

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

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Forward

I've tried to look at the world in many ways. I can understand how people can look at the world and think that within the complexities of the universe that there are amazing physical things that just happened to produce living things. The universe is simply one amazing place with many things that we don't understand completely. Our limited minds can only grasp so much and, for whatever it is we choose to believe, we need a measure of faith. The question we need to consider is whether we intend to place our faith within the realms of physically-confined science or whether we think that there is something in our universe that is beyond what our physically-based science can tell us. The current knowledge base of science may not have answered all the questions but, given time, will it eventually answer all the questions that we have? Is the physical all that there is?

Our personal experience has much to do with our perception of things. Have we, or those people we know, ever encountered events that seem to have no sufficient purely explanation? - or - Have we felt betrayed by those non-physical explanations that we have been led to believe by those around us? - or - What personal leanings do we have to explain the world as we see it? - or - What institutions around us do we trust more to give us reliable answers?

We can never know everything, but whether we give much thought to our world-view or not, we simply do have a world-view. With whatever incomplete knowledge and wisdom we have about the world, we have beliefs about the way that the world behaves, and we must have some measure of faith about all that. Whatever our personality, our disposition or our experience, what is it that we choose to believe?

My knowledge of the world is as incomplete as anyone else's, but through my life's experience and life's searching, I have found an explanation that makes the most sense to me. How I got to this point is another story, but I have found what seems to me the most reasonable answer to how the world behaves. The answer includes a creator of the universe, creatures who have been created to love that creator but have chosen to rebel against that love, and the creator's reaching out to those rebellious creatures.

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Preface

The Community

By its very nature, spiritual life is a community thing. At its bare minimum, we cannot have spiritual life apart from God, for to be without Him is to be spiritually dead. Then, if we are spiritually alive, that is, if we are connected to God, then we are also connected to all of God's people. It is within our connections to God's people that we all discover more deeply about who God is. It is with that community of shared knowledge, shared gifts and shared abilities that we can best be the people that God has intended us to be.

The Target

This book is aimed at varied audiences. It can be used for individual study or for group discussions. The book is arranged so that it can be read by people who are either well acquainted or not so well acquainted with the Bible.

The Scope

Because the different sections of the Bible were written by so many different authors over different generations and so many different styles, it can be difficult to see how it all fits together. It is the intent of this book to provide an overview of Scripture by weaving together some of the overarching themes of the Bible so that we can observe the Bible as one integrated package.

Because the scope of this book is very wide, it moves very quickly, and you may find it beneficial to pause as you read so that you can grasp the context of one paragraph before you go to the next.

The discussion questions at the end of the chapters are meant to be just that. Many of them require reflection and have no easy, straightforward answers. It is only by discussion with other people that one can discover more deeply just how God has revealed himself.

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Prologue

One Question Still

*As I look into the star-filled sky
And wonder how and wonder why
and wonder who and wonder when
and ask it over and over again*

*The answers come by much too slowly
as questions come and questions go
as questions rise and questions fall
one question still is, "Who made it all?"*

Rationalism or Revelation

One of the questions asked by nearly everyone, at some point in their life, is "What on earth am I here for?" Many people start by observing the nature of the universe around us and from that they try to derive some answers. Unfortunately, the answers based only on those observations are always limited by our incomplete knowledge of the universe. This process of observing the world and using those observations to make sense of our world is called rationalism. I have seen in my journeys that rationalism can give you any result you ultimately want. In fact, because no one possesses total knowledge or wisdom, it can be posited that no position can ever be absolutely proven wrong. So if that is the case, then where do we go to answer the question, "What on earth am I here for?" or the query related to that, "What is it that makes all of us ask that question?"

If we start out by saying that we are simply the result of mindless interactions of matter and energy, then we have no purpose. However, if we believe that the evidence indicates that we are the result of intelligent processes and that we are creatures – living beings deliberately created by an intelligent creator – then we need to look to the one who created us. Fortunately, our Creator gave us more than rationalism to discover the truth about ourselves and the world, He has bothered to reveal Himself to us. When we do go to look at this revelation we discover many profound things; such as who God is, how we are made in His image and how the relationship we have with each other reflects our relationship to the Creator.

DIGGING DEEPER: How do we know things? ¹

According to philosophy, there are two ways to know things:

- Rationalism - Knowledge consistent with or based on reason
- Revelation - Knowledge shared by another. A subset of Empiricism (Knowledge which is known by the senses.)

Shaped according to whom?

Some people would rather think that we are the result of undirected evolutionary processes, that God is a fabrication of our minds and that we ascribe our own human characteristics to the God we made in our image; this is called *anthropomorphism*. Some people believe that God is the one who designed us and designed us to be like Him, and that we should see how our characteristics are derived from Him; this is called *theomorphism*. It is through *theomorphism* that we will find an answer to the question, "What on earth am I here for?" by considering the question "What has God revealed about himself in His creation, in His image and in how we relate to each other?"

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The Journey

One can know about God as an intellectual exercise, but to “know” Him is more than that. You cannot know Him simply by accumulating information about Him, but only by experiencing Him and interacting with Him. Discovering God is not simply a theological exercise. God’s presence and His handiwork are written in creation and in the people whom He made in His image. This means that we can discover God with the tools we use to discover the world around us: the tools that include but are not limited to science, philosophy, history, art and language. We can also discover God by interacting with people.

Writing this book was possible only because of the journey ... discovering God by the repeated process of reading what is expressed in His revealed word, listening to others, learning about science and history, and experiencing life until it was possible to see how the various pieces fit. As a result, this book provides an overview of the Bible, tying the beginning of Scripture to the end and all of that to events in life’s journey.

Digging Deeper

Some of the paragraphs are followed Digging Deeper sections have sidebars that contain references to Biblical (and sometimes extra-Biblical) material that support the content of that paragraph. While these sections also contain brief explanations of those references it is recommended that you refer directly to those materials. When extra-biblical materials are referred to, I have used online content as much as possible to make it convenient to access those materials. When extra-Biblical references are used, those title bars will have a notation for an end note which will indicate where the references will be found.

Poetry

Because prose has not always been the most suitable material to express God's revelation, Scripture sometimes uses poetry. This book also contains poetry at the end of each chapter of this book. In the poems, look for a succinct expression of God’s truth related to the chapter that precedes it. Enjoy the poems as a creative, thought-provoking and sometimes playful way to capture some essence of the work of God. Use them to help stretch your mind creatively around some of the concepts being discussed.

Discussion Questions

Recognizing that we are not designed to journey through life alone, this book is designed to be studied with another person or with a group. Each chapter ends with discussion questions that you will allow you to learn about each other and discover God's revelation through each other's eyes. The questions are deliberately open-ended, recognizing that the Bible has answers but each of us sees the Bible in the context of our own journey. The most fruitful answers will come if you allow time for personal reflection before answering the questions, meditating on the Scripture passages referred to and carefully listening to each other. Some questions will not have answers that are right and wrong, although the best answers will correspond to Scripture. Interestingly, that does not necessarily mean that the most Bible literate person will always have the best answer, because it will be possible for anyone to answer the questions based on prompting from the Holy Spirit. To make your study easier, note that with each question there will be a reference to particular paragraphs where the key concepts can be found.

Scope of this book

In this book, I have not avoided the big questions, the deep questions of life. As my journeys have prompted me to look at many areas of study, I refer to these areas in this book. There are so many places that we can look to find answers to our questions, but eventually we must center on something. I have found that center in the Holy Bible. Then, starting from that center, I examine other areas of knowledge to answer those questions.

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Therefore, you will find that the scope of this book is immense. Although the focus of this book centers on Scripture, covering the entire Bible, it also covers some other areas of knowledge as well. For those readers who may not be familiar with the historical scope of the Bible, I have provided “Appendix A – A Brief Overview of Biblical History.” Because of the scope of this book is so large, you will find that the Discussion Questions at the end of each chapter focus on overarching themes and ideas more than on specific verses.

For those less familiar with Scripture, this book will present an opportunity to see the grander themes and scope of the Bible. Hopefully this study will put a context on later Bible studies that are more narrowly focused on portions of Scripture. As you go through this study, look for common threads that keep on reappearing ... the God who reveals Himself in different ways through time is the same God dealing the same issues over and over again.

For those better acquainted with Scripture, this book will present an opportunity to see the Scripture they do know in a larger context. Our perception of the world influences our interpretation of Scripture and our knowledge of Scripture shapes our perception of the world – it is an interactive process; therefore your answers will rely on your life’s experiences and your familiarity with Scripture. Since this book encompasses the breadth of Scripture, it would be appropriate to follow this study with other studies that are more specific and in-depth.

The scope of this book has made it difficult to write and those who wish to dig deeply into themselves and Scripture will need to put in much effort as well, but the journey is well worth the effort. As I have learned many things as I have written this book, I ask that God bless your journey as well.

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God Reveals Himself in His Creation

It is a normal experience to look at the world around us and become amazed, whether we look at the power of the ocean, the vastness of space, the force of an erupting volcano or the intricacies of any of a myriad of living things. But now, partly because the universe we look at is broken and partly because we do not understand everything we look at, when we look to the creation by itself to understand the Creator, we sometimes get confused. Fortunately, we find that a more complete picture of the Creator can be seen if we look at His revealed Word. If we combine our knowledge of the world with the knowledge revealed by the Creator, that is, if we combine our physical sight with our spiritual sight, we will see so much more. We will even see how the unfolding process of the physical creation can reflect the characteristics of the non-physical God. We will see an emerging pattern, as God through time unfolds his nature before us. We will see, even within the nature of the universe, the nature of the one who created it.

The view from eternity

When God tells us that He created “in the beginning,” we should recognize that God is implying that He was there before the beginning. Before He created a world constricted by time, God was there. We may live in a world constrained and measured by time, but God is not. It is very difficult for us to understand what God’s perspective is when He looks at us from eternity because we cannot change the past, can only imperfectly anticipate the future, and at our best, can only control our own individual actions in the present. However, God looks at us from eternity and sees one day as one mark on His ruler and 1000 years as another mark on the ruler. Even if we could understand quantum physics and how time is relative to a space-time framework, we still can only partially see how time and how God transcend our world and our universe.

DIGGING DEEPER: The words we heard ... we proclaim

Genesis 1:2:1, John 11:5, 1 John 1:1-4

In the beginning, God ... was the Word ... which we have heard ... we proclaim. Could it be that those who had touched Jesus when He walked on the earth, touched the Pre-existent Eternal One who is and was ... who was there in front of them and at the same time is at the beginning of time ... and have therefore become witnesses of creation itself?

DIGGING DEEPER: The plan of creation

Psalms 139:16 – All our days were pre-arranged before we were created. He had a purpose for us.

Proverbs 8:1-36 – These verses treat wisdom as if wisdom was a person talking to us ... If only we were listening! One of the significant points of this proverb is that God’s wisdom was used in the creation of the world and in the creation of each one of us. Our existence is not arbitrary or done as a joke at our expense.

Creativity and Purpose

When God did create, in the beginning, He started with nothing except the elements that He himself created. Can you imagine what kind of imagination God has? Not only did He start with no materials, but He also started with no previous model. From before the beginning, God knew how all that He had made would be used along the way. He knew from before the beginning how everything would happen, how everything would end, and how the world, the universe and each of us individually would fit into His masterpiece of creation. In that one scope, we not only see the immense creativity of God, but also His incomprehensible ability to plan and prepare, a God of deliberate purpose.

