

# **THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD**

## **THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD – DEREK LUPTAK**

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*Only to sit and think of God,  
Oh what a joy it is!  
To think the thought, to breath the Name  
Earth has no higher bliss.  
- Frederick W. Faber*

**Genesis 1:1-3** - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

**1 Corinthians 4:6** - For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

**2 Corinthians 2:14** - But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.

**2 Peter 1:2** - Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

**Hosea 6:3** - Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.

**Hosea 6:6** - For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

### **I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD FLOURISHES WHEN SPACE IS CREATED IN OUR LIVES FOR DIVINE REVELATION**

A. **To express recognition of the presence or existence of** - To believe rightly and think rightly about God is crucial to KNOWING God. But it is step one. To grasp and assimilate right information about the nature and character of God is an important first step, but it should never be mistaken for the totality of Christian Living. It *is* possible to believe "right information" and still live in a way that does not reflect the love of God as revealed in Jesus. In our learning, there is a gradual progression from knowledge to understanding to wisdom. Knowledge is what you know; Understanding is how well you know what you know and Wisdom is knowing what to do with what you know.

**1 Corinthians 8:1-3** - We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. But whoever loves God is known by God.

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**Colossians 1:9-12** - For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. *We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives*, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, *growing in the knowledge of God*, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his people in the kingdom of light.

**Hebrews 10:26-27** - If we deliberately keep on sinning *after we have received the knowledge of the truth*, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

**2 Peter 1:5-8** - For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. *For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**Philemon 1:6** - I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.

- “...the width of our knowledge about him is no gauge of the depth of our knowledge of Him.” (J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, InterVarsity Press, Illinois, 1973. p. 39) (Emphasis added)
- “There is today no lack of Bible teachers to set forth correctly the principles of the doctrines of Christ, but too many of these seem satisfied to teach the fundamentals of faith year after year, strangely unaware that there is in their ministry no manifest Presence, nor anything unusual in their personal lives...Thanks to our splendid Bible societies and to other effective agencies for the dissemination of the Word of God, there are today many millions of people who hold “right opinions,” probably more than ever before in the history of the Church. Yet I wonder if there was ever a time when true spiritual worship was at a lower ebb. To great sections of the Church the art of worship has been lost entirely, and in its place has come that strange and foreign thing called the ‘program’...The modern scientist has lost God amid the wonders of his world; we Christians are in real danger of losing God amid the wonders of His Word. We have almost forgotten that God is a person and, as such, can be cultivated as any person can.” - A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God*, Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1982, Pg. 9

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- B. **To delve deep into holy mysteries and live out of the overflow** - A healthy respect for the mystery of God is an integral component to a robust understanding of the “revealed-knowledge” of God. Among the other aspects of His nature He has revealed to us, He had made it known that His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. (*Isaiah 55:8*) Without an appreciation for the mystery of God, we are more likely to fall into the trap of “conceptual idolatry” in which we imagine that we can fully understand God and thus, shrink Him down to a more manageable size. By contemplating the depths of God’s mystery we are liberated from our superficial existence and freed up to experience the richness of His abundant life in ways we can’t previously imagine.

**Romans 11:33** - Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

**Ephesians 3:17-19** - And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, *and to know this love that surpasses knowledge* - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

**1 Corinthians 2:9-11** - However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived— these things God has prepared for those who love him" - for God has revealed them to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except that person's own spirit within? *In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.*

- “Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilized peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him.” - A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, HarperCollins, New York, 1961, p. 3
- “God is not contained by our words or by our concepts of him. Even in light of the incarnational revelation of Jesus Christ, Paul states, ‘For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.’ (1 Cor. 13:12). God may know us fully, but we comprehend God only in part. Our scriptures are full of stories and statements that declare that God is complete and wholly ‘Other.’ Solomon prays at the dedication of the temple and rhetorically asks in recognition of the representational nature of what is happening, ‘But will God *really* dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!’ (1 Kings 8:27, emphasis added). Even so, we read that God allowed his Spirit to abide and hover in the Holy of Holies. Why would we suppose that God would be able to dwell in the

