.

God IS indeed Generous!

Can we grow to see the larger scope of what's in play, and how His generosity is full from top to bottom - not just within a narrow view of the life we live and see? Knowing, understanding, and trusting God to our fullest ability stokes our Worship, and rightly belongs to such a loving and generous Father.

God is Generous

09/23/2018

This subject as a whole should burn in our souls, and it seems right to discuss it. Many have observed that we suffer a Post-Christian environment that threatens to strip us of our worship and joy in God, because it's easy to gravitate to the more attractive parts of His story that this environment selectively promotes.

The Good and Beautiful God Part 3, Chapter 3 - What is your Cup?

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The Good and Beautiful God

Part 3, Chapter 3 - What is your Cup?

Summary

The topic of trials and sanctification is core to the human experience under Father God - and is perhaps only second in importance and difficulty to the understanding His Theology. Our difficulty comes from many directions, including an inability to understand His mind ("For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. **Isa 55.8**), that our perceptions and affections are directed towards us and not Him (Haughty eyes and a proud heart - the unplowed field of the wicked - produce sin. **Prov 21.4**), and we fall short if we do not progress in learning surrender and trust to Him in the circumstances He allows (...you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. **Jas 1.3-4**). The question 'What is your cup?' can illuminate our understanding of God and our alignment with Him. Yet, we can learn faith and peace in it all, because 'we are all God's handiwork', and He loves us recklessly.

Key points

Two perspectives, yet only one must prevail.

It is very understandable that we as fallen people favor our view from our perspective. In the moment that ushered in the Fall, mankind's gaze swung from God to ourselves - and every human since then born of an earthly father has suffered the consequences brought upon us by Adam - The seeing of ourselves as more important than God. This is a Theological

fact, demonstrated through billions of life experiences throughout history. The only Human to escape the consequence had to be “born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.” **(Gal 4.4b-5)**. Jesus was born of God the Father: “And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” **(Luke 1.35)**. Coming from a lineage outside of our ‘sin-infection’, Jesus arrived Holy. This Holy Jesus, being and knowing God personally, explained to us the reality of our situation and how we can be rescued. “For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.” **(John 3.17)** Our perspective - self focused and incorrect - may be countered with His perspective - God focused and true. And as God is Sovereign, His perspective will prevail. The question is, will we strive to understand and cooperate?

Head and Heart Knowledge

A ‘head knowledge’ is inferior to a ‘heart knowledge’. A reformed heart is His goal because the ‘heart’ is the root and seat of character, not the head. Consider:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. **(Matt 6.21)**

And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. **(Matt 22.37)**

But what comes
out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. (**Matt 15.18**)

And I will give
you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the
heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (**Ezek 36.26**)

Head knowledge is necessary to advance towards a faith in what is true,
but unless that knowledge lands on a contrite and willing heart by faith,
knowledge does no good.

“Then Jesus said
to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on
Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they
do. For they preach, but do not practice.” (**Matt 23.1**)

“...but that
Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in
reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it
were based on works.” (**Rom 9.31-32a**)

The (otherwise) incorrigible heart

And so, our otherwise irredeemable problem. Contrary to current and popular
opinion, we
are not a race that is inwardly good, and can choose wrongly. Rather, we are
inwardly wrong and, save
godliness, will also choose wrongly.
Corrective glasses are of no use to a blind man. And as the eye must first be
repaired, so too
our heart.

This is, aside from the work of God, an impossible task to us. “Can the
Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who
are accustomed
to do evil.” (**Jeremiah 13.23, sarcasm by**

God intended)

Faith comes from God alone (**Jas 1.17**), through our hearing His Word (**Rom 10.17**), asking His understanding (**Jas 1.5**), and stepping forward on His statements before we would see the results appear (**Jas 2.17**). Consider: The moment before you found an assurance of Salvation, had you ever tasted it beforehand? No, each of us learned we needed it, heard and understood His promise of it, and asked Him in faith believing He would answer as He said He would. This would have been your first taste of His reforming an otherwise irredeemable heart. And so the boot camp of the rest of our lives in Christ began.

Sweating it out of us

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (**Heb 11.1**)

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. (**Heb 11.7a**)

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith. (**Jesus, Matt 21.22**)

The faith God intends to increasingly forge in us will always focus on Him (**Mk 11.22**), fully grounded in His Character which is explained to us in His Word (**Ps 119.142**), and affirmed in His response (**John 14.21**). God and the faith He intends is not the problem, our blind and stubborn hearts are.

So, how would He inform a heart that can't understand Him, or penetrate the callouses on a heart that is free to defy Him? Ask any parent, and hear that a

child's error

might be from either ignorance or from disobedience. Do we use the same correction for both cases? Both cases are to be instructed to the degree they can, and grace tempers the response.

Father holds unquestionable love, the gift of faith, the sovereignty over circumstance, and the wisdom to instruct.

All of these He employs in our training.

We commonly call them trials. And

so, knowing what He is achieving, why He does it, that He loves and protects us, and that He intends us to know/understand/trust Him - we can embrace James' command:

Count it all

joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (**Jas 1.2-8**)

Is James alone in this admonition?