Order

In the first chapter of Genesis, we see the unfolding of what God has created. The process of creation is marked out in days. We may struggle with what the full sense of what God’s “day” is, but we can clearly see the deliberate intention of creating things in a particular order. In that order, one created thing prepared the way for the next as the God of creation imposed His order and purpose on the random arbitrariness of the universe. As living things were created, the world was prepared to meet all their needs. Even more so, when God created

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man, there was a place assigned for him in the entire created order of the universe. There was a plan to fulfill and, beginning in Genesis, God prepared man and prepared for man, to fulfill His ultimate purposes.

Goodness

Another overall revelation in these “days” of creation is the declaration of goodness. Throughout the process of creation, there is the declaration, “and God saw that it was good.” Even in the final day of creation, the declaration was, “and it was very good.” Therefore, not only do we see that the creation was not done in an arbitrary way, but we see that the creation has value. It was good, very good. Beginning in Genesis and continuing through Revelation, we also see another pattern develop; when the Lord speaks, it happens, for His word is His covenant and He does what He says. His unlimited power is linked to His absolute moral authority ensuring that whatever God creates is good, for God is good.

Community

In Genesis, God reveals himself as “Elohim”, a mysteriously singular and a plural word. As we look further in Scripture, we see that there is God, and the Spirit of God hovering and the Word of God creating; one God revealed to us as three persons, not three gods but three people in one God– a mind-boggling complexity which we somehow have managed to neatly wrap up, perhaps too neatly, in the term “Trinity.” In addition, as we look through Scripture, we can see that there are distinct roles for each person – the Father who is the source of all things and who directs and orders, the Son who submits and carries out the Father's will, and the Spirit who indwells and guides. Thus, we see God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – from before the beginning – one God, three people, each person with a purpose, and among them order, harmony, and community.

DIGGING DEEPER: ‘Elohim’ ... God the community?²

‘Elohim’ is a Hebrew word for God which consists of the word ‘Eloah’ with a plural suffix. In fact, ‘Elohim’ could be interpreted as ‘god’ or ‘gods’ depending on the context.

The word ‘Trinity’ is not found as a word in the text of the Bible but was constructed by the Church (prefix ‘tri’ combined with the root ‘unity’) to explain how there is one God and at the same time God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This is not straightforward for us to understand but it is hinted at in the Old Testament and more explicitly stated in the New Testament.

John 6:17-23 Jesus speaks of the Father as the Son

John 14:15-21 speaks of the Comforter and the Father

Question of Biblical Time

The account of creation leaves out many details, and some will dispute about what those details are, even to the question of how long is a “day” in the day of creation. Are the days 24-hours long or indefinite periods of time or even both? There is also a question as to whether the descriptions should be considered as metaphors. As I have examined the various answers to the issue, I am in awe of God's power no matter which way the creation unfolded. However, no matter what some of the unexplained natural or supernatural details are, we can see something of the character of God in what He did reveal to us. For in the Scriptural account that He gave to us, He revealed to us some very significant things about Himself.

DIGGING DEEPER: How long is a day?³

Some competing explanations are:

- a) Literal 24-hour days (young earth creation)
- b) Day-age theory (each day corresponds to a geologic era)
- c) Time relative (which equates cosmic time with earth time)
- d) Biblical language is metaphorical/poetical.

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Before the beginning

From nothing, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty. However, in that inauspicious beginning God was beginning to work out His plan: He would take the chaos in the universe and impose His order upon it. The first ingredient we are introduced to is water, a marvelous substance that has so many interesting properties that many books have been written about it and it is the prime ingredient that God would use to support the life that He would eventually create. There is a common belief among many people that if a spot in the universe has water then life could easily spring up, but the ingredient for life that is often ignored by those same people is God. Without God's intervention, there would be no life. But God was there at that moment. His Spirit hovered over the waters and at the proper moment in time He would, according to His purpose, begin His work with the water.

At a later moment He would create abundant life within the water, but at the moment described here there is water and His presence above it. From this beginning, God would gradually mold and shape the world according to His purpose, the purpose He had within Himself before the beginning of time. From before the beginning of the universe and outside it in time, the God of purpose and order was there working out His plan using the ingredients from which He would create life, water and time itself.

Before the beginning, there were words. Through time, as God has revealed Himself, we see God using the words that were always there, words of command, words of comfort and words to communicate His thoughts, intentions, feelings and desires. In the beginning was His Word. The first act and every act of shaping the universe and its contents had begun with a word, for nothing just happens, but rather God deliberately acts. He is a God of the word. The first words spoken are used to command. God offered a command to the universe and it responded and took the shape He ordered.

DIGGING DEEPER: Words of creation.

Genesis 1:1 – One can create (be creative) with materials already on hand, but here the Hebrew word being translated is ‘bara’ which means created out of nothing, *ex nihilo* (Latin)

DIGGING DEEPER: The First Ingredients:

Time, water, God’s command

DIGGING DEEPER: What does it take to make a life?⁴

Although some biology books make it seem otherwise, abiotic evolution (the evolution of life from non-living chemicals) is very problematic with some speculations but no real solutions in sight. There is a \$1,000,000 dollar prize for an empirically viable solution.

Day 1

In the first moment of time, the first act of shaping was to create light – the symbol of His presence, His knowledge and His holiness. From the beginning, He has intended that we have knowledge of Him, for as our physical eyes can see light, so with our spirit we can become aware of His presence. However, when He created the symbol of His presence, He also revealed the symbol of His absence – darkness. Just as there is a place with Him, there is a place without Him. It is possible to not know Him – to be in the darkness. There is goodness and there is evil. In the beginning, there is hope and warning, the symbol of His presence and the symbol of His absence.

God declared that light was good, but not the darkness. However, He would use both the light and the darkness to order time, for there will be times of darkness, times of light and times in between. There will be nights and days, evenings and mornings, and from within that order He will order the rest of His creation. From the beginning He has intended times and seasons, a time for every purpose and a purpose for every time. From the beginning of time, God had intended that His purposes would be revealed in the time He has set aside.

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DIGGING DEEPER: Light, darkness and the ordering of time

Light:

Revelation 22:5 Symbol of His presence

1 Timothy 6:16 Symbol of His holiness

2 Corinthians 4:6 Symbol of His knowledge

Darkness:

Isaiah 59:1-11 Sin and evil blind us.

John 3:19 Evil men don't want the light

Psalms 82:5 The wicked are ignorant and do not understand

Ordering of time:

Ecclesiastes 3:1 He has intended time and seasons, a time for every purpose and a purpose for every time

Our choice:

John 8:12 To follow Jesus is to walk in the light

Day 2

In the second moment of time, God would take the ball of water called earth and extract an atmosphere to go around it. Though it would have been possible for God to simply create life within the water, God had another plan in mind. He would create an intricately designed complex system to support the kind of life He intended. Scripture only captures some of the essence of what that system is, but as we, in our age use science to explore that system, we can see how complex and detailed that system is. Indeed, even now we can only see some of the details and some of the complexity for we have not yet uncovered or understood all the significant details of the mind-boggling system of the living things.

DIGGING DEEPER: Complexity⁵

There may be differing opinions on why the universe is complex, but there is no doubt that it is very complex. There are entire university programs dedicated to studying complex systems. There is a question about how the complexity of the universe came to be which have caused some scientists to formulate the theory of Intelligent Design.

When we use science to examine the atmosphere, we discover that it does not hold just water vapor, but also many ingredients that support the life that would be created later. We also have discovered that the atmosphere interacts with the universe outside the earth. On the one hand, the atmosphere extracts useful energy from the sun in such a way that life can be supported by that energy, but on the other hand, the atmosphere shields us from the harmful energy from the sun and other sources that would destroy us if we did not have that shield.

DIGGING DEEPER: It's more than hot air⁶

The atmosphere does much more than give plants and animals stuff to breathe. (Ex: filter radiation from outer space, keeps earth warm, protects us from meteorites, etc.)

We also know that the atmosphere would later become a tool that God would give for us to use. Using the atmosphere, we can communicate with each other and with Him because it allows instruments like vocal chords to create many rich and complex sounds through which we also create rich and complex languages not only to understand and communicate with Him, but also with each other. And we, with all of God's creatures, are able to lift our voices with a praise that reflects the majestic wonder of God. Moreover, we would be given the awesome ability to allow God's Spirit to come within us in such a way that we could even possibly speak the Creator's own words. Marvelously, all of this fantastic power is as natural as our ability to breath, so that each breath becomes a reminder of God's amazing ability to indwell and inspire us.

DIGGING DEEPER: The breath of life

We would die quickly if we could not breathe. As important as air is to us physically so is our need for God to speak to us
2 Timothy 3:16 – The Bible was written by people inspired by God.

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Day 3

In the third moment of time, God formed the dry land, the final preparation of the earth before it would be ready for living things. Scientists know how relatively easy it is to support life in the water as compared to dry land because living things need water to live. But throughout history God would choose to reveal himself in things of weakness and need. Although God had already shown His tremendous power by His ability to create the sun, the stars, the wind and the waves, God would continue to show His hand by doing things in the places least expected.

DIGGING DEEPER: How did it happen?

Isaiah 41:17-20 – If we are looking carefully, we will see signs of the Lord, things with no other explanations

DIGGING DEEPER: Topsy-turvy

Isaiah 40:28-31 – This is how the weak become strong

1 Corinthians 3:18-19 – This is how the foolish become wise

Isaiah 53:1-12 – This is how the Creator lived as the suffering Messiah

Throughout the process of creation, God's greatness will be revealed not only by the awesome natural forces he had already created, but by creatures and things that are weak and humble. For God will produce life where there is no life, just as He will provide hope where there is no hope. He will cause the plain things to become beautiful, the weak to become strong, the foolish to become wise. Even the Savior of the world will Himself come to us as “a root out of dry ground.”

DIGGING DEEPER: Abundant life⁷

Before the Great Flood, there is evidence that life on earth was very plentiful. God intends for us to have abundant life

DIGGING DEEPER: Splendor of God

Isaiah 61:1-3 This passage was read by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 3:18-19) and the full context from Isaiah points to the splendor which would be displayed by His disciples

At this moment of time, the earth was now ready to receive life. The first living things created were plants which could live off the nutrients in the soil and in the water. Each plant should be a reminder that, contrary to expectations from mindless evolution, God is the one who plants. Paleontology has revealed to us that the plant life was once much more abundant and varied than it is right now; and that is what we would expect if we understand the Biblical account. The Lord had planted abundantly, but over time, the ravages of sin have taken their toll. However, as we look at the evidence left for us to see of what God had planted, we see that the plants of the Lord had displayed His splendor even as the people planted by the Lord would do. In addition, plants like all living things reproduce according to their kind. Indeed, it is normal and expected that living things reproduce, even spiritually living things. In fact, our ability to reproduce can indicate the state of one's spiritual health.

DIGGING DEEPER: Do you see Him?

Romans 1: 18-23 – This passage declares that God's general revelation is sufficient. People can be condemned for ignoring the visible signs of His character.