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theologies that have been created by human minds if he wouldn't full dwell in a sanctuary built by human hands? In the modern world, we don't build physical, architectural temples to host God; we construct elaborate theological systems to describe the God of the cosmos. But he is not contained by our descriptions. " - Tim Keel, *Intuitive Leadership*, Baker Books, Michigan, 2007, Pg. 174

- "God does not come to us offering rules; God comes offering relationship. Truth is not found in the solving of difficult theological riddles. Truth is found as we get lost in the mystery of faith. You can maintain your bearings while getting lost...if Jesus is leading the way. As you inhabit the Mystery of God in you, you experience the GodLife relationship, which brings truth and hope to the world. Jesus never commanded us to learn the right things about him, but rather to follow him. We find the truth and help reveal the hiddenness and mystery of God in Christ as we lose ourselves in the GodLife relationship." - Leonard Sweet, *Out Of The Question...Into The Mystery*, Waterbrook Press, Colorado, 2004, Pg. 199

- C. **To intentionally seek to be transformed into His likeness by making space for the Spirit to integrate and plant a Jesus-Shaped Life within our heart-soil** - We need an intentionality to not only learn information about God and His mystery and holiness, but to also live deeply out of that reality. The truth about who God is must not only inform our minds, but permeate our hearts. **WE CANNOT DO ANY OF THIS TRANSFORMING WORK OURSELVES, BUT WE CAN MAKE SPACE FOR THE SPIRIT TO WORK.** Spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, solitude, study, meditation, service, confession, worship and celebration do not bring transformation in themselves, but they expand our capacity for transformation by unmasking destructive thought patterns and clearing out the clutter within us. The Spirit is the One Who changes us from the inside.

**Romans 8:29** - For those God foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed to the image of his Son*, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

**1 Corinthians 9:24-27** - Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

**2 Corinthians 3:18** - And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being *transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory*, which comes from the

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Lord, who is the Spirit.

**1 Timothy 4:7-8** - Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, *train yourself to be godly*. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

- “Christians empowered by the Holy Spirit are fed from a very deep well. They don’t fluctuate or change. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, our inner world is stable in spite of the shifting world outside. Christians are deepened by the trials they undergo. They rise above their challenges. Environment doesn’t dictate their behavior; instead, they transform the environment they live in. Christians who practice spiritual disciplines have a divine conspiracy in their hearts. As Paul tells the Colossians, God has given them abundant wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). (..) The Word of God clarifies our vision and reminds us that God blesses us generously with his precious knowledge. Those who believe in Jesus have everything in the world. Jesus lives in them; his knowledge abides in them. Our challenge is to draw out that divine power. The wise person knows how to draw on the deep in the well of his or her inner life“ - Joshua Choonmin Kang, *Deep-Rooted in Christ*, InterVarsity Press, Illinois, 2007, Pg. 43-44

## **II. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IS PRACTICAL AND MUST BE ASSIMULATED INTO OUR EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE**

- “Practical Theology” may seem to some an oxymoronic phrase, yet if our knowledge of God has no fruit-producing effects, according to James (1:22) we are “deceiving ourselves.” What you know about God only matters if it changes the way you see your life and alters your attitudes, actions and relationships. Merely abstract theological speculation is not what is meant by the phrase “Knowledge of God.” True knowledge of God leads to FRUIT in the life of the “knower.” However, again, we need to keep in mind that this fruit is not a direct result of our “strivings” but a work of the Spirit THROUGH us.

**Matthew 3:8** - Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

**Matthew 7:16** - *By their fruit you will recognize them*. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?

**John 15:2** - He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be *even more fruitful*.

**Galatians 5:22-23** - But the *fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

**James 3:17** - But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-

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loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy *and good fruit*, impartial and sincere.