Consider:

Peter - "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." (**1 Pet 4.19**)

and, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. (**1 Pet 5.6-7**)

Paul - "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..." (**Phil 3.7-9**)

and, "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing

plenty and hunger, abundance and need.” (**Phil 4.11-12**)

and, “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**

Cor 12.7-10)

As Creator, Father has a right over us and an obligation to us. This is the consequence of coming into His family, of becoming His child. “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.” (**Prov 13.24**). This is a corrective rod of love, one that refuses to see His child turn back to the slop (**Lk 15.16**) and to protect your faith (**2 Thes 3.3, Heb 12.2**). And so, does the Potter have no right over the clay? (**Rom 9.21**) Doesn't Jesus offer us a yoke? (**Matt 11.30**)

This is why it is imperative to learn the Character of God, because He surely will prevail over you, His child. The excellent news is that He is loving, patient, merciful, kind, wise, and righteous. True, our trials are often utterly painful, but should we expect it to be an easy exercise to dislodge the opinions and beliefs of a blind or stubborn heart that conflict with a holy understanding and trust in Him, an understanding and faith He insists upon? To this point Peter points out that it is surely a difficult task for us and for God - “If the righteous is scarcely saved,

what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" (**1 Pet 4.18**)

But more so, we have assurance of His intent and love for us through these difficulties, which glorify Him and benefit us: "And we know that for those who love

God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (**Rom 8.28**), and that we "might obtain a better resurrection".

Praying for help

Shall we pray for relief, peace, or faith in deliverance through the One behind it all? The Word tells us to pray for all of these. However, praying only for the parts we want instead of what Father intends will not get us very far. True, Scripture reports many, many times where removal of the problem occurs.

However, is there in any of Scripture this response without the inclusion of faith in the Deliverer? It is easy for us to go right to the pain and ask that it goes away, but if it is not faith building, can we expect God to do it?

He wants peace for us, but never at the expense of faith in Him (remember Paul, 2 Cor 12.7-10). Father intends us to learn and rely upon and expect peace through faith in Him, as a child. An early removal of the circumstance He superintends is counter to what He tells us to expect, if it removes His opportunity for us to grow. So, we pray for relief, faith, and peace in Him.

He knows each of His children intimately and crafts life to fit each one of us unto His end goal. Learning to trust Him can truly only come through experience, else it would only be head knowledge. He loves us and perfectly protects our faith. His purpose will be

realized for each one of us. In all of this He calls us to learn Him, to trust Him, to find real peace.

A Personal Note

Several years ago, I found myself deep in the weeds in trials - it was heading into the hardest point in my life and I felt almost hopeless. Struggling towards Father, I asked Him for a lifeline, and He gave me a reprieve I hope to always remember.

Our family went to the theater see a movie, and before the show they played the following Pixar short film.

As I watched it, I thanked God for His care, and wept. He graciously helped me begin putting things into His perspective. God answers, and He can show up wherever He pleases. He encouraged me to be still and know He had everything covered.

Hint: Father God drives the truck, the Jackalope is a Jesus figure ☐

What is Your Cup?

09/23/2018

The topic of trials and sanctification is core to the human experience under Father God - and is perhaps only second in importance and difficulty to the understanding His Theology.

The Good and Beautiful God Part 2, Chapter 3 - Father's Character

09/23/2018

[2018.02.02.TGaBG_ReCap_Character.Ch3-P2Download](#)

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The Good and Beautiful God

Part 2, Chapter 3 - Father's Character

Summary

What is more useful to understand about a person - his past actions in a given set of circumstances, or his overall character that resides behind his actions? The record of a person's actions might be an indicator of his character, but knowing his actual character is far superior in predicting what he might do in circumstances that have not yet happened. Given endless possibilities, a universe of circumstances we might face, the best way we'd be able to have reason to trust him would be based upon his character - the fiber of his personality and from which his responses would come.

Key points

Nature and Nurture

In our previous discussion, we considered the influencers in our lives. We asked whether these people had helped, hindered, or left neutral our knowing, understanding, and trusting Father God.

In the debate of nature versus nurture, we are born with dispositions (nature), yet must learn command over our actions. Actions are filtered through our

beliefs, our

Narrative, shaped by our influencers (nurture).

We cannot escape the truth that our interactions with persons who play a role in our life make impressions that color and steer our viewpoint. Yes, we alone are responsible for our

actions. Yet, the basis of who we are that

informs our actions are shaped much by these influencing people in our lives.

Sizing up our influencers

So, consider your influencers, the people who have closely interacted with you, those who have helped shape you.

How would your influencer compare to the following description?

(S)he is someone who I believed had a clear view of the truth, conducted their life very well without mistakes, had a steady hand and never failed in responsibilities, always put my interests first regardless of mood or circumstance, never failed to seek reconciliation nor held a grudge, could always be trusted to be near to respond, and always protected me despite the cost.

This would be an amazing person.

And, if an influencer, would be a priceless and mighty force in your

life. Yet, the truth is that a person of

this sort is rare, and by strict definition, impossible. Placing the measuring stick next to the best

person you have ever known, experience shows us that real people traverse the scale, all the way down to the despicable.

Sizing up Father

Now, carefully consider that statement again, and rather than a view towards your human influencer, look through it towards Father God:

Father is someone who I believe has a clear view of the truth, conducts

His life very well without mistakes, has a steady hand and never fails in

responsibilities, always puts my interests first regardless of mood or circumstance, has never failed to seek reconciliation nor held a grudge, can always be trusted to be near to respond, and always protects me despite the cost.

The statement reflects this month's study which included restatements of the Lord's Prayer:

God is near, present

God is pure, Holy

God is powerful and the King Who rules His realm

God cares, provides for us

God pardons our sins against Him

God protects, rescues us from trials and evil

Our Father in
heaven, hallowed be Your name,

Your kingdom
come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today
our daily bread.