Day 4

In the fourth moment of time God, in preparation for the animals and for man, would provide sources of light that would serve as markers of times and seasons. Unlike animals, plants are not able to change behaviors, so they do not need to use tools to distinguish times and seasons to their benefit, but creatures, especially humans, are able to use the sun, moon and stars to enable them to farm, hunt and travel. Even before the use of clocks and calendars, man would have the ability to plan and prepare for his activities.

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Light, the symbol of God's presence is, of course, there during the day; and even during the night there are sources of light. They do not shine as brightly – but they are there even in times of darkness. In the same way God is not absent, but rather He, the one who marks the times and the seasons, is always there guiding the way. In the time of darkness we now live in, we sometimes question if God is there. Some of us may look to astronomy or astrology for clues in the created sources of light for guidance, looking for clues to who we are and which way we should go, but the created sources of light only provide a shadow of the light of the Creator. Some of us may look to the created sources of light for guidance, but they are only visible images of the invisible God to remind us that it is He who is able to guide us through His Spirit that indwells us.

Day 5

In the fifth moment of time, God would fill the oceans of water and the oceans of air with life. No matter how high or how deep we look, there was life, reminders of His presence. For only the second time in creation, God created out of nothing (see Words of Creation, p.9) and what He created out of nothing are souls -- living, breathing, moving, conscious souls -- and each soul a testimony to a life outside of biology, for the visible life is but a reflection of the life of God. God spoke to these conscious souls, blessed them and instructed them to become abundant, to multiply and to fill the earth, just as He, out of His own abundance, would fill the earth with His grace. The abundance of life He created also reflects the spiritual principle that from only one life or one seed, no matter how weak or how small, can eventually come an abundance of life and a bountiful harvest.

DIGGING DEEPER: What is a soul?

Genesis 1:20, 21, 24, 30 – The Hebrew word used here is ‘nephesh’ and is translated moving creature, living creature or life.

DIGGING DEEPER: More abundance

John 10:7-10; Ephesians 3:20 – Jesus wants followers to have life and faith immeasurably more than we can ask or think.

DIGGING DEEPER: The three creations⁸

Although God was busy making things, there are only three times that God creates out of nothing (Hebrew: bara)

Day 6

In the sixth moment of time, God would put living souls on the fully prepared dry land with food to eat and lights in the sky to guide them. Each step of creation had prepared the way for the next. Everything was now in place with a purpose and a place to be.

As we examine this world, we can see how living things depend on each other and on the environment around them. Science has revealed how complex is the web of life and how wonderfully paradoxical: fragile and hardy, dependent and resilient, some things are able to survive in the harshest of places while others require a very particular environment. But the most amazing feature of this complexity is that, written in each cell of every living thing, there is a code more intricate than any program man has ever written, a signature of the Creator that wrote it. Embedded in that signature is a mystery that should give us pause in that the very code that controls the cell is dependent on that cell to perform its processes and even to survive. (*see Appendix B - The Paradoxes of God and Dynamic Tension*)

DIGGING DEEPER: The “Code-a-clone” factory⁹

Each cell has a central computer (DNA) with robots (mRNA) that carry the instructions to factory floor (rRNA) where the parts (proteins) are assembled by other robots (tRNA). Although in a mature organism, the factories are highly specialized, each factory has all the programs necessary to produce an entire new organism with other specialized factories.

DIGGING DEEPER: VIPs from heaven

2 Corinthians 5:20; Matthew 25:14,15; 1 Peter 4:10; Luke 12:38 – God has sent some VIPs to earth. Do you know who they are?

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However, there is a final purpose for all of the creation. The capstone of the creation would be creatures especially endowed with the character of the Creator. For the third time, God would create something out of nothing. (see Words of Creation, p. 9) This time He would create physical beings with a spirit capable of communicating with their Designer, ambassadors of God, stewards of God who would exercise dominion over God's creation on God's behalf. Interestingly, as DNA controls the cell yet is dependent on it, so God's ambassadors who, although they exercise control over creation, are also dependent on the very same creation. And now the players are in place, the forces are in motion and the creation is complete.

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You May Not See or Hear

You may not see it in the vastness of a star-filled sky
or across an ocean of raging waves
or in a hurricane
or racing cloud

You may not feel it in the volcano's power
or in an earthquakes tremble
or in a tornado passing by
or gentle breeze

You may not hear it in the rolling thunder
or in a song of unrequited love
or in a promise made
or child's cry

You may not see the hand of God that made it all
or hear Him whisper out your name
or feel His touch
or presence

Bible reading: *1 Kings 19:1-13*

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Discussion Questions:

1. If wisdom could talk to you – what would you like to hear? (Creativity and Purpose)
2. What things in science don't you understand? How does this affect your appreciation of God? (Question of Biblical Time)
3. What things in creation do you appreciate? (Before the Beginning)
4. What things do you see in creation that seem to require an explanation that God must have been involved in it? (Before the Beginning)
5. How important is it to you to understand how long the 'days' in Genesis are? (Question of Biblical Time)
6. There are some things in life that don't seem to make sense, they don't seem to be 'afflicted' by order. What do you do when things seem to be out of order? (Day 1)
7. How does light communicate God's presence for you? (Day 1)
8. What are all the ways in which you communicate? What do you mostly communicate about? Compare that to what God communicates about. (Day 2)
9. What humble things don't you fully appreciate? (Day 3)
10. How do you mark the seasons of your life? (Day 4)
11. In what ways are people paradoxical? (Day 6)
12. God created the universe with us in mind. How do you respond to that? (Day 6)
13. What do you think God's purpose is for your life? (Day 6)
14. Discuss how various phenomena in poem may or may not reflect God's hand at work? (You May Not See or Hear)

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God Reveals Himself in His Image

In the world we now live in, we do not have to look very hard to see that something is very wrong. The first part of the creation story ends with a creation that is good, very good. What happened between then and now? Even though we know that we, His Spirit-endowed creatures, are expressly made in the image of God, we know that we, with all of creation, also are corrupted and find it difficult to look in the mirror and see the reflection of God. Unfortunately, many people through the years have confused the current state of creation with God's original creation and therefore have gotten confused about the nature of God. That means we need to use rationalism (see "How do we know things?" p. 4) cautiously and rely more heavily on God's revelation. Fortunately, God has spoken to us through time and so it is that we now have the revealed Word of God. Therefore, let us first look at the Creator and His revelation in order to clearly see what He had intended before things went wrong so that we can discover how He created the first people to see and how He intended for us to be.

Multiply and subdue

The instructions given to Adam and Woman were similar to the instructions given to other creatures, to multiply, which is a natural extension of all living things that reflect the nature of the living God. God also gave to Adam and Woman, the instruction to subdue, which implies a process that includes discovering God's creation and understanding it so that we can learn to order and control it. It is in that context that we now explore who God is and how He has made us and the rest of creation.

DIGGING DEEPER: What was her name?

Genesis 2:23; 3:20 – Adam called the woman God had made, “Woman.” Woman was not named “Eve” until after the fall and the discipline. Since the majority of this chapter covers the time before the fall, I will use the name, “Woman” throughout most of the chapter

DIGGING DEEPER: We’ve got a job to do

Genesis 1:26-28 – Right from the beginning, God gave us some jobs to do. What are they?

Fullness of identity

In one sense, God is one, and the essence of God's character, even though it is complex, can be reflected in one of His creatures. When we think of a “whole” person, we think of the sum of the person's body, soul and spirit; the three parts together defining the whole person. Sometimes there is a tendency to perceive the essence and the character of a person more by the “inner” qualities than by the external body. For instance, when a person's body is broken by injury or by birth defect, we know that although the broken body may place limitations on how that person operates in this world, we intuitively know that there is more to the person than the external expression, the body of that person. It is also generally understood that after the body dies, there is something of a person that endures beyond the death of the body.

DIGGING DEEPER: Defining ourselves¹⁰

In some cases, when we define ourselves by our gender, our color, etc. then we are identifying ourselves by our bodies. In other cases when we define ourselves by our culture or our values then we are identifying ourselves by things outside our body

However, after saying all that, there is a significant way in which the body defines who we are in this world, because we all must live with whatever the limits of our bodies are and however we look. It is in that “wholeness” that we truly understand who we are and how we perceive others to be. It may be that there are aspects of our soul and spirit that transcend our circumstances, but we must include who we are in the body to see the fullness of our identity. For it is in our full interaction with the world that our body, soul and spirit; our emotions, thoughts and will are integrated together and define who we are as individuals.

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Although our bodies are corrupted – in fact, we will need new ones at the resurrection – it is through our bodies given by God that we interact with the world and that we are put in a particular place at a particular time in the world to fulfill a particular purpose that God has intended for us in the world. It may be that only God fully knows the role He has intended for us, but it is up to us to look at our bodies and our circumstances with eyes wide open to the purposes of God, in order to work with God, as we try to fulfill the purpose He has intended for us in the world. God is perfectly able to show His glory in whatever circumstances He has placed us in, for it is through our soul and spirit that we, with God's help, may transcend our circumstances, and it is through our body, given by God, that we can fulfill God's purpose for us in this world. As we try to discern who we are and what our purpose is, we find another layer of complexity.

DIGGING DEEPER: What happens when we die?¹¹

I Corinthians 15 – This whole chapter is a wonderful treatise on resurrection.

Complexity: Male and Female

In Chapter One of Genesis, God reveals Himself as a multiple-personality. It is revealed in His name, “Elohim.” and it is revealed in the statement “let us make man in our image,” (italics mine) after which He explicitly creates man and woman. Although we can see one person reflect the image of the one God at one level, we are now able to see at another level the expression of the multiple-personality God reflected in the sum of male and female. Other than that biological detail, the first chapter of Genesis does not reveal any more about which particular ways that man and woman complement each other; however, it is an interesting fact, that although God is not a physical God, particularly not a male or female one, that nonetheless God did create man and woman to reflect His image. It must mean something.

Therefore, as we look in chapter two of Genesis, we see what a much unexpected unfolding of the way in which man and woman is probably were created. If we examine the curious way in which God reveals His creation of man and woman, then we can explore just how the expression of man and woman reflects His image. God could have simply created the man and woman simultaneously, but He did not. God could have created both man and woman from the dust, but He did not. God could also have created man and woman out of nothing using no material on earth, but He did not. So what is the purpose in the way He created man and woman?

DIGGING DEEPER: One plus one equals one?

Genesis 1:26-28 – In the first chapter we discussed how 1+1+1=1 (the Trinity). And here we have God (singular) said to himself (singular), let us (plural) make man in our (plural) image. Adam (singular) is made in the image of God. Adam and Eve (plural) are made in the image of God.

Complexity: Body, Soul and Spirit

Just like the beasts, Adam was created from the dust of the earth and then God breathed life into that soul. (see What is a soul? p. 21) Adam, and all of us, have bodies fashioned from the materials of this world. In the search for our purpose in the world, we need to remember that we are part of it and tied up in it just like our DNA code is tied up in each of our cells. However, unlike the other created souls, this new creature, Adam, was created in a unique way such that his character would resemble the character of God. For when God breathed life into Adam, He did not just impart physical life but also spiritual life, His own Spirit. Therefore, when we look at Adam and we see him interacting in the world, we see the nature of God interacting in the world. When we see the essence of Adam, his body, soul and spirit, we see the essence of the triune nature of God.

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DIGGING DEEPER: Spiritual life.