- A. **The Word became FLESH and dwelt among us** - The Incarnation is the hub of practical theology. In the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself became human, and in so doing extended His blessing into the physical, material world in which we live. He came to us as Emmanuel (God with us) and “tabernacled” among us. If words on a page were enough, there would have been no need for the Incarnation. What was it about God that He could only show us by becoming one of us? What theological significance is there to the fact that in the person of Jesus Christ, God Himself took part in everyday human activities (eating, drinking, sleeping, laughing, playing, working, growing up, etc.)? We sometimes blanch when children ask uncouth questions about Jesus’ bodily functions and the like, but we have to remember that the Incarnation in itself is remarkably uncouth (and that’s the point of it)! As much as we try to keep “God-stuff” respectable and elevated; God Himself came down to us and is with us in the grittiness of life as well as the glorious. This is the scandalous nature of the Incarnation. What are the implications? 2,000 years to digest this remarkable reality and we haven’t even scratched the surface.

**Luke 1:35** - The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."

**John 1:14** - The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

**Ephesians 4:7-10** - But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says, “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people (ps. 68:18)” (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

**Philippians 2:5-7** - In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had. Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, *and being made in human likeness*.

**Colossians 1:21-23** - Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he *has reconciled you by Christ's physical body* through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. *This is the gospel* that you heard and that has been

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proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

**1 John 1:1-4** - That which was from the beginning, *which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.* This life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

**1 John 4:1-3** - Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: *Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,* while every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

- “Jesus is the person in whom we see God present among us, God dwelling among us, God here and now. Jesus calls us out of our libraries and classrooms and lecture halls where we are studying the rich and storied past of God’s revelation; Jesus challenges our obsessive preoccupation with scenarios of how and when God will finally accomplish his purposes with us and with all humankind. “Look what is right before you: I am.” The signs are all over the place, the sayings are echoing in our minds and hearts. The glory. But once we take a carefully John-guided look at Jesus, we have to revise our understanding of glory considerably. The thunder and lightning of Sinai, the elaborate rituals and fabrics and designs for worship in the wilderness tent, the architectural splendors of the Solomonic temple, the spinning, gyroscopic cherubim dazzle of Ezekiel’s throne, the thunderous Psalm 29 poem/prayer that conducts the entire creation into symphonic harmonies - all this is now background to the glory that we see in Jesus. Nothing of the splendor that is conveyed in these earlier expressions of the glory is to be dismissed or minimized in any way. But this glory must now be remained and received and entered into as Jesus reveals it; Jesus ignorable, Jesus unimpressive, Jesus dismissed, Jesus marginal, Jesus suffering, Jesus rejected, Jesus hung on a cross, and - the final and irrefutable indignity - Jesus dead and buried. All this is included in the content of ‘we beheld his glory.’” - Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in a Thousand Places*, Eerdmans Publishing Company, MI, 2005, Pg. 100-101
- “We say of our Blessed Lord that He is our example as well as our mediator. Yet He was God as well as man. What is this then but saying that of such consequence was it to the happiness of man that he should know how to behave himself as a creature, that it was necessary that the Creator should take a created nature, and come Himself to show how to wear it? Thus one of the many known reasons for the sublime mystery of the Incarnation was that the Creator Himself might show the creature how he

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should behave as a creature...The mysteries of Jesus are man's studies of the beauty of holiness..." - Frederick W. Faber, *The Creator and Creature*, Tan Books & Publishers, Rockford, IL, 1961