And forgive us
our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not
into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Matthew 6:9-13

Who He Is; Who we believe He Is

Do you sense any hesitance in seeing Him that way? If so, you're a fellow, fallen human.

The goal of this exercise, and more so the Goal of the Lord Jesus Himself, is to help us see the inconsistencies of our heart in relation to the truth He tells us about the Father He knows.

This is the Father Who strives to rescue us, to bring us back to our intended place before Him.

Last month, we read that the models (influencers) in our lives, good or bad, can be a blessing - if we take care to test our narrative and weigh it against the true Model. Jesus taught the Prayer to reveal Father to us, and also to help us see the inconsistencies between our views and Reality. His Goal is to help us know, understand, and trust the Father He trusts. This long transformation is our Sanctification.

Can we believe Jesus' explanation of Father? Can we realize the contrast between His (and our) Father and the influencers who have shaped our expectations of God? Here, we are to see the truth about Father, and repent of the notions that might stand in our way:

God's fatherhood must define what human fatherhood ought to look like, and not the reverse.
(James Bryan Smith)

Father's Character

09/23/2018

What is more useful to understand about a person - his past actions in a given set of

circumstances, or his overall character that resides behind his actions? The record of a person's actions might be an indicator of his character, but knowing his actual character is far superior in predicting what he might do in circumstances that have not yet happened.

The Good and Beautiful God Part 1, Chapter 3 - God is Trustworthy

09/23/2018

[2018.01.05.TGaBG_ReCap_Trustworthy.Ch3-P1Download](#)

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The Good and Beautiful God

Part 1, Chapter 3 - God is Trustworthy

Summary

Just because someone has attributes, it does not automatically equate to their intent and treatment toward you. A wise man might give his thoughts or keep them to himself, a wealthy man could give or keep money, a violent man may choose or not to rob you. Knowing God's Character is foundational, but trusting Him and His response is another issue.

Beginning Chapter 3, we start to have a look at how trust works, why it develops, where it can fall off of the rails, and why it is important to consider our stance before Father. His intent is to show and convince us that He is Trustworthy.

Key points

Understanding someone's character is an important issue. Knowing what to expect from that character and trusting it is a whole other issue.

Perhaps one of the main, universal drivers shared by every human is a desire for the avoidance of pain.

Beginning at that premise, we can possibly trace the beginnings of every behavior, decision and hope. And perhaps this is because the existence we experience in life is the polar opposite of the state of existence for which we were intended - one of peace surrounding a perfect God Who knows no deficiency. We just weren't made for this fallenness.

Found both in Scripture and the hopeful tales spun by mankind, in 'Heaven' there is no need, pain, loss - only joy, gladness, provision, peace. It seems in the end, we are all drawn to this. Even the Lost hope for the dead to be 'in a better place'.

A correct understanding of Scripture will repair the fallacies we attribute to God. Yet, the Goal of God and His Word are not simply to rescue us from Hell - it is to move us increasingly into relationship with the God with Whom we will reside, once the wrath we're due has been addressed.

The report of Creation heralds perfection. Everything began "very good" (Gen 1.31). Scripture is replete with assurances of God's goodness. We are told He is right, fair, full of mercy, even good intent. There is little room for argument concerning His Character. However, to varying degrees we are faced with a disconnect between God's Character and how we trust He will respond to us. Now, 'varying degrees' is an enormous understatement. As we consider Jesus'

trust of Father and learn to compare it to our own warped state and outlook, we face a seemingly bottomless chasm of mistrust.

Father understands this, and His work is to continually invite us to bridge that ravine with Truth and confirmation.

We are His workmanship (Eph 2.10), and the works He brings us to walk in only succeed as we engage these works trusting Him (Jn 15.5). These exercises build our trust in His Character and response.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. **Eph 2.10**

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. **Jn 15.5**

Father calls each and every human towards a primary Goal, and every Believer participates in their progress towards that Goal.

Father of course understands this, and goes to endless lengths to help and to accommodate us towards the Goal. Laying a foundation of Who He Is through Scripture, the next course of bricks begins. He teaches us to trust that He will not keep these attributes to Himself, but instead work to in us to “taste and see that the Lord is good”.

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! **Ps 34.8**

God’s goodness is a given, yet not until we would taste and take refuge are we blessed. Why? Because knowing of His Character is one issue, while trusting His Character as directed towards us is a whole other

issue.

In the same way that an expert in a field who doesn't have hands-on experience is incomplete, so too are we if we thoroughly know the reports of God in Scripture yet lack a trust borne out of an engaging experience with Him.

How will we grow to know what to expect from Someone Who is unseen?

So herein lays the problem: How would we hope to grow in our understanding of and trust in an invisible Person? Without reservation, we can agree that a knowledge of Him through the Scriptures is essential, lest we would know of and believe in a God other than the One written of. But remember, we all begin this Walk ignorant of Him, and ignorant of the Scriptures.

Consider the universal progression every human is called to tread:

- Recognize there is a God
- See the Scope of His presence and involvement
- See our core opposition to Him and His ways
- Hear His call and His demand to repent and return to Him
- Acknowledge our need for Him
- Ask for Rescue from our fallen state
- Recognize this newly reconciled relationship
- Cooperate towards a progressively changed 'heart'
- Patiently help others to realize the same you've learned
- Prepare to meet Him

Notice that this cycle applies to us across the spectrum - whether we're not yet Saved, or if we've followed Him all of our life since Salvation. The Lost finds rescue in the cycle; the Saved

finds progressing Sanctification. In both scenarios, the participant is called to and learns to trust Him.