Job 32:8 – The Spirit gives understanding
Ecclesiastes 12:7 – The body returns to dust, the spirit of God
2 Corinthians 4:16 – The body deteriorates but the spirit remains
Romans 8:9-11 – God’s own Spirit indwells us.

Complexity: Order

Moreover, as we look at God more closely, we see even more complexity which is reflected in the intricacies that we can see within Adam, for from within Adam an entirely new person would be formed. God took a rib from Adam's side, formed it into Woman and breathed His life into her. When Woman was brought into Adam's presence, Adam immediately recognized her as a part of himself, “bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh.” So in this wonderful reflection of the Godhead, we see that just as the Son, who is eternal, was begotten of the Father, we also see Woman, who was part of Adam from the beginning, begotten of Adam. Moreover, just as the Son is the essence of the Father, so is Woman the essence of Adam. Therefore, whenever we use the term, “mankind,” it is not because we are forced to select a gender specific term, but we are remembering – or should be remembering – the distinctive way in which all humanity derives its life from Adam. So when we use the term, 'mankind,' in this distinctive way, we honor the unique way in which human life was created, and we also honor the Creator in whose image we are made and who Himself referred to us as 'mankind.'

DIGGING DEEPER: Why not ‘humankind’?

Genesis 1:20-25 – Most of the time species are named by, of course, their species name (Ex: cows are called cows). While we also call humans, ‘humans,’ we also sometimes call us ‘mankind’ or ‘man’. This nomenclature shows the culmination of the unique way God created humans: first Adam was created and then – from Adam – Eve was created. Hence all human life is descended from the man, Adam.
Genesis 1:27-27 – Look at the way the verse is phrased ‘Let *us* make man in *our* image ... let *them* rule ... in the image of God let *us* make *him*.’

Image of God: unity and complementarity

When we look at Adam, we see a creature made in the image of God, and when we look at Woman, we see a creature made in the image of God. But even more, when we look at Adam and Woman together, we see in more detail an even more complete image of God, for we see an image of one God with multiple personalities. Although in one sense Adam was complete, Adam was made more complete when he had another person with whom he can relate to. Similarly, Woman, being derived from Adam, was also complete in nature. However, within the nature of both Adam and Woman is the ability to relate to and connect with another person, whether that person is God Himself, or another God-conscious person who can share the dominion given to them by God. Adam could then be made more complete, more perfect, if he could have the opportunity to fully express his innate ability to fully relate with another God-conscious soul.

The ability to relate to another person is a reflection of the same ability within the Godhead, because just as within the Godhead, the Father and the Son share the same Holy Spirit, so also Adam and Woman share the same Holy Spirit. The Spirit that unites the Father with the Son also unites Adam with Woman and Adam and Woman with God. The sharing of the Holy Spirit provides a profound unity which binds Father, Son, Adam and Woman. However, despite this unity they are not totally fused. The Father is not the Son, Adam is not Woman and man is not God. There is a oneness of spirit, but they are still different people, with differences that complement one another.

Therefore, as we examine the union of Adam and Woman, we see how the way Adam and Woman complement each other is a reflection of the divine order. We see how the union of the Father and the Son is reflected in the

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image of the physical union of Adam and Woman ... one flesh. Within the physical union of Adam and Woman we see the unashamed intimate unity of two complementary individuals designed not only for each other's pleasure but designed such that consummation of that unity will produce new life, children.

DIGGING DEEPER: Uniquely ours¹²

No other creature copulates in the intimate face-to-face manner that humans do.

This reflects how we, the children of God, are the result of the consummation of the love between the Father and the Son. Even more than all this, the consummation of marriage also points ahead to the time when the church, the Bride of Christ, will reunite with Christ in heaven. What the outgrowth of that consummation will be we will have to wait to see. It is in this perspective that the physical sexual union between Adam and Woman, between husband and wife, becomes a holy act and why it is quite unlike the sexual union of other creatures. It is also why Scripture is so particular about how men and women handle sex. The physical act of sex between a man and a woman is not just an isolated physical act but is part of something much bigger that has emotional, spiritual and eternal dimensions. The biological ways in which a man and a woman complement each other are only part of a larger reality indicating the other dimensions in which man and women complement each other.

DIGGING DEEPER: Here comes the bride!

Revelations 19:1-10 – Somehow, the intimacy between husband and wife will be the kind of intimacy between us and Christ. Our great communion is described in the great Wedding Supper of the Lamb.

Consider the different ways in which Adam and Woman were created. It was Adam who named the animals, tended the garden alone, who received instruction about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, who was allowed to discover the need for a companion, and whose rib was taken in order that God would fashion a female companion for him. It was Woman who was created from Adam's rib and so received his nature. It was Adam who was made in the image of God for the glory of God. It was Woman who was created not only for the glory of God but also for the glory of Adam. In the same way, as the Son submits to the Father so was Woman created to submit to Adam. And as the Father loves and cares for the Son, so was Adam created to love and care for Woman. Some current advice by marriage counselors mirrors the advice given in the Bible, men have a need to be respected and women have a need to be loved. It is in this way and other ways as well that male and female depend on each other and complement each other.

DIGGING DEEPER: The order of creation¹³

Genesis 2:7-25 – This passage describes the actual creation account of Adam and Woman and is used as the bases of their relationship, which is based on the relationship of God the Father and God the Son.

1 Corinthians 11:3-12 – This passage has been the subject of much debate – but in the context of other passages it has some emphasis on the complementary roles of men and women and some on the equality of the relationships – just as there is in the Godhead.

Ephesians 5:24-33 – Again, this passage compares the husband/wife relationship to the relationship of the Father and the Son with dimensions of complementarity and equality.

Love and freedom

But all this love is dangerous and costly, because love is not possible if there is no freedom to choose. Love is not love unless it is offered willingly; that is, in order for one to be able to choose to love, it must be possible to choose to not love. Also built into our relationships is the choice to obey, for as the Son chooses to obey the Father, so also was Woman designed to choose to obey Adam and the creatures were designed to choose to obey the Creator. So the creatures designed in God's image, designed to reflect God's freedom to choose to love and choose to obey, can also choose to risk disaster by breaking those connections between each other and between them and God, for to choose to be apart from God is to choose to be apart from the only source of love

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and goodness. To choose to defy God is disobedience and to be cut off from the only source of life. Woman's choice was to question God and His authority without seeking help from either God or Adam. In short, she chose to place her own authority above anyone else. She was deceived, but nevertheless, she chose to supplant God's authority with her own. Adam's choice was to "listen to his wife," and deliberately turn away from God and the divine order. Adam was not deceived, but instead of confronting the challenge to God's authority, Adam turned away from following God to following the deceived woman, an action which completed the fracture that would not only break the image of God but also disrupt all of creation.

DIGGING DEEPER: Who sinned first?

Genesis 3:1-6; 1 Timothy 2:14 – Was it the woman who was deceived and took the first bite or the man who wasn't deceived but watched the whole thing and didn't say a word.

Consequences of sin

The sins of Adam and Woman fractured the unity, harmony and complementarity of the relationships between Adam and Woman, between man and God and between man and creation. In a way that we cannot comprehend, the effect of sin was not just on those relationships but also on the entire creation. It was as if breaking the capstone of creation also fractured the rest of creation. It seems that the effect of corruption in the bodies of Adam and Woman, who were made of the stuff of the universe, required that the universe itself be broken.

DIGGING DEEPER: The debate

Genesis 3:10-22 – Describes Adam and Woman's fall from grace.
1 Timothy 2:11-14 – Aspects of this passage have caused much debate, but the biblical context of relationships is given in terms of the created order and the fall.

The curse

God responded to the broken universe with righteous judgments. The serpent is cursed and will eventually be cast into torment forever. The ground is cursed and will eventually pass away to be replaced by a new earth. Adam and Woman are not cursed but are disciplined as ones loved by God.

DIGGING DEEPER: The breaking of creation¹⁴

Romans 8:19-22 – The immense magnitude of destruction caused by sin is hard to grasp. It also makes the job of reconstruction also hard to grasp.
Genesis 3:14-15; Revelation 20:7-10 – The serpent's curse is foretold and fulfilled
Genesis 3:16-19; Revelation 3:19-20 – The discipline of Adam and Woman foretold and fulfilled.
Revelation 21:1-4 – How much different the new life will be!

The discipline

The discipline given to Adam and Woman is three-fold. The first discipline is pain in childbirth. What should be a joyous event and the endpoint of a consummation of love, will be an event fraught with pain. However, the pain will be a prophetic sign of the pain of the Father sending His own Son into a broken world to endure hardship, mistreatment, condemnation from loved ones and the awful pain of separation from each other. The second discipline seems somewhat cryptic; however, we can compare it to the warning given to Cain in Genesis 4; by looking at the two passages together, we can understand that the discipline given was to harden Adam's and Woman's hearts so that they would contend for authority, and that there would be a conflict between her sinful desire to insubordinately rule and his sinful desire to turn away from the responsibility given to him by God. In the third discipline, we see that Adam, who was made from the dust of the earth, would have to toil to reap food from the resistant, cursed earth.

DIGGING DEEPER: Under authority¹⁵

Matthew 8:5-13 – The centurion understood that substantial personal authority is derived from a larger authority.

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The discipline incurred in the instances above can be understood more completely, if we try to understand the Roman centurion, who knew that his authority was effective only because he served under the authority of the Roman Empire. Furthermore, he was only able to administer authority under the authority of the Roman Empire because he himself was subject to it and had to prove himself worthy of it. The centurion observed that, in the same way, Jesus served with an authority that was derived from God. In this light, we can infer that the disciplines given to Adam and Woman were given in order for them to learn to re-establish the authority they had before the fall: Adam's authority over Woman and Adam and Woman's authority over the earth. The discipline imposed on Adam and Woman would require that they re-establish their authority in the face of a broken, corrupted and hardened world.

Although, the depth of brokenness was deep, so was the desire to re-establish what was broken. Adam's son, Abel, was found sacrificing one of the firstborn of his sheep, burning its fat as an offering to God. Soon after that Abraham's first-born son, Cain, tragically kills Abel in a fit of jealousy. Although this was an act of sin, it not only reflected the depths of brokenness, but like Abel's sacrifice of a first-born sheep, it also reflected the ultimate solution that God had not yet then revealed – the death of God's own Son and His Son living as an outcast among His own people. It also revealed the contrast: the first-born son of Adam brings death while the first-born Son of God brings life.

DIGGING DEEPER: The greatest sacrifice

Genesis 4:1-13 – The sacrifices that Abel made to God were foretelling the ultimate sacrifice that God would give

DIGGING DEEPER: The greatest contrast

Romans 5:12-21 – Compare the differences in the first-born sons.

Ultimately, all of creation will point to God, for all of creation reflects His handiwork. The pinnacle of creation, mankind, reflects God's own image whether the template is drawn on one individual or on the one-flesh of husband and wife. Therefore, we see the image of God reflected one way within the nature of Adam (or Woman) and another way within the one flesh of Adam and Woman. Either way, the physical templates are used to reflect the character of God. Although each template is limited and neither is an exact template, they both can be used by God in distinctive ways for in both cases they reflect the nature of God.