- B. **The Holy Spirit subjectively brings us in tune INTERNALLY with the EXTERNAL Incarnate Word** - The modern age that we are as a race beginning to move on from, was an age that was steeped in the idea of objective rationalism. Basically, objective truth was sought by subjective beings through reason alone and scientific methodology. While there was some merit in that approach, the Christian has a rich heritage to draw from that validates both the idea of objective truth and subjective experience of that truth. If Jesus is the Word, the ultimate self-revelation of God, then we have to come to terms with the fact that truth is both personal and transcendent. For this reason, Jesus promised His disciples that He would pray to the Father to send us a "strengtheners," the Spirit of Truth to "teach (us) all things." (John 14) At its basic level, spirit is personality. We don't have to imagine all kinds of ghostly apparitions, spooky auras or magic "energy fields" when we deal with the spiritual. Your spirit is your personality, and God's Spirit is His personality and presence that indwells us. Words on a page about Jesus, as crucial as they are to our understanding of His historical life, cannot fully convey to us the personality of God. And our own imaginations are likely to be carried away into "conceptual idolatry" if we relied solely on our own understanding of God to lead us. Therefore, if we seek a truly transformative knowledge of God, we must take seriously both the external incarnate Word as related to us through the canonical gospels and the indwelling Spirit of God, who not only searches out the "deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:9-11) and relays them to us in the very depths our own beings. The seed of the Word is cast into the soil of our hearts. The Spirit interacts with the mysterious, unseen places within us and somehow Christ is formed within us. (Gal. 4:19) Yet, even in explaining this, we have to be aware that the cognitive knowledge of it is not the reality of it. It must happen in you, merely knowing about its possibility isn't sufficient. And that is the work of the Spirit, although we can co-operate.

**John 14:26-27** - But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, *whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.* Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

**Romans 5:5** - And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts *through the Holy Spirit*, who has been given to us.

**Romans 15:13** - May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,

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*so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

**1 Corinthians 2:12-14** - We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because *they are discerned only through the Spirit.*

**1 Thessalonians 1:4-6** - For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, *because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.* You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering *with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.*

**2 Timothy 1:14** - Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—*guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.*

**Titus 3:4-7** - But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,* so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

**Jude 1:20-21** - But you, dear friends, *by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,* keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

- “The union between the Father and Son is such a live concrete thing that this union itself is also a Person. I know this is almost inconceivable, but look at it thus. You know that among human beings, when they get together in a family, or a club, or a trade union, people talk about the ‘spirit’ of that family, or club, or trade union. They talk about its ‘spirit’ because the individual members, when they are together, do really develop particular ways of talking and behaving which they would not have if they were apart. It is as if a sort of communal personality came into existence. Of course, it is not a real person: it is only rather like a person. But that is just one of the differences between God and us. What grows out of the joint life of the Father and Son is a real Person, is in fact the Third of the three Persons who are God. This third Person is called, in technical language, the Holy Ghost or the ‘spirit’ of God. Do not be worried or surprised if you find it (or Him) rather vaguer or more shadowy in your mind than the other two. I think there is a reason why that must be so. In the Christian life you are not usually looking at Him. He is always acting through you. If you think of the Father as something ‘out there’, in front of you, and the Son as someone standing by your side, helping you to pray, trying to turn you into another

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son, then you have to think of the third Person as something inside you, or behind you. Perhaps some people find it easier to begin with the third Person and work backwards. God is love, and that love works through men - especially through the whole community of Christians. But this spirit of love is, from all eternity, a love going on between the Father and the Son.” - C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, HarperCollins, NY, 1952, Pg. 175-176

- “The Holy Spirit; and the task of the church. The two march together hand in hand. We can't talk about them apart. (..) Without God's Spirit, the church simply can't be the church. The wind and the fire and the brooding bird are given, then, to enable God's people to *be* God's people. This has a surprising and dramatic effect. The Spirit is given so that we, ordinary mortals that we are, can ourselves be, in a measure, what Jesus himself was: part of God's future arriving in the present; a place where heaven and earth meet; the means of God's kingdom going forwards. The Spirit is given, in fact, so that the church can share in the life and continuing work of Jesus himself, now that he has gone into God's dimension, i.e. heaven. (The 'Ascension' is about just that: Jesus going ahead into God's sphere, into God's future, against the day when heaven and earth become one, and he is once more personally present in the new, combined, heaven-and-earth.)” - N.T. Wright, *Inciting Insight: The Holy Spirit*, <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/events/2005/inthechurch.cfm>, 2005