The cycle of knowing, understanding and trusting Him is an upward ascending and increasing spiral, like a spring small at the bottom growing larger at the top. As He nurtures us, all steps of this cycle are played over and over again in an expanding success. We can even locate ourselves in this progression before or after receiving Salvation - the cycle number you're on might be different, but the process repeats and remains the same because the Goal remains the same. It is a lifetime-long road, but He is caring and patient.

To increasingly engage in the above requires trust in God, yet a God we are to progressively know better. And so the question was posed: Consider other people in your life who represented an influence over you. For instance, what characteristics did (presumably) your Dad have, and how do you recognize the effects your view of God the Father? Why? Because we begin life ignorant of God, perhaps first learning about influencing characteristics from our Dads. In traditional families, we will first know more of our Dad's/Influencer's character before learning Father's. This foundation preemptively colors our understanding and attitude about authority, grace, God, and how we can expect Him to respond. Not intended in the least to be psycho-babble, nor an excuse for our choices, we cannot seem to escape what even Sesame Street teaches toddlers - to know something new, build upon something similar you already understand.

From Scripture, we are also instructed to learn from parallels in the same way - Moses' instructions of the Tabernacle and Laws were a shadow (Heb 8.4-5), sound leaders are to be imitated (Heb 13.17), and we have Jesus' example to follow (1

Pet 2.21).

Now if He were

on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. 5 They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." **Heb 8.4-5**

Remember your

leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. **Heb**

13.17

For to this you

have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. **1**

Pet 2.21

The Influencers in our lives, good or bad, can be a blessing - take care to test your narrative and weigh it against the true Model.

We trotted out the question concerning our Dads' influence on our view of Father, and got answers across the spectrum - good characteristics leading us to God, bad traits informing us of a problem in contrast to His traits, and even a neutral influence neither good nor bad.

In our group's case, they all influenced our path to God. Perhaps we all know of someone whose Influencers

have helped to spin them off into destruction, or even a very good person who has still failed to embrace God.

If we agree that the universal progression every person is called to

tread listed above is true, and that our view of God is effected by our Influencers,

then we can acknowledge it is imperative to run all influences - what we read,

hear, associate with, believe - through the sieve of Scripture. We must derive what

is called right by the
Truth, and repair our perceptions. On
the topic of trusting Father, what things are snagging you?

A personal experience.

I was gently asked, "I notice you refer to God the Father as
"Father". Would you please explain
that?"

After more thought, my answer is that I conclude it is Scriptural (Rom 8.14-17),
a term of glad submission and endearment, and an expression of a personal
relationship He beckons me to.

For all who are
led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,
but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba!
Father!" The Spirit himself bears
witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then
heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in
order that we may also be glorified with Him.

Rom 8.14-17

I perceive a godly Dad as one who strives to be wise, provides
instruction and direction, protects, and insists on God's way in patience and
love. Imitating Jesus, he would do
everything he could to live up to his role in the world (not just in the home, and
beyond being only a 'spiritual leader') as prophet, priest, and king. All of these
attributes and responses are
perfectly declared and demonstrated by Father God. I love His Pure dealings with
me, and His
forging of these same attributes in me as His child.

Those who have influenced me throughout my life have not been many of
these things - both persons of bad character overall, and even fellow fallen

Believers who are learning holiness like I am.

But in a clear and absolute way, I recount how God has increasingly been that perfect Father for me. It is not

that He has increased, but instead He has helped me increasingly embrace Who He fully Is and recognize His dealings with me.

The outcome of any progressively Sanctified heart includes a repaired understanding of Him, and with repentance, an ever wider lens that sees Him. Father, our Heavenly Father, works towards fulfilling His intent to grow each of us this way. He has been consistent and true to me, and this is why I choose to reverently call Him Father.

Consider early Church father Polycarp's response to those who would have him deny Christ. There stood a man who had learned to trust God, and I want to know Him in the same way.

The proconsul then urged him, saying, "Swear, and I will release thee; — reproach Christ." Polycarp answered, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never once wronged me; how then shall I blaspheme my King, Who hath saved me?" At the stake, to which he was only tied, but not nailed as usual, as he assured them he should stand immovable, the flames, on their kindling the fagots, encircled his body, like an arch, without touching him, and the executioner, on seeing this, was ordered to pierce him with a sword when so great a quantity of blood flowed out as extinguished the fire.

My privilege of a growing closeness to Father cannot be special or unique - I read in the Word that this relationship is intended for every human being who would embrace Christ, obey the Spirit, and trust Father.

God is Trustworthy

09/23/2018

We have a look at how trust works, why it develops, where it can fall off of the rails, and why it is important to consider our stance before Father. His intent is to show and convince us that He is Trustworthy.

The Good and Beautiful God Chapter 2 - God is Good

09/23/2018

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[The Good and Beautiful God](#)

Chapter 2 - God is Good

Summary

Most any Christian you ask will agree (confess) that God loves us, that He is Love, that love showed itself on the Cross. In the midst of good fortune, we often hear about His blessings. During the hard times the common anthem is "He has a plan".

While all of the above is very true, we have an opportunity to discover that these statements are actually topical - just the tip of the iceberg - if we'll take time to further consider His Word, His explanation and demonstration

of His Character. Chapter 2 introduces us to a bit more of the topic "God is Good".