DIGGING DEEPER: God's handiwork

Psalm 8; Psalm 19:1-6; Ecclesiastes 3:11 – All these passages describe who creation shows God's handiwork

Corrupted Image

Within the template drawn on Adam are features found throughout God's creation: His transcendence, creativity, imagination, purpose, order, and goodness. Within the template drawn on the one flesh, Adam and Woman, are drawn the hallmarks of God's character, including the great paradox of order and freedom, the ability to love and the choice to obey. For in order to love, there must be within the relationship between Adam and Woman and the relationship between man and God, the ability to choose – to choose to obey and to submit to one another. Before the creation of Adam and Woman, there was nothing in the complexity of the universe that had any implicit moral value... things would simply be good because God created it that way.

Nevertheless, Adam and Woman were created with the greatest freedom that a creature could have – for they could choose, even to the death – to follow God or not. However, we all know the result of the gift of the freedom offered by God, a thoroughness of corruption that has affected our attitudes, and affected the relationships between each other and our relationship with God and even affected creation itself.

It is the corruption in the world that forces us to be cautious in discerning the truth concerning God and His creation; for we will now see implanted within us and within creation both good and evil. Therefore, within ourselves, we must deal with whom we fully are – creatures who are at once designed in His image and who

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also are broken by sin and need redemption. Fortunately, we are made in the image of a transcendent God, whose love and eternal grace has patiently endured our inability to change ourselves and has continued, in spite of our insistent will to sin, to remain faithful to us. That faithful abiding love can be reflected both in our lives and in our marriages in honor of the one who made us.

Transcendence

However, love can only be offered voluntarily. When we do choose to reflect the creative love of God, the manner in which we do it is up to us. However, we find that while there are many ways to appropriately reflect this creative, transcendent love, there are also inappropriate ways as well. Sometimes we do better than at other times. However, if we are honestly are trying to find a way to honor God, our struggle to serve in this way is an open testimony to Him as well as to others.

Even though the corruption in the world penetrated both Adam and Woman's entire being and touched every corner of the universe, it was not without hope. After Adam and Woman fell away from God, when God measured out the consequences, God also offered a word of hope. Even in the curse to the serpent, a brief hint is given of a descendant of the woman who would avenge the deceiver. So instead of instant physical death, a process of discipline is laid out. Immediately after receiving the discipline, Adam gave Woman a new name, "Eve," (or "Life") for Adam realized that even though the penalty for sin was death, and even though spiritual death had already occurred, the transcendent God found a way to mete out more than Holy Justice, but also Mercy and Grace.

DIGGING DEEPER: The first hint of grace

Genesis 3:16 – The first hint of how God would resolve the issue of sin is given even as the serpent receives the curse of God.

There was no way Adam and Eve could disregard the consequences of their sin, for one does not break the laws of God any more than one ignores the laws of physics; certain actions will always yield certain reactions. The penalty for sin was death. One cannot have an open loving relationship with a completely Holy and Just God, especially one who knows our every thought, and somehow be in rebellion to that God.

History could have ended right there for Adam and Eve, and for all of us as well, But God had a plan that started before he created Adam and Eve and would end long after they were gone. In many ways, The Story, His story had just begun.

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He Made Us More than Perfect

*He made us more than perfect
He made us more like Him
He made us more than hopeful hearts
He made us free from sin*

*He gave us more than beauty
He gave us endless grace
He filled our lives with so much glory
It shows upon our face*

*He gave us more than intellect
He gave us minds like His
Along with wisdom for each day
And boundless, endless grace*

*He gave us more than peace on earth
He gave us peace with Him
And peace within our willful hearts
That overflows our brim*

*He gave us broken bodies
So that He could make us more
More beautiful than angels
And more holy evermore*

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He Made Us More than Perfect (continued)

*He gave us more than circumstance
More than hopeless chance
He gave us time to know Him
And to more than catch His glance*

*He made us more than holy
Despite our will to sin
He made us more than beautiful
He's starting from within*

*He gave us more than courage
Through our spirit had been broken
He gave new life to precious souls
Through his power and grace He strengthens*

*He made us more – more like Him
More priceless than earth's treasures
He gave us more love than we can hold
Much more than can be measured*

*He gave us broken bodies
So that He could make us more
More beautiful than angels
And more holy evermore*

Bible reading: Revelation 7:9-17

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Discussion Questions

1. How is our instruction to 'subdue' related to our instruction to be stewards (Luke 14:13)? (Multiply and subdue)
2. If our present physical bodies are important but will perish, but our soul is eternal – how should that be reflected in our lives? (Fullness of identity)
3. Describe a point in time when God helped you transcend your circumstances. (fullness of identity, transcendence)
4. In what ways do we resist God's order of creation? (complexity: order)
5. If our life is described by God's Spirit within us, how do we respond? (complexity: Body, Soul and Spirit)
6. Sex was not meant to be shameful, but an exquisite act of oneness. In what ways does our popular culture destroy the intent of our sexual relationships? (Unity and complementarity)
7. In what ways are men and women made equally? complementarily? (Unity and complementarity)
8. How is it that a person is in the image of God and, at the same time, men and women together complementarily reflect the image of God. (Unity and complementarity)
9. How is love dangerous? (Love and Freedom)
10. Reflect on how our sin affected all of creation. How do you respond? (Consequences of sin)
11. How do we respond to God's discipline? (The discipline)
12. How does our brokenness affect our identity? (Corrupted image)
13. When you describe yourself to another, what do you describe first? How do you think God would describe you? (Transcendence)
14. How does your life reflect the transcendence of God? (Transcendence)
15. How can God use our broken bodies to make us more holy? (He Made Us More Than Perfect)

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God Reveals Himself in His Holy Nation

God created a people to be like Him and for Him to love and relate to, but these people misused their freedom and turned away. To some, it might have seemed to be a big mistake, but from before the beginning God had a plan that would only gradually be unfolded over many generations and only after many would lose their hope.

DIGGING DEEPER: To make a long story short

The content of this chapter covers the entire Old Testament history of national Israel. If you are not familiar with the Old Testament history, please read *Appendix A – A Very Brief History*

Sin flourishes

The people God designed to carry His image continued to abuse their privileged estate, making mockery of all God had given. The corrupted creation, left to itself, simply brought more and more decay. The curse of sin's penalty, death, was upon the world. Spiritual death, separation from God, was evident in the continual decay of morality. Physical death, the death of the body, was the ultimate sign of decay in the world and the ultimate end of a creation corrupted by sin. Yet there was life just as there was hope, for God had not totally abandoned the world, although it would not be until much later that God would reveal how He would use even death to restore His creation.

The Great Flood

In the face of all the sin and corruption, The Holy God is remarkable for His Holy Silence. Only the majesty and order of creation stood in silent testimony to the Creator. As we examine the beginning of God's history, the Old Testament, we do not see God, busily and openly engaged in the affairs of the world. God's silence begs a question, "Is it out of a sense of justice that He lets the effect of sin take its toll?" After the fall of Adam and Eve, God was publicly silent and the sins of the world would take root and flourish. By their own behavior the people of God would increasingly earn condemnation until the point at which God saw fit to restart the process all over again –flooding the world and killing all the people except Noah and his family.

DIGGING DEEPER: The grief of God

Genesis 6:5-8 – The sin of the world increased very quickly, but our sin grieves the God who loves us. Was there only one man worth saving?

Starting Over

After the flood, God began again. Repeating the pattern in Genesis 1, He instructed Noah and his family to multiply and fill the earth, but this time He gave forth a new instruction: Animals will now fear man and man will now eat animals; however, men are not to eat like the animals for they are not to eat meat with the blood still in it. Animal life, although it is still precious, is not like human life. Human life is precious above all, demanding an accounting before God from any man or beast that would kill any human. In His grace, God shortened the life span of men significantly, and it seems to be only due to those shortened lifespans that violence and depravity didn't escalate as vigorously as before the Great Flood. God also promised not to destroy the earth again with a flood.

DIGGING DEEPER: Starting over again

Genesis 1:28; Genesis 9:1-6 – God's instructions to Noah were very close to the ones that He gave to Adam. What was different?

DIGGING DEEPER: How old are you?

Genesis 5:2-32; Genesis 6:3 – Compare the different life spans in these two passages. Why is there such a difference?

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The Tower

After dealing with Noah, God remained publicly silent again for a while, except for a brief activity at the tower of Babel where God briefly interrupted the process of decay. The rebellion of men against God became strident as they didn't scatter to fill the earth as they were directed and instead conspired to build a tower in order to "make a name for themselves." So God intervened and enforced His edict to fill the earth by creating a confusion of language. The people were scattered, and for another period of time, God remained silent once more.

DIGGING DEEPER: The first Diaspora

Genesis 11:1-8; Genesis 9:1; Genesis 11:4 – The people did not follow God's instructions to spread out, so God "confused" their language so that they would be "encouraged" to spread out on their own.

Abraham and the patriarchs

Then God, still working quietly, called out a man named Abram and began to work on the next phase of His plan. Abram would be called out of his own country in Mesopotamia and taken aside so that God could prepare him to be the patriarch of a new nation. The outstanding trait that God identified in Abram and took measures to strengthen was faith. It was the kind of faith God sought for, but unfortunately was to see too little of, in the nation He was going to be building. Nevertheless, this new nation was to be the work of God, and God's glory will not be hidden even by a corrupted nation, for God's grace is able to abound where sin abounds and God's light will shine like a beacon in a world darkened with corruption and sin.

DIGGING DEEPER: Hall of Faith

Hebrews 11:8-11 – Hebrews 11 is sometimes called the Hall of Faith. Abraham is mentioned in three verses.

DIGGING DEEPER: Sin and the law

Romans 5:1-20 – Long after Abraham's time, God gave Israel the law which created more restrictions and therefore increased the amount of sin, but at the same time it also created a way for God to increase His grace by providing a way for Him to restore our relationship with Him.

Abram's test of faith was empowered by a promise, the promise that not only will a whole nation come out from him but more than that, the whole earth will be blessed by him. In God's utterly amazing plan, God waited until Abram was 99 years old and his wife, Sarai was 90 years old when he repeated the yet unfulfilled promise. At this point He also changed Abram's name to Abraham meaning "father of many nations". Unfortunately, for Abraham and those who came soon after him, the promises of that nation would be held at a distance. The testing of faith would have to stretch beyond Abraham, beyond to his son, Isaac, and even beyond his grandson, Jacob. Even though Jacob would have 13 children, that generation of children would not stay in the Promised Land.

DIGGING DEEPER: The promise delayed

Genesis 12:2-3 – God gave Abram a tremendous blessing while Abram was a 'young' man living in Mesopotamia.
Genesis 17:1-15 – Nations would come from him, but when Abram (meaning "Father of many") was 99 and still childless, God repeated the promise and then Abram's name was changed to Abraham ("Father of many nations") and his wife's name was changed from Sarai (meaning "my princess") to Sarah (meaning "princess")
Genesis 21:12 – Abraham was 100 when Sarah was 90 when they had their son, Isaac, through which God's promise would come.
Genesis 25:19-23 – Isaac was 40 when he got married. He only had two sons. Finally, Isaac's son, Jacob, had 13 children. This looked more like the promise of the nation, but the entire family would end up in Egypt – not the 'Promised Land.'