**C. We are called to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God; this is true worship** - The apostle Paul tells us this in Romans 12:1, followed by an admonition to resist “conforming to the pattern of this world,” but to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” In John 17:15-16, Jesus prays not “that they would taken out of the world,” but that God “would protect them from the evil one.” He then goes on to say we are not “of the world,” just as He is “not of it.” So we are to be “in the world” but not “of the world.” So here we see a progressive movement from the Incarnation, to the sending of the Strengtheners, from the Father in the name of the Son, Who works mysteriously within us, conforming us into His likeness (Romans 2:12) purifying for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:14). The knowledge of God is not simply a teaching to think about, but a life to be lived. To walk with God is to see life in the context of a larger reality than the systems of the world. This larger reality is “the Kingdom of God,” and when we live out the Kingdom in everyday life, we are no longer “of the world” and its systems of power. To live this way is to be a “living sacrifice.” No longer living for self-preservation or merely the pursuit of selfish pleasure, but living out the love of Jesus, revealing the heart of the Father, being the salt of the world, like a city on a hill, so that men will see our good deeds and glorify our heavenly Father. (Matt. 5:16). Salvation is not merely the forgiveness of sins (although that is a vital element), it is a life we are called to live out, through the empowering of the Spirit.

**Titus 2:11-14** - For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It

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teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness *and*\* to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

**James 3:13** - Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

**Ephesians 2:10** - For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

**1 Peter 2:4-5** - As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by human beings but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

- “O, this faith is a living, busy, active, powerful thing! It is impossible that it should not be ceaselessly doing that which is good. It does not even ask whether good works should be done; but before the question can be asked, it has done them, and it is constantly engaged in doing them. But he who does not do such works, is a man without faith. He gropes and casts about him to find faith and good works, not knowing what either of them is, and yet prattles and idly multiplies words about faith and good works.” - Martin Luther, *Great Voices of the Reformation: an Anthology*, ed. Harry Emerson Fosdick, Modern Library, NY, 1954, Pg. 121-122
- “One specific errant concept has done inestimable harm to the church and God’s purposes with us - and that is the concept that has restricted the Christian idea of salvation to *mere forgiveness of sins*. Yet it is so much more. Salvation as conceived of today is far removed from what it was in the beginnings of Christianity and only by correcting it can God’s grace in salvation be returned to the concrete, embodied existence of our human personalities walking with Jesus in his easy yoke. Once salvation is relegated to mere forgiveness of sin, though, the discussion of salvation’s nature are limited to debates about the death of Christ, about which arrangements involving Christ’s death make forgiveness possible and actual. Such debates yield ‘theories of the atonement.’ And yet through these theories the connection between salvation and *life* - both his life and ours - become unintelligible. And it remains unintelligible to everyone who attempts to understand salvation through these theories alone. Why? It is because they are of no use in helping us, as the apostle Paul puts it, to understand how, being reconciled to God by the death of his Son, we are then ‘saved by his life.’ (Rom. 5:10) How can we be saved by his life when we believe that salvation comes by his death alone? So if we concentrate on such theories exclusively, *the body and therefore the concrete life we find ourselves in are lost to*

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\* That’s a significant “and” theologically.

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*the redemption process.” - Dallas Willard, *The Spirit Of The Disciplines*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1988, Pg. 33-34*

- “The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us: or (putting it the other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made.” - C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, HarperCollins, NY, 1952, Pg 176

### **III. MINING THE DEPTHS OF THE LIVING GOD**

- “The only reason you exist is pleasure. It’s the only reason you were made. You have no other function than enjoying and being enjoyed by God. None. Not one. Why do you exist? Does God need your help? Have you seen the angels around His throne? He doesn’t need you to do anything for Him. **You’re the one creature made to mine the depths of the living God.** Everything for you has been built around the revelation of God, Him letting you know something about Himself.” - Allen Hood, *The Excellencies of Christ Syllabus*, Forerunner School of Ministry