Key points

Prelude

Our Author Smith began his walk no different than any of us. He recognized God as Ultimate, confessed his own sin and need, and called on Jesus for His offer. He also, until one day, had little direct experience with God outside of a quiet Christian life. To this point in his walk, he agreed/confessed of His love. But, when real trial was visited upon him and his family, the next leg of his walk began as the Lord helped him understand a bit more of His Character and Intent. Early on, Smith discovered that there are many degrees of depth - as well as a range of opinions - on how God deals with us. But most importantly, he came away with a personal report, an experience, of God's care for him.

This is uncomfortable, what do I need to do to make it go away?

Removing ourselves from uncomfortable situations (or placing ourselves into pleasurable ones) isn't difficult to appreciate. Our world, from day one, is a constant reinforcement of cause and effect: If it burns my hand, move it away; If I'm cold, put on a jacket; If I'm hungry, eat; If I don't want a ticket, don't speed; If I don't want to be struck in the nose, show respect. Conversely: if I don't want to be fat, eat less; if I want to get there faster, speed; If I am in jeopardy, take preemptive measures. Our lives are replete with taking care of business and responding in some sort of action.

So, when difficulty visits us, it is natural to seek a way to avoid, or solve, or endure the situation. Pain, fear,

loss, death – all of these are not what God left us with on Day Six of Creation. It's also not what we can expect once everything is straightened out in the End. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. **(Rev 21.4)**

But for now, in this Age before the Gathering occurs, we are in a place of tension. Somehow we have to reconcile a natural desire for peace and comfort v/s understanding God's Character and Intent towards us v/s how we are to respond to trials and heartache.

Who sinned?

Or, How does God see things and how should I respond?

This Chapter shares the Smith's experience following the diagnosis and the ultimate death of their daughter. He shares the responses of other Jesus followers, and the range of theology about God is sadly lacking. We also shared around the table our own experiences with responses given to us like this.

Ask 10 people to explain something abstract (as opposed to the answer to a math equation) and we can expect 10 different viewpoints. And, the more complicated the topic, the wider ranging (read: the farther from the truth) the answers might be.

Now, ask 10 people, even Christians, about an aspect of Almighty God. But wait, in His case it doesn't mean there are no definitive answers – this is why He has given and protected the Scriptures, and has given the Spirit, and deals directly with each of us personally. The answers from those 10 people will directly correlate to their exposure and experience with Scripture, Spirit and personal experience. Perhaps it is even safe to say that any number of people, if thoroughly experienced in these three things, will come to much the same conclusions about that aspect of God we've asked them about. Why? Because He is seamless, pure and consistent

in His expression of Who He is. Yes, the ways He demonstrates it to us as individuals might be different, but the Truth behind the demonstrations run true to His Character.

God is Good and He loves me. This situation is terrible. Can this be reconciled?

Sink low enough into a difficulty, or spend enough time suffering an injustice, and we might likely find that our comfort in 'God loves me/He has a plan' is challenged. Have any of us ever found ourselves boxed into this problem?

1. God loves me
2. God is Sovereign and all powerful
3. This is a horrible pain/injustice/your need here

Is it possible that even the most devout Follower could come to a place where he would ask God "Why haven't you fixed this for me?" After all, He has the means to, and He says He loves me, right?

What is God working to accomplish?

At the most basic and simple human level, if I will show my love to someone it will probably revolve around their comfort and pleasure. This is the stuff of romance novels, the sweeping off of feet. But what of a love with a deeper view, perhaps something like wanting our children to learn how to handle a budget? In this case the result might sometimes be they can't immediately have what they want. Parents would likely see the degree of pain the children experience as reasonable and necessary. This parent would be loving, yet there is pain.

What is God's main, bottom line goal in Creation? That He would be acknowledged, praised, glorified, worshipped as the One and True God.

What is Father's main, bottom line goal for us and Creation? In the Westminster Catechism, the answer to Question

One is a common - and excellent - answer: That we would glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Both cases contribute to His goal.

As we are involved in this, and as we are lacking as fallen people, and as He loves Himself and loves us, we enter Salvation to begin our training out of our wrong beliefs/actions, and into our understanding, faith and trust of Him. As a child learning to budget experiences pain (followed perhaps by financial peace through godly obedience), should we not expect pain as Father teaches us through difficulty while keeping the End Goal in view? If so, our list might now look like this:

1. God loves me
2. God is Sovereign and all powerful
3. This is a horrible pain/injustice/your need here
4. I know and am learning He is Good and Trustworthy
5. He will even provide me comfort as I suffer His teaching trial
6. As I learn to trust Him, I too can learn to say I 'Count it all joy' (**Jas 1.2-4**)

This is why we have Jesus to lead the way, even when we would ask God

"Why haven't you fixed this for me?" For

He too asked Father this same question: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." (**Lk 22.42**), and again

in obedience on the Cross "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you

forsaken me?" (**Mk 15.34**)

Even Jesus, perfect, learned as a Man to trust and obey Father: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered." (**Heb 5.8**). Can we expect that our course would be any different than that of the Second Adam, Who we follow and have Salvation through? If Father loved Jesus, and He also loves us, then we have hope of reconciling the 'God is Good and He loves me / This situation is terrible' issue.

Because, remember He also tells us:

The eternal God
is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms;

Deut 33:27

The steps of a
good man are ordered by the Lord, And He delights in his way. Though he fall,
he shall not be utterly cast down; For the Lord upholds him with His hand.

Ps 37:23-34

If I say, "My
foot slips," Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up. In the multitude of my
anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.

Ps 94:18-19

My help comes
from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.

Ps 121:2

He heals the
brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Ps 147:3

Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

Isa 41:10

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

Isa 43:2

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Rom 8:28

And,

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Lk 12.32

The list goes on and on.