The Incomprehensible Sacrifice

One of the most controversial incidents in Biblical history is the time God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham obediently took Isaac to a mountain, bound him and went so far as to raise his knife to lay him. But God,

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satisfied of Abraham's faith interceded at that moment and provided a substitute sacrifice, a ram. Those of us who believe in a God of justice and righteousness who forbids us to murder are revolted by God's request of Abraham, it seems so contrary to the God we think we know. But as repugnant as it seems, this event is only a shadow of a dark event in the future. This awful shadow will be seen again in the awful rituals of the annual Passover sacrifice that would begin in the time of Moses. Then the awful event itself will be carried through when God offers His own Son as the horrible, incomprehensible sacrifice. It is only then that the incomprehensible request that God made to Abraham can also be seen as the shadow of the resolution of God's love meeting the consequences of our sin. Our failure to grasp God's request of Abraham is also our failure to grasp just how horrible our rebellion is to God.

DIGGING DEEPER: Test of faith

Genesis 22:1-19 – How could Abraham's faith withstand such a horrible act?

The Deceiver Wrestles with God

As with all people, God's chosen people are flawed as well. Even the namesake of God's chosen nation on earth was known for his deceitfulness. However, God will not only accomplish His purpose despite our failures, but He will use our failures to His glory. Abraham's grandson, Jacob was deceitful as he was cunning. God allowed the consequences of Jacob's sin to work through until Jacob was faced with resolving his relationship with his brother, Esau. It was then that God met Jacob as a man and Jacob wrestled with Him, at which point God changed Jacob's name to Israel.

DIGGING DEEPER: Test of will

Genesis 33:22-32 – In what way did Jacob win when he wrestled with God?

Hope shines through the flaws

It was human frailties that brought Jacob to the point where he had 12 sons and a daughter through two wives and two concubines. It was another frailty that he had openly chosen one of his sons to be his favorite. But it is the strength of God to work in the midst of all that frailty to accomplish His will.

DIGGING DEEPER: Chosen

Genesis 27:1-36 – Joseph's brothers chose to do ill to him but God used that choice to fulfill His promise

Waiting in exile

God had arranged that 11 jealous brothers would sell the 12th brother, Joseph, into slavery. However, what the brothers meant for harm, God meant for good. Despite being mistreated by his brothers and then his masters, Joseph did not become bitter but remained faithful to God. God then used Joseph's faithfulness to escalate Joseph into a powerful position so that Joseph could arrange to take care of his family in a time of long famine. The family of Israel would eventually journey into Egypt remaining there for 400 years until eventually becoming enslaved by their Egyptian hosts. In the meantime, corruption and sin would ensnare the nations around the world while God quietly worked His plan. In the nations throughout the world, entire generations would perish without a word of hope from God. Even the nation of Israel, which had received hints of hope, was waiting.

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DIGGING DEEPER: The promise rememberer

Genesis 50:19-20 – Despite all his misfortunes, Joseph held onto the promise God had made. When his brothers worried about Joseph retaliating for the way they mistreated him, Joseph was able to see the ‘big picture’.

Genesis 15:13-21 – Long before Israel would end up in Egypt, God had told Abraham of His plan to bring Abraham’s descendants to Egypt where they would be in captivity for 400 years and then they would be brought back to the ‘Promised Land.’

Moses

The waiting continued until God raised up a reluctant Moses to confront a recalcitrant Pharaoh. In the unfolding dramatic process in which the nation of Israel would at last emerge, God would finally begin to publicly reveal the plan which had long remained hidden. God had hidden before, working quietly in the lives of a few individuals, but He would now begin to openly work on an entire nation. His work with individuals would never cease, but now, the drama of redemption would be worked on a large public stage.

DIGGING DEEPER: The unwilling serve God

Exodus 3:13; 4:1, 10, 13 – Moses kept trying to backout of the task that God had given him

Exodus 7:3 – Pharaoh was not willing to ‘let Israel go’ but then God hardened the Pharaoh’s heart

The drama of man's sins and God's plan of salvation would now be available for the whole world to watch because God's plan of redemption would unfold to encompass an entire nation and eventually the entire world. The entire process would occur like the gradually brightening day as in the dusk before the dawn where the gradually increasing light increasingly reveals changing shadows and objects. Just as the sun will rise at its own pace and will not be hurried, so will Adam's redemption unfold in a measured, unhurried pace.

DIGGING DEEPER: A nation set apart for God

Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9 – Israel was to be a kingdom of priests and a Holy Nation – so also is the church.

Curse of death

The final curse God delivered through Moses to the Egyptian captors was the death of the first-born in all the families. Although the curse extended even to the Pharaoh's household, the angel of death passed over the houses of those whose door frames were sprinkled with the blood of a 'perfect' lamb. Death still visited every house because the shadow of sin even encompassed God's own chosen people. Fortunately for His chosen people, a substitutionary death, the death of a perfect lamb, was made available - if the people would only respond in obedience. At this moment, little did the people realize that the curse of the death of the first-born would even be extended to the household of God, who would send His own firstborn, His own Son, to be sacrificed as the Perfect Lamb.

DIGGING DEEPER: Death of the firstborn

Exodus 11:1-12:13 – The firstborn of all the Egyptians died.

John 1:29-34; Hebrews 9:19-28 – Jesus, the first-born of God was sacrificed.

After being set free by the Egyptians, the nation of Israel began its walk to return to the land promised by God; but just as Abraham needed time to be prepared by God, so also the nation of Israel would need its time of preparation. To set the newly freed nation on its way, God followed the set of ten miraculous plagues on the Egyptians with the parting of the Red Sea; then God went into hiding once again, this time in a dark cloud on top of Mount Sinai where He remained secluded with Moses as He gave Moses the new covenant written on stone tablets. Tragically, even 400 years of captivity was not enough to instill patience in Israel. When Moses

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had gone up Mount Sinai to receive the covenant from God, it was not long before the people of Israel could no longer bear to wait and they returned to worshipping idols. God suffered the people of Israel to fall into depravity before He sent Moses back to the camp, then He worked with Moses, first allowing him the opportunity to petition on behalf of the people, and then allowing him to return to camp to clean up the mess.

DIGGING DEEPER: Cleaning up

Exodus 32:1-35 – While Moses was with God on top of Mt. Sinai, God knew about all the developments happening back in the camp, but He let events take their course and then allowed Moses to participate in the cleanup

Priesthood

While the consciences of men had been aware of the separation between God and themselves, God now purposely created a pattern to confirm that fear. The Levites who rallied to Moses to stand for the Lord would be set apart as priests to represent the Holy God before the people and the sinful people before God. This pattern would be used to remind the people of their sinfulness and their separation from Him. This pattern was not new to the world – many other religions had established priesthoods, but in those cases, there was only a general sense of awareness of their separation from God. In the case of Israel, God was actually acting in history. However in the arrangement set up by God there were hints that this relationship was not intended to remain forever, for God would gradually reveal the solution to the separation.

DIGGING DEEPER: How to select the priests

Exodus 32:26-29 – The Levites who responded to Moses call to purify the camp were willing to execute the transgressors.

Tabernacle

One of the first hints of the temporary nature of the separation can be seen in the tabernacle God instructed the Israelites to build. While the different parts of the tabernacle were particularly designed to be images of eternal truths, the tabernacle itself was a temporary structure that could be moved when the nation moved. The presence of God would be there amidst the nation, but He would remain hidden within the tabernacle accessible only to particular people and under restricted circumstances. Then, although the Holy God was still kept at a distance from the people, He also had a place of residence directly in the middle of people. Though He would not be seen by all the people, He would be active in their midst, directing and guiding the leaders and miraculously intervening in the affairs of the nation.

DIGGING DEEPER: The Tabernacle

Hebrews 9:24-10:1 – The tabernacle and the law were given as shadows of what was to come.

Exodus 35:4-38:31 – There is a lot of detail about the materials and construction of the Tabernacle.

Exodus 25:2 – Only freely given love offerings were accepted for the building of the Tabernacle.

DIGGING DEEPER: The Holy Place

Exodus 35:10-19 – Inside the tabernacle there are two rooms. The front room holds three items of furniture: The Table of the Presence, the Lampstand (menorah) and the Altar of Incense. The back room holds the Ark of the Covenant.

The robust detail given by God to describe the Tabernacle and its contents not only provided rich imagery about God but also about how He intended to resolve our broken relationships, although it would not be for Moses or the people of Israel at that time to fully understand the full significance of the tabernacle. On the one level it would be the dwelling place of God among the nation of Israel. On a second level it would be an image of the Holy God who would become the scapegoat and the sacrificial Lamb of God.

The materials used to build the Tabernacle were requested by God to be freely offered only from people whose hearts were prompted to give. The earthly tabernacle of God would be made of love offerings, gifts freely given, as He would freely give Himself up for us.

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Outside the tabernacle there was an altar on which the priests would slay animals to atone for the sins of the people. Even after the sacrifice, before the priests were allowed in the tabernacle, they needed to use water from the laver to wash themselves before they could enter. In the front room of the tabernacle there were three items: a table containing unleavened bread, a lampstand and an altar for incense. These items pointed forward to the one who is the Bread of Life and the Light of the World and our High Priest.

Inside the inner room of the tabernacle was the centerpiece of the Tabernacle, the ark of the covenant, which was a container for the stone tablets on which the Commandments were written. The ark was made of acacia wood and gold, representing humanity and divinity, for God Himself would eventually encumber Himself in flesh. Once a year the cover of the ark would be sprinkled with the blood of a perfect lamb, foretelling the time when the incarnate God would shed His Holy Blood on our behalf, taking the penalty for our sins. Another clue of God's intentions lay within the wall of the tabernacle itself. Within the walls was the skin of a ram, representing the ultimate solution to our sins, for the one who traveled with the Holy Nation would take on flesh. The firstborn son of God who would offer Himself as the actual perfect Lamb of God who would die for the sins of the world.

Time of preparation: wandering in the wilderness

The tabernacle would travel with the Holy Nation as they journeyed in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land, the land promised to them by God years before. Unfortunately, their hearts were not ready as they approached the Promised Land. Despite being shown the abundance of the land that God was about to give them the adults were not ready to walk by faith and were condemned to die in the wilderness. They did not die immediately, however, instead they would die on the long journey in the wilderness while their children would grow walking with the presence of the Lord in their midst. After 40 years the children who had learned to walk with the Lord were now ready to enter the Promised Land.

DIGGING DEEPER: Death in the wilderness

Numbers 13:1-14:35 – When the decision was made to not enter the Promised Land, everyone who was an adult at that time was condemned to die in the wilderness.

Joshua 5:2-9 – All those who were not adults at that time were able to see how God provided for them during the 40-year journey.

Deuteronomy 31:14-32:43 – Well, as ready as could be. God warned Moses and Joshua of the disobedience that would happen, how He would punish them and then ultimately provide them atonement.

Entering the Promised Land: the test

Once in the Promised Land, the Holy Nation would have to battle for each section of new territory, for God was preparing their hearts, testing their faith at each step. Each step was an opportunity to grow in faith. Each failure in faith was a chance to repent and grow in purity. There was no doubt, however, that their faith was severely tested. The Lord insistently demanded complete obedience and purity, even demanding total destruction of the sinful peoples who were then occupying the land. If the nation did not respond exactly as the Lord commanded the consequences were unwavering. One message was clear, the penalty for sin was death, but there was another message as well – in the face of the continued transgressions of His own people, God did not destroy His Holy Nation. His penalties were severe, but He offered a discipline mixed with mercy.