- A. **The knowledge of God is illuminating** - We see the metaphor of light being applied to the knowledge of God throughout the Bible. God’s light penetrating and permeating our darkness is a central theme of the Bible. During the plague of darkness in Egypt, the children of Israel miraculously had light. In the wilderness they followed a cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night. Jesus is revealed to be “the light of all people.” And in Him, we are able to “walk in the light.” The writer of Revelation prophetically anticipates a day when God makes His dwelling permanently among us, and He will be our light. More specifically, we are told in Romans 1:19-21 that the invisible qualities of God are apparent in creation, and if we do not recognize the Creator by the light of natural revelation, we could face the futility of our thinking and the darkening of our hearts. The illuminating of the intellect (renewing of the mind) is a meaningful element of apprehending the knowledge of God. Church history is full of vigorous intellectual journeys as exemplified in the lives of Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, Blaise Pascal and C.S. Lewis. Great Christian thinkers like these have left the Church a treasure of inestimable value. Loving God with the mind is a wonderful, joyous thing - and an intellect illuminated by the Spirit of God is a fountain of light for a darkening world.

**2 Samuel 22:29** - You, LORD, are my lamp; the LORD turns my darkness into light.

**Psalms 19:8** - The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

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**Psalm 36:9** - For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

**Psalm 78:14** - He guided them with the cloud by day and with light from the fire all night.

**Psalm 97:11** - Light shines on the righteous and joy on the upright in heart.

**Psalm 119:105** - Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

**Isaiah 9:2** - The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

**Isaiah 60:1-3** - Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

**Isaiah 60:19-20** - The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end.

**Matthew 2:9-10** - After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed.

**Luke 2:25-33** - Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: *a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.*" The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

**Luke 11:34** - Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness.

**John 1:1-5** - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word

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was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

**1 John 1:6-8** - If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

**Revelation 21:23** - The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

**Revelation 22:5** - There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

- “Without doubt, the mightiest thought the mind can entertain is the thought of God, and the weightiest word in any language is its word for God. Thought and speech are God’s gifts to creatures made in His image; these are intimately associated with Him and impossible apart from Him. It is highly significant that the first word was the Word: ‘And the Word was with God and the Word was God.’ We may speak because God spoke. In Him word and idea are indivisible. That our idea of God correspond as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us. Compared with our actual thoughts about Him, our creedal statements are of little consequence. Our real idea of God may lie buried under the rubbish of conventional religious notions and may require an intelligent and vigorous search before it is finally unearthed and exposed for what it is. Only after an ordeal of painful self-probing are we likely to discover what we actually believe about God. A right conception about God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God.” - A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, HarperCollins, NY, 1961, Pg. 2

- B. **The knowledge of God is fascinating** - The knowledge of God is not boring. Perhaps human means of transmitting the knowledge of God has made it seem that way, but in its pure form (direct communion between creature and Creator) it is captivating. This is why, although the left-brained, systematic approach to the knowledge of God can be a great way to make sense of who God is and what He is doing in the world, it is insufficient in itself to lead us into the fullness of that knowledge. If we focus only on the cerebral approach to the faith, we can easily suffocate and squeeze all the life out of it. We are not dislocated brains floating in

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jars. We experience life as it comes through the senses and react deeply and emotionally to God, as well as rationally. This is where the arts come into the equation of knowing God. Music, paintings, literature, and dance are just a few examples of artistic mediums that have the capacity to speak to us in ways that go beyond the merely cognitive approach to attaining knowledge. Church history is full of creative men and women who sought to communicate something of the experience of God to the rest of us, in achingly beautiful ways. Some of the great artists the Church has in her heritage include Bach, Handel, Dante, Milton, Lewis, Tolkien and too many more to count. There is also a rich treasury of contemplative writings such as *Practice of the Presence of God*, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*, *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* and *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*. Writings such as these and many others seek to communicate the experience of God's transforming presence in the life of the God-lover and the process of spiritual formation and growth. This is a more "right-brained" approach to the faith and is more at home with story, song and image than systematic thinking. The scriptures themselves are full of stories, songs, parables, poetry, hyperbole and metaphor. The psalms invite us to marvel at God's creative power and join in! The stories Jesus told help to baptize our imagination. The prophets were performance artists to some extent. The first thing the Bible tells us about God is that He is wildly creative. And He created us in His image.

**Exodus 15:20-21** - Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, *took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing*. Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea."