Some final thoughts.

And so, we can find reconciliation with His love and our suffering. We can say "This happened because God had a plan", while also saying "Though this happened, God has a plan on what to do about it".

There is much more to consider on this topic. John Piper, on the eve of his cancer surgery, scribbled out his booklet "Don't Let Your Cancer Go To Waste". In it, Piper makes a

good argument that even 'bad' things are a gift from God. He reasons that as Sovereign, it isn't possible for anything to pass Father's notice - He can stop an event, cause an event, or let an event proceed that comes out of the fallen world. Was Piper's cancer caused by God, or allowed by God, or not stopped by God? Piper chooses to anchor his opinion in Father's Sovereignty and love, concluding that whatever reason He chose, He did indeed choose it. And on that, Piper thanked God for His gift of cancer. Piper saw it as deemed proper and necessary for His child John, in pursuit of God's main goal of glorifying Himself and in helping John to see things increasingly His way. Piper counted it all joy, and we can too.

God is Good

09/23/2018

Most any Christian you ask will agree (confess) that God loves us, that He is Love, that love showed itself on the Cross. In the midst of good fortune, we often hear about His blessings. During the hard times the common anthem is "He has a plan".

The Good and Beautiful God

Remainder of Chapter 1 - How We Change

09/23/2018

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Remainder of Chapter 1 - How We Change

Summary

Jesus offers a new life, one that is full. One that is close to our intimate Father and all that entails. Stepping into the Family is the beginning, but we begin a long walk of realization, of His progressively showing us the things in us that interfere with this close relationship He intends for us to have with our Holy Father. This requires change in us, not on the surface but at the 'heart' level. But how? Who can change one's 'heart'? The answer is God alone, and this chapter explains the mechanics of who we are and how we might cooperate with God, find true change, and begin actively growing closer to the One Who loves us best.

Key points

Prelude God mercifully explains to us what mankind has strived to understand for millennia - how are we made? What makes us tick? Why do we do the things we do? And Who better to explain, than the One Who made us?

A multitude of philosophies and approaches have developed through our

history on the topic of our behavior and how to see it change. Questions have to be answered concerning how we work before anything can be said of how to bring about change. Consider the options: Are people innately 'good' or 'bad' on the inside? Are we solely responsible, or can 'the Devil make me do it'? Is change a matter of shaping habit and behavior alone? Does God change and grow us, regardless of our participation (or lack thereof)? Our Creator provides us with answers to these questions in His Word to us, his children.

Tossed about the sea of these questions, life can be miserable - especially to the person who is aware of his faults, the outcomes of his behavior, and the need to change.

Misunderstanding how we are made leads to ineffective attempts to change - and the misery of desperation, perhaps even disenchantment with God. To be stuck in an awareness of need - and a longing need for help and answers - leaves one with a miserable resignation to a sad existence. But it doesn't need to be this way, if we will follow our Lord's instruction and position ourselves to receive His help.

The Mechanics of the Human 'Heart' Jesus stated that "what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart" (Matt 15.18a). The 'heart' is described as responsible as the seat of who we are, and what God is primarily concerned about in us. Consider that a search for the word 'heart' through the Bible produces 862 instances. A few that are relevant to Father's concern of our heart condition include:

(Before the Flood) Gen 6.5 "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his **heart** was only evil continually."

(To the king

Abimelech on not taking Sarah into his bed when warned by God) Gen 20.6a “Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your **heart**”

(Given from God

by Moses to the Hebrews) Deut 10.12-13 “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?”

(Jonathan’s

armor bearer responds to attack the garrison) 1 Sam 14.7 “And his armor-bearer said to him, “Do all that is in your **heart**. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you **heart** and soul.”

(David’s plea) Psa 139.23 “Search me, O God, and know my **heart**!

Try me and know my thoughts!”

(God states) Jer 17.10 “I the Lord search the **heart** and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”

And, (Concerning

Father’s Work through the Spirit) Rom

8.27 “And He who searches **hearts**

knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the Will of God.”

Father calls the root of our person the ‘heart’, and shows much attention to it. Perhaps the clearest

passage attesting to this is 2 Chron 16.9a, “For the eyes

of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose **heart** is blameless

toward Him.”

The ‘Will’ and its role in our behavior What role do we think our ‘Will’ plays in our behavior? Without God’s explanation of our heart, it would be easy to assume that our Will is responsible for our actions. Consider the terms ‘Will power’, or ‘setting your Will’ to do something, or the ‘Will is weak’. These terms seem to indicate that our Will alone is responsible, but in consideration of the vast passages of the heart, it cannot be held responsible.

Bending our Will to bring about change results in a short-lived outcome. Yes, we can do pretty much anything for a while - some of us more so than others depending on the circumstance - but in the end, we all eventually come back to show our true colors, or the reality of our state of heart.

Our book’s author suggests that the Will is ‘the hinge on which decision is made’, ‘responding to the impulses’ of the things that influence it. Maybe a good description, but can we add that the Will - while it can be strained for a while to affect behavior - is really the outward-facing outcome we see as a result of the heart behind it?

Isa 50.7 states “But the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have **set my face like a flint**, and I

know that I shall not be put to shame.”

Using the Will to support a behavior and hold it in place for the time being isn’t a bad thing. Isaiah has a courageous heart that rests in God’s help, and he sets his Will as a flint to assist in his intent - but it is not the seat of his intent.

Influencers of the Will - what drives our behavior Our author writes that the Will instead responds to 3 primary, underlying influences: The Mind, the Body, and the Social Context.