DIGGING DEEPER: Total purity

The details given in Scripture about the Tabernacle and the Laws were meant to illustrate the importance of holiness and the demand for the nation's holiness.

Joshua 7 – The story of Achan's sin.

Joshua 23 – Joshua issues a reminder of covenant.

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Judges

That mercy continued to be apparent after the Holy Nation had occupied the Promised Land. The transgressions of the people led to difficulties with or conquest by the neighboring tribes. The troubles caused the people to repent and turn back to God and then God would raise up a judge who would lead the people to victory; but after each victory, the people would forget their commitment and fall away from God and each cycle would keep on repeating. The basic problem facing the nation at this moment is summarized in the last two verses of Judges, “and everyone did what was right in their own eyes.” God was supposed to be their king, and God did raise up leaders (judges) when needed, but the people of Israel were not committed to following God.

DIGGING DEEPER: Over and over

Judges 1:1-2:23 – It would seem they could never learn. Over and over the people of Israel would fall away from God, God would send His judgement (someone to bother them), they would call out for relief, God would raise up a ‘judge’ to deliver them, and the cycle would repeat.

Judges 21:24-25 – In the end, the summary was “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.”

In the midst of this era of the judges, we are given the touching story of Ruth which lays out the paradox of God’s provision in the midst of our troubles. At one point of the story, Ruth’s mother-in-law, Naomi states that “the Lord has gone out against me.” In her perspective, it seemed as if God had abandoned her: her circumstances certainly looked bleak at the time because not only did Naomi’s husband die, but so did the husbands of her three daughters. Unexpectedly however, Ruth follows Naomi back to Naomi’s hometown of Bethlehem and the rest of the story shows God’s provision in the face of Naomi’s resignation. Not only did God provide for Naomi but significantly, the genealogy of Matthew 1, shows an even bigger picture of God’s hand at work.

DIGGING DEEPER: Beyond the hardship

Ruth 1:13 – It was a difficult time for Naomi. She was in a foreign land because the ‘promised land’ had a drought, and then her husband and sons had died. Of course, she felt abandoned.

Matthew 1:5 – Little did Naomi know, that in her difficult circumstances, God’s hand was at work – for Naomi’s Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth, would become one of Jesus’ descendants.

Rejecting God as King

Finally, there was a point where the Holy Nation wanted to do something better – but the solution they sought was not to resolve their spiritual condition but rather to have a king like “all the other nations.” God warned the people of the dangers of being like “all the others” but the people still clung to their own wisdom. In spite of their intransigence, God was able to use even the unrighteousness of His Holy Nation and allowed them to reject the kingship of God and instead establish their own monarchy. Despite their rejection of Him, He was ready to take them from where they were and encourage them to follow him.

DIGGING DEEPER: Leading the blind

1 Samuel 8:7-8 – Time after time, the people of Israel did their own thing, never seeing the real problem. Of course, the solution they sought – to do what everyone else did – wasn’t dealing with the real problem.

1 Samuel 12:20-24 – The real problem was the rejection of God as king. Despite that, God would use their sin to accomplish His purpose. This scenario would be repeated again when Jesus was escorted into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, then a few days later when Jesus did not make any move against the Roman government, many lost their faith in him

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God on our terms: the kings of Israel

Of course, having a king did not resolve the spiritual condition of the Holy Nation, even though one king was declared to be a “man after God's own heart.” The cycle of sin, repentance and renewal repeated as before, and the condition of the nation worsened as time went on. Time after time, God would try to convince His Holy Nation that their weakness was irrelevant if they would only depend on His strength, but time after time, the Holy Nation would look to their own strength or the strength of their neighbors instead. The Lord responded to the inherent unrighteousness of the Holy Nation with repeated judgments followed by fresh opportunities for the Holy Nation to repent, but the nation only continued to show itself unworthy of the grace of God. Yet God patiently continued the process of discipline that He had begun back in the Garden of Eden.

DIGGING DEEPER: The right heart

1 Samuel 13:14; 1 Samuel 16:1-13 – No one in Scripture but Jesus is free from the frailty of sin, but David, one of Israel's kings, is described as a ‘man after God's own heart.’

The lessons: righteous authority

The people would keep on forgetting that God's zeal for righteousness will cause Him to remove authority from one who has proven himself unworthy in order to bestow it on one who is. Inheritance is a privilege, not a right. Some examples are: 1) Esau was the first-born son of Isaac, but he disregarded his birthright and had it taken by his brother Jacob. 2) The sons of the priest Eli would normally have taken his place, but their place was taken by Samuel. 3) King Saul's continued disobedience to God caused God to pass the throne to David instead of Saul's son, Jonathan. In all of these cases God had raised up new leaders to take the place of those who would have normally be in line to receive it.

DIGGING DEEPER: Zeal for righteous authority

Genesis 25:19-34; 27:1-40 – The oldest son, Esau, had his birthright taken from him, even if Jacob tried to take it in a duplicitous way.
1 Samuel 2: 27-32; 3:19-21; 4:11 – Eli's priesthood would normally have passed to his sons, Hophni and Phinehas, but the honor would go to Samuel.
1 Samuel 15:26; 16:12-13 – Saul's reign was cut short and the throne was given to David instead of Saul's sons.

The lessons: raising leadership

The people would keep on forgetting God's ability to raise for Himself leaders for His Holy Nation. If the current leaders are neglecting the duties, God is able to make good use of those who have dedicated themselves to Him.

DIGGING DEEPER: Raising up a leader

1 Samuel 1:28; 2:35 – Out of thankfulness, Hannah gave Samuel to God. Because Samuel had a listening heart, God used Samuel to replace Eli's sons as the priest.

The lessons: justice and mercy

The people would keep on forgetting God's concern for justice and mercy. The true worship of God is done with the whole heart. When the Holy Nation would engage in prayer and fasting but not engage equally with acts of justice and mercy, God would reject that prayer and fasting and would not listen to their cries.

DIGGING DEEPER: Zealous for justice

Zechariah 7:9-13; Hosea 6:4-6; Micah 6: 6-8 – Many times we normally associate justice with retribution, but God associates it with mercy and compassion as well. We approach this way of thinking when we call our prisons, ‘correctional institutions.’

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The lessons: grace and the law

The people would keep on forgetting God's desire for His people to trust in Him instead of themselves. How often do we look at our circumstances and conclude that God has abandoned us – yet even in the darkest times, despite our blindness, He is working more than we know on our behalf.

DIGGING DEEPER: Who do you trust?

Psalm 147:10-11; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8 – Are you trusting in your strength and abilities - or God's?

Exile and captivity

God is not constrained by our inabilities. On one side, God is able to work with His stubbornly resistant people to display His righteousness to the nations around them, and on the other side, God is able to work with those same nations to discipline His own Holy Nation. In either case, God is able to accomplish His will despite any of us, our ineptitude or our defiance. In the end, the Lord would tear apart His Holy Nation and allow part of it to be dispersed through the Assyrian Empire and part of it brought into captivity by the Babylonian Empire. Those empires would come and go, but the end of the earthly kingdom was not the end of the Lord's kingdom, rather only a part of the process the Lord would use to restore His people to Himself. In time, the Lord would raise up a new nation, a nation whose law would be written not on stone, but on their hearts.

DIGGING DEEPER: Grace and the Law

Jeremiah 31:31 – We may not think of ourselves as being 'under the law' but the law of God has not ceased – in fact, it should be in our hearts.

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Too Small a Thing

Too small a thing He says it is for you to simply be
A light only to Israel, because you're a light for me
You'll be a light to all the world despite how small you seem
The God who formed you in the womb has much too large a dream
All the world must be restored and each and every nation
Must hear that though they see no hope, the Lord will bring salvation

As a seed yields trees
And trees yield fruit
The Spirit yields His gifts

As love yields grace
And grace yields faith
The Lord will yield His saints

Bible reading: *Isaiah 49:6;1 Corinthians 12:4-12; Romans 8:1-11*

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Discussion Questions:

1. Humans were vegetarians before the time of Noah. Should we be vegetarians now? (The Great Flood)
2. Compare the time preceding the tower of Babel with today. (The tower)
3. What would motivate you to leave your home to settle in another country? (Abraham, The Patriarchs)
4. The promise given to Abraham would not be fulfilled until after he had died. How good are you at waiting for God? (Waiting in exile)
5. God chose to lead the Egyptians through 10 plagues before they would free Israel. Why do you think God did that? (Curse of death)
6. The Levites rallied to Moses and killed many of their own kinsmen. How do you respond to that kind of action? Could you do that? (Priesthood)
7. What does it mean to you that Jesus is the “Bread of Life”, the “Light of the World” and the one who offers prayers on our behalf? (Tabernacle)
8. For 40 years, the children of Israel grew up seeing the supernatural phenomena of the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night as they journeyed with the tabernacle through the wilderness. After they settled in the Promised Land, the land of “milk and honey,” they no longer saw that phenomenon. What would that do to their state of mind? (Time of preparation)
9. God commanded the Israelites to completely destroy the cities and the peoples that occupied them. How do you respond to that? (Time of preparation)
10. Significant tasks usually require significant preparation. What times of preparation have you gone through? (Time of preparation)
11. Judges 1 summarized problems in the settlement of Israel into the Promised Land and Judges 2:1-5 tells what the real issue was. Compare Judges 1:19 to 2:1-3. (Judges)
12. Have you ever found yourself in difficult times such as depicted in Ruth 1? How did God provide? (Judges)
13. King David was no less a sinner than anyone else. What does it mean that he was ‘a man after God’s own heart?’ (God on our terms)
14. Zechariah 7:9-8:8. Contrast the behavior of Israel at the end of chapter 7 to the promises God makes at the end of Chapter 8. (God on our terms)
15. How can God use you to affect the world? (Too Small a Thing)

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God Reveal Himself in His Silence

This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it. You said, 'No, we will flee on horses.' Therefore you will flee! You said, 'We will ride off on swift horses.' Therefore your pursuers will be swift! A thousand will flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five you will all flee away, till you are left like a flagstaff on a mountaintop, like a banner on a hill." Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! - (New International Version, Zondervan, Isaiah 30:15-18)

Apparent absence

The time between Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, and the epiphany of Jesus as the Son of Mary is sometimes referred to as the Silent Years, but the silence of this period is only one more occurrence of the restraint that God has displayed from the beginning. It seems to be a hallmark of God that He expresses Himself to us in the way that we least expect. Although he can assert himself in any manner He chooses, He often asserts who He is by not "asserting himself." It is rather as if He has so much power and ability to control that that power is much more manifest in His own constraint of Himself.

DIGGING DEEPER: The Silent Years¹⁶

The 400-year gap between the writing of the Old Testament and the New Testament were notable for the silence of inspired authors, not from the lack of God's activity.

If we look through history, it is most notable that the one who holds all things together only rarely makes His presence overtly known. He makes it very possible for anyone who does not want to see Him to not see evidence of Him. In fact, he has established conditions such that even those who do want to see evidence of Him may only see that evidence on His terms; and this is to the point where it is noted that those who want to come to Him must come to Him by faith. So invisible is His hand that some people have assumed that while God may have been there at the beginning to create the world, He has not been actively involved since then. If it were not for anecdotal, historical evidence, it would be easy for everyone to assume that there is no God and that things only happen by "natural (scientific)" law or human behavior.