**1 Samuel 16:16** - "Let our lord now tell your servants who are in front of you to look for a *man who is a good player of the harp*. When the bad spirit sent from God is upon you, *he will play the harp, and you will be well*."

**Ecclesiastes 3:11** - *He has made everything beautiful in its time*. He has also set *eternity in the human heart*; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

**Psalms 34:8** - Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed are those who take refuge in him.

**Psalms 119:103** - How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

**Matthew 26:5-11** - While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. "This perfume could have been sold at a high

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price and the money given to the poor." Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me."

**Ephesians 3:16-19** - I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

- “Creativity is a part of our nature; we, not the ostrich, have been given the ability to create. God breathes life into our dusty forms. His Spirit hovers over us, calling to the depths and leading us into abundant living. We are creative because we are made in God’s image. Imagination is part of our nature: we solve problems, we relate to others, we come up with ideas, we make guesses, we are resourceful, we dream and fantasize. (..) When you use your imagination, you are putting into play your experiences, personality, abilities and intuition. Your relationship with God gives you insight into his purposes and his creative process. Your creativity is a link to the living God.” - Alice Bass, *The Creative Life*, InterVarsity Press, IL, 2001, Pg. 20

*I cannot dance, Lord, unless you lead me  
If you want me to leap with abandon  
You must intone the song.  
Then I shall leap into love,  
From love into knowledge,  
From knowledge to enjoyment,  
And from enjoyment beyond all human sensations.  
There I want to remain, yet want also to circle higher still.*  
- Mechthild of Magdeburg, 13<sup>th</sup> century saint

- C. **The knowledge of God is transformative** - The knowledge of God never lets us get away with trying to casually observe Him from a distance. The knowledge of God pierces the heart and renews us from the inside so that we overflow with the knowledge of God. The scriptures look ahead to a day when the earth is drenched in the knowledge of God. It begins here and now with you and I. And each of us are on the journey that God has set us on. We may have different experiences of God, but in Jesus, we are in communion with the same God. Our lives are pilgrimages; and the knowledge of God is both the scenery along the way and the destination. Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 13:12** that “Now we see but a poor reflection as if in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

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**Deuteronomy 2:7** - The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. *He has watched over your journey through this vast wilderness.* These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything.

**Psalms 84:5-7** - Blessed are those whose strength is in you, *whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.* As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. *They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.*

**Galatians 2:20** - I have been crucified with Christ and *I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.* The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

**Colossians 1:27** - To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, *which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

- “*Adeste Fidelis.* That is the only answer I know for people who want to find out whether or not this is true. Come all ye faithful, and all ye who would like to be faithful if only you could, all ye who walk in darkness and hunger for light. Have faith enough, hope enough, despair enough, foolishness enough, at least to draw near and see for yourselves. He says ask and it will be given to you, to seek and you will find. In other words, he says that if you pray for him, he will come to you, and as far as I know, there is only one way to find out whether that is true, and that is to try it. Pray for him and see if he comes, in ways only you will recognize. He says to follow him, to walk as he did in the world’s darkness, to throw yourself away as he threw himself away for love of the dark world. And he says that if you follow him, you will end up on some kind of cross, but beyond your cross and even on your cross you will also find your heart’s desire, the peace that passes all understanding. And again, as far as I know there is only one way to find out whether that is true, and that is to try it. Follow and see. (..) *Adeste Fidelis.* Come and behold him, born the king of angels. Speak to him or be silent before him. In whatever way seems right to you and at whatever time, come to him with your empty hands. The great promise is that to come to him who was born at Bethlehem is to find coming to birth within ourselves something stronger and braver, gladder and kinder and holier, than ever we knew before or than ever we could have known without him.” Frederick Buechner, *Secrets In The Dark: A Life in Sermons*, HarperSanFrancisco, 2006, Pg. 54-55

**Concluding Prayer:**

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*You, O Eternal Trinity, are a deep sea into which, the more I enter,  
The more I find, and the more I find, the more I seek.  
O abyss,  
O eternal Godhead,  
O sea profound,  
what more could you give me than yourself?  
Amen.  
- Catherine of Siena*