These three things are all warped by our fallenness, the result of the

sin of us and in the world. Mind, Body and Social Context are all creations of God, and were perfect when created. The introduction of sin warped these things, and we now respond accordingly.

Jesus, too, possesses these three things. In His sinless case, however, they remain as the 'Manufacturer' intended - and so is the outcome of His actions. Jesus' Saving Work is the basis for seeing these things redeemed back to their correct intent, and thus we can grow into an increasingly closer awareness of God, and have a full life - "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." (John 10.10b)

Jesus' goal is that all three things in each follower would be brought to heel, to increasingly be repaired and changed, back to the way Father intended. This change is a cooperative act of each believer responding to the initiating Grace of God, Who states He wants us to repent and return to our original purpose of seeing, trusting, valuing and Worshipping Him.

Understanding the cooperative nature of change is important. God does not change us without our participation, and we cannot change ourselves without God's Work of Grace. He alone has the means to change the heart of a cooperating believer of Christ.

Specifically, **the Mind** relates to our worldview, our beliefs, our attitudes that drive our responses. Our part is to hear his Word and embrace the challenges to our differing perceptions, then to repent.

God's Grace = Giving of the Truth, His promise to help us gain wisdom. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." James 1.5

Our cooperation = Read, strive to understand, work to recognize the use of the Word. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Rom 12.2

The Body - be it the flesh, emotions, desires - influences our decisions, often towards the wrong conclusions. Aside from the basic 'sins of the flesh' are pain-avoiding and pleasure-seeking influencers as we seek shortcuts to a false peace, and thus play out through the Will - Prov 30.7-9 "Two things I ask of You; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny You and say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.", and, Prov 7.21-22 "With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast"

God's Grace = Jesus' instruction (command) on choosing Him over ourselves - "And He said to all, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it." Lk 9.23-24

Our cooperation = Choose to know Christ as superior to all other things - "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" Phil 3.8-9

Social Context - We are in large part a product of our nurture, the outcome of the way

we were raised, that we live, and what people and their ideas - contrary to

Father's - that we embrace - Tim 1.3-4 "As I urged

you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge

certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves

to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the

stewardship from God that is by faith.", and, 2

John 6-7 "And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is

the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should

walk in it. 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.", and, 1 Cor 15.33 "Do not be

deceived: "Bad company ruins good

morals.""

God's Grace = A command that we separate from influences that we hold

more dear than God; that falsely inform us - "Whoever loves father or mother more

than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is

not worthy of me" Matt 10.37, and, "Whoever walks

with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." Prov 13.20

Our cooperation = Choose friendship with godly influencers who also fear

and pursue God - "As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan

was

knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." 1 Sam 18.1, and,

"A friend loves at all times, and a

brother is born for adversity." Prov 17.17,

and including Jesus, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not

know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I

have heard from My Father I have made known to you." John 15.15

Father cares greatly about our Heart, because it is the seat of who we

are. He seeks those after His own heart

(David, per 1 Sam 13.14a). Our closeness to Him is in direct proportion

to our holiness. Yes, we are forgiven
and can stand before Him on Christ's Work.
But consider a life of seeing Him now through an active cooperation of
knowing his Word, repenting and being changed, and expecting to see Him.
"Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he it
is who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will
love him and manifest Myself to him." John
14.21

How we Change

09/23/2018

Stepping into the Family is the beginning, but we begin a long walk of realization, of His progressively showing us the things in us that interfere with this close relationship He intends for us to have with our Holy Father. This requires change in us, not on the surface but at the 'heart' level.

The Good and Beautiful Life - Introduction

09/23/2018

The Good and Beautiful Life may be a new book title, but it's not a new concept. Rather, it is a message at the center of Jesus' ministry and embraced by the Church through the centuries. Yet, it has seemingly been forgotten, beginning in the 20th century.

Intimacy with Father

09/23/2018

We acknowledge (read: Millennia of pondering) that Jesus did this with perfection - but what does this show us? His successful navigation as a Human is a banner for us to learn and follow.

Fear and Fortitude

09/23/2018

I realized that the contrary views of my whole life and my actions have been largely based upon (avoiding) the fears of discomfort - loss of provision, bruised pride, disrespect, harm. In response, I have looked to excel at the barriers to the things that cause those discomforts. The problem is, aside from being sinful, these preventative barriers are horrible taskmasters.

Lefty Bogolia Eulogy

09/23/2018

There are many of us here who belong to Jesus, and who are friends of Lefty. We have seen him in action, and we know something of his character. Preparing to speak to you, I polled some of our mutual friends and asked "What are the core things about Lefty that strike you?"

Lamentation - New Terms For Us Under the Blood

09/23/2018

We see David lamenting to God in the Psalms and should ask “Is this how I should lament to God today under Christ?” Nobody escapes difficulties, so how should we address God about this? David’s is a good model, but with a big exception for Believers today.

Submission is Inferior to Reverence

09/23/2018

It was the worst day of my life, and the best day of my life. And I didn’t even realize it.

Kathleen Cook Funeral

09/23/2018

I have known Kathleen for several years as a minister at Colonial Nursing Home in Crown Point. Some of the family I met at the home as they visited with her, and most everyone else last year at her 90th birthday party.

Leadership, Authority, and Subordination

09/23/2018

Legitimate authority is established upon assignment, not merit. Authority has nothing to do with a person's abilities, and in fact, means that authority remains even in an ignorant leader. Bad leaders are still responsible.

Hannah's Baptism

09/23/2018

Hannah's Baptism testimony, and my prepared response.

Test Yourself, Christian

09/23/2018

Going to church does not make you a Christian; nor does saying a prayer, going down an aisle, passing a catechism, telling yourself that you are, or trying to be a decent person. You can only be a Christian if Christ is in you, which can be tested and proven according to the scriptures.

Why did God Create Man?

09/23/2018

We often point to the Westminster Catechism and state that our chief goal is “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever”. While a great explanation from Man’s viewpoint, I have wondered about God’s point of view, too.

Two Minutes to Explain the Gospel

09/23/2018

First, let’s acknowledge there is a God Who has expectations. One proof of this is your inherent sense of right and wrong, which is there as an anchor to His expectations.

The Results and Effects of Sin

09/23/2018

I would describe sin as an act that defies the stated expectation of God.

The Missional Life

09/23/2018

A missional life will rest upon an understanding of the core reason of a man's existence, being realized through his Saved life.

The Inerrancy of the Bible

09/23/2018

I believe the Bible is the faithful compilation of everything God intends for us to hear from Him.

General and Specific Revelation

09/23/2018

I believe both categories speak of His character. No person will ever be without an awareness of the God of Everything, and on the other hand, all who pursue Him can find Him personally.

Created in God's Image and Likeness

09/23/2018

Being that the Bible states that God has no material form, and the fact that all of us look very different both in person, race and gender, I believe the Image and Likeness He imparted upon us refers to His characteristics and attributes.

Brief Explanation of the Trinity

09/23/2018

I believe the basics of the Trinity include Three Persons, all God, holding distinct offices and responsibilities, with subordination among Them under Father, yet none of Them no less God Supreme.

Kent Eloë Eulogy

09/23/2018

The shadows had been long, and it was brisk, cold. "Mike! Mike!" he whispered as we sat in the deer blind. A beautiful mulie buck had topped the crest of the hill between the draws, and he was on the move in our direction as he crossed the hay field. My friend had brought me to hallowed ground

Arthur R. Spoerhase Funeral

09/23/2018

I have known Rick for almost two years now. The members of our ministry team visit the Colonial Nursing Home residents several times a month, and Rick and I came to know each other along the way.

Albert A. Scheffer

09/23/2018

Life is indeed fragile, and we are but mere men. However, we are also personalities, most precious and special - the result of a lifetime of experience and growth. Al was no different than any of us in that way, but he was surely a unique soul.

Some Questions for the Pastor

09/23/2018

Questions we might ask of a Pastor when considering attending his Church.

Trials from God and the results He intends from us

09/23/2018

Our lives and circumstances - what are they? To ourselves, to us as we focus on ourselves, we are quick to lose sight of what our lives and circumstances truly are. The truth is, in light of God's view, everything we are - our lives and circumstances - are at best secondary.

Nick Scheffer Funeral

09/23/2018

My observation has been that Aunt Claire and Uncle Nick loved each other, sacrificing themselves for each other. I have heard and seen Aunt Claire's devotion to Uncle Nick, even if he was having a bad time of it and wasn't always so loveable. Claire remained devoted to him.

Frank Tomlin Eulogy

09/23/2018

All of us have the opportunity to settle our debt now by accepting Jesus for Who he says He is, else we will face Hell as payment. Beware! Any other route to Heaven is a lie. The wonderful news is that Jesus' offer is simple, it's free, and it's guaranteed.

Matt's Baptism

09/23/2018

Passages in preparation for Matt's Baptism

How and why the Lord keeps us Saved

09/23/2018

Looking at the exhortations of Hebrew concerning the perseverance of the saints and God's use of Scripture, among other things, to accomplish this, it seems we can often find difficulty in understanding how this is so and how it even fits theologically.

Preparation for the Lord's Supper

09/23/2018

Followers of Christ are brought into the New Covenant by the Atonement. This is possible through the breaking or sacrifice of Jesus' Body, to finally satisfy the Justice demanded by God for our sins.

Thoughts on Heb 6.4-9

09/23/2018

What of the person who “backslides”? It must mean one of two things - either that person never belonged to Christ, or, he is a very poor example of a Christian, who’s ‘works will be burned in the fire’, and who continues to ‘grieve the Holy Spirit’.

Jesus’ mother and Father - the God-man

09/23/2018

What does Scripture reveal to us concerning the mystery of Jesus’ God and man realities? He came here to be among us, Jesus the Son of God, God Himself in every sense, yet also fully man.

Our Biblical Tapestry

09/23/2018

A tapestry is woven, and there are many different sorts of threads which run through it. If you imagine looking up close and tugging on an individual thread, you might also imagine seeing where else that thread runs through the tapestry. Studying the Bible, especially by reference, is illustrated in this way too.

Why must we pray?

09/23/2018

When someone is directed to do something - is given the opportunity and has the means to do it - they will also be held accountable for their response. In this case we are told to do so by God Himself, and He keeps perfect accounts of how we respond.

To Whom and how we pray

09/23/2018

Only people whose High Priest is Jesus, who are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, are recognized by the Father as His children. The Father has chosen to use priests as representatives between God and mankind.

Sanctification; preparation for prayer

09/23/2018

Though we are sinners, as Righteous through Christ we may now approach the Throne of God in the Most Holy Place in Heaven. We may stand before God in the Holy Spirit, clean under the Sacrifice of the Lamb's Blood.

Praying in God's Will; at the Throne in confidence

09/23/2018

If we go to God the Father in prayer, we must be doing it in the belief that that He is listening and willing to respond. The truth is, that without this faith, we are just speaking into the air at no one.