DIGGING DEEPER: Seeing the invisible¹⁷

Colossians 1:15-17; Romans 8:28-31; Hebrews 1:1-14 – It is remarkable that the one who holds all things together can only be seen by faith. But if our eyes are open in faith, there is much that can be seen.

The apparent absence has led to another question, "How could there be a God who is all-powerful and all-loving when so many bad things are happening?" Therefore, many have chosen to conclude that either God is not all-powerful, not all-loving or not real. In our age, we know that scientific evidence has not forced people to assume the existence of God nor has the historical evidence for God been so overwhelming that it has simply forced all people to conclude that God must exist. It seems that God must have chosen to remain invisible throughout most of human history, and so must have very particular reasons to have it that way, but because of His silence, those reasons need to be inferred either from God's indirect revelation through His creation or through the limited revelation of Himself as He has spoken to us through a few specific people.

From the time of Adam to the time of the Flood, to the time of the Tower of Babel, to the time of Abraham, God was mostly silent and there is scant Biblical record of any communication with people. From the time of Abraham to the time of Joseph, God focused His communication on only a few chosen people, a chosen family. To the rest of the world, He was silent. From the time of Joseph to the time of Moses, He was silent to everyone once again. From the time of Moses to the time of the prophets, He dealt with only one nation of many in the

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world, and then once more there was another time of silence, the time between the Old Testament prophets and the time of Jesus.

Behind the silence

Through the years of history, God's voice and God's activity have been notably restrained. The curses and discipline invoked after the human fall from grace, seemed to begin a long period of the world experiencing the harshness of a broken creation of which we became the broken masters - all broken because, even if we never fully understood it, that is what we really wanted in our sinful desires.

DIGGING DEEPER: Watch your desires

Romans 1:18-32; 8:5-9 - Just as God hardened Pharaoh's heart, so He has "given us over" to our desires.

There's the rub - at least in part - we got what we desired. We desired to be our own God. Only because God is merciful, did He not give us 100% of what our sinful desires wanted, for that would be eternal separation. Although He gave us a world in which He seemed to be absent; he had not gone away entirely. He was quietly working out a plan behind the scenes in which he would work His plan of redemption for us, a plan that on one level may seem harsh and cruel, but a plan that would allow Him to restore us to Himself and His Righteousness.

DIGGING DEEPER: The plan behind the silence

Galatians 3:13-14; 4:4-5 - In the time of Silence after the prophet Malachi it would have been easy for one to wonder, "If there is a God then where is He?" God was working out His plan, but He was waiting for the "fullness of time."

Confrontation delayed

The plan was not for Him to confront us directly as a protagonist, because if He placed our sins before us, our sinful natures would be inclined to stay turned away in rebellion, and in fact, we would die if we saw Him face to face. Instead, His plan was to work within the bounds of who we are - creatures with the ability to choose and to love and to whom He has invested the rights and responsibilities of the rulership of the world. Therefore, He has allowed us the privilege of confronting who we are without Him.

His desire was that after we experienced who we are without Him then we - with His help - would change our minds, turning from going our own way and instead following Him. It does seem hard to understand how a just and righteous God could allow us to keep on hurting ourselves or how He could allow us to be overwhelmed by the capricious forces of a broken world, but that is what we wanted when we desired to go our own way instead of His. Yet in the midst of all that, He also allows His grace to work through all the cruelty that the world tries to bring. He has not completely abandoned us - for that would be Hell itself - but He has allowed us to taste it in good measure, along with the opportunity to experience His grace.

DIGGING DEEPER: Coming to God on His terms

Habakkuk 1:13 - If we are in a sinful state when we try to see God, we will perish.

Matthew 4:17; Luke 13:3 - We are called to repent - to change our mind about where we are going, to choose to turn away from sin, then He will change us so that we can come to Him.

Grace and evil constrained

On the one hand, we can see evil constrained by the presence of His quiet grace and, on the other hand, we can see His grace constrained by the presence of the horrible evil that He has allowed. In the middle of that tension, we can see the unfolding plan of God working through the ceaselessly unbending natural laws of this world. It is because of that unbending order that Christians, seeking the righteous unchanging God, were at the forefront of the development of science as a tool for investigating the physical world. The scientific method has

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uncovered certain laws of nature - basic principles that are simply true and unchangeable, which underlie all the workings of the physical world and permeate every process that occurs. Certainly, that is a reflection of the character of God. We do not break the laws of nature as much as they break us. If we jumped out of a window and think that we shall fly – it doesn't matter what we shall think, the laws of physics dictate that we shall fall anyway; but it is also true that if we use those same laws more creatively, then we can do what seems contrary to nature - like flying in an airplane. So it is with God. His righteousness is unyielding but, by His creative will, He can allow grace to be shown to us. His character is revealed both in the relentless outworking of the natural law and in His quiet patient grace as He works in and through us, person by person.

DIGGING DEEPER: Science and God¹⁸

In our current age, many people wonder if the current-day claims of science are in conflict with the claims of God. There is not necessarily a direct conflict, but there are many scientists whose God is their naturalistic philosophy. However there many scientists who have faith in God and who also understand that the order in the universe is from God.

Invisible hand

God's apparent silence gives us opportunity to reflect on His modus operandi, how He has chosen to work within the constraints of His unyielding unrighteousness, His creative grace (how creative would not be fully known until the coming of Jesus of Nazareth.) and His investment of the rulership of the world that He gave to us. As we look through history we see remarkably few epiphanies but, more than not, we see the relentless consequences of sin and we also see God choosing to act through individuals. Interestingly, God is able to use people who are times consciously working against Him or at other times not even conscious of Him at all. This meant that although there may have seemed to have been times in history no one was openly working with God, it did not mean that God wasn't working. The intriguing part of the period of God's silence between the Old Testament and the New Testament is that the world stage was being set up for the coming of the Messiah, yet some of the major actors in the play were not God's own people but pagan governments such as the Roman Empire or the Assyrian Empire.

DIGGING DEEPER: God and government

Romans 13:5-7 – The Roman government may have been hostile to Christianity, but God still gave them a job to do. Whether we recognize it or not, or they like it or not, they are serving God.

Micah 3:6 – We would not usually see the silencing of the prophets as a sign of God's activity, but God is able to work His plans, even in silence.

Consider the servants Moses and Pharaoh: both were serving God, one in meekness another in hostility. Service to God is not dependent on our speaking for Him or against Him or not speaking at all.

Amazingly, God even makes use of pagan governments to carry out His will, even though they are by nature opposed to Him. Because of this, the apostle Paul exhorts us to obey our earthly rulers whose job it is to keep the peace. A more amazing point for us is this: Very often as we pray to God for direction, we pray for Him to give us a 'sign', but many times, we are trusting God to provide that 'sign' by His leading other people, people who may even be pagans. If that is so, then we are trusting that a pagan is responding to God even when we, who know God, are not confident that we hear His voice properly or that we will respond to His voice. Yet as we open the history books and read about the great civilizations of Mesopotamia, Assyria, Greece, Egypt and Rome, if we are aware of God's plans, then we can see that they all are being used by God to prepare the world for the coming of His Son. While His chosen nation was being chastised for disobedience, God was moving the rebellious nations of the world to fulfill His purpose.

On the one hand, God had stopped speaking to His people through prophets or priests just as He has not spoken openly to the other nations of the world. On the other hand, God was continuing to work in the hearts of individuals; softening the hearts of those who sought him and hardening the hearts of the rebellious. Whether

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we are aware of it or not, He has laid His hand upon us all, working through the consciences He has provided each of us, even though we may not seem to be able to hear His reasoning voice.

Waiting and watching

During the Silent Years, it may have been hard to look around and be able to recognize evidence of God at work. In our current time we can look back and examine the prophecies to find out how God was working. But for those who lived in the silent years, to watch empires and natural disasters come and go and yet not hear from God must have been bleak and worrisome. Yet during all that, Magi from the east were able to discern when the greatest news on earth would be happening. That is what we must do when we seem to encounter God's silence.

DIGGING DEEPER: Coming and coming again

Matthew 26:24 – In the Silent Years, God was waiting for the “fullness of time” when He would come as the Son of Man. And we are waiting now for Him to come again in glory.

We must grasp that behind the silence, God is working out His plan, a plan which ultimately is for our good. We must look to the prophecies which tell us what God has planned and be ready for action when we do see Him. It may be hard for us to understand why God is taking so long to complete His plans for us. In this world we may not always see him, but we can hold onto hope, for He has promised to come again in glory. Let us use this time of His present silence to exhort us to be diligent in seeking Him because there will yet come a time when God's final silence will fall on those who will remain eternally separated from Him.

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Bits of Truth

A bit of heaven
A bit of hell
But on earth kept well

A bit of evil
A bit of grace
Ready to be embraced

A bit of love
A bit of hate
Serve as deadly bait

A bit of dark
A bit of light
Must choose the wrong or right

Bible reading: *Romans 7; Romans 8*

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Discussion Questions:

1. When does God seem silent to you? (Apparent absence)
2. In what way does God restrain himself? (Apparent absence)
3. Why do we need faith to recognize God from the evidence we see? (Apparent absence)
4. What is the answer to, “Why does God allows bad things to happen to good people?” (Behind the silence)
5. How is God’s righteousness reflected in His silence? (Confrontation delayed)
6. How is God’s grace reflected in His silence? (Grace and evil constrained)
7. What would the world be like, if evil was not constrained by grace? (Grace and evil constrained)
8. Why does God use pagan governments to fulfill His plans? (Grace and evil constrained)
9. How would you use God’s silence to exhort someone else to seek God? (Watching and waiting)
10. What possibilities does it open up for us, if we realize that God is able to accomplish His will even through people who are antagonistic towards Him? (Watching and waiting)
11. What are the choices for good and evil that we encounter in everyday life? (Bits of Truth)

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God Reveals Himself in the Son of Man

Grasping the will and way of God is difficult enough when He is in the habit of simply doing the unexpected, but the grasping becomes futile when we are confronted with the impossible to understand. Who could foresee that the Pre-existent Eternal Creator of the Universe could make Himself to be born as a human in the universe that He created? How could any finite human being actually "be" God. Even beyond that, how could the one person, God, exist in the three personalities of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? We cannot hope to fully grasp these ideas, but they are what God has revealed to us.

DIGGING DEEPER: Beyond understanding

John 1:1-15 – The Son of God is God.

John 5:24-27 – Jesus referred to himself using the title "Son of Man" more than any other title.

Matthew 1:18-22 – God was born as a human baby.

Luke 2: 51-52 – This baby (who was God) grew into a child that obeyed his 'parents.'

Luke 2:39-40 – This child (who was God) grew in wisdom.

Genesis 1:27 – *Humans are made in the image of this God.*

The non-physical, eternal God created us (physical beings) in His image then He was born as one of us!?!?

The Circle

The Son of God is God and the Son of God is the Son of Man. The infinite, eternal God was born as a baby and grew as a baby and a child. The Creator of the Universe and Lord of All was obedient as a child to His earthly mother and adopted father. The God of all wisdom grew in wisdom. How can we grasp these things? Yet, in all of this a curious circle is completed: God made creatures like us with enough of His characteristics that we are said to be made in His image, then God became one of those creatures. It is difficult for us to imagine looking in a mirror and then becoming the image we see in the mirror, but this is the kind of seemingly impossible thing that God has done. How could it be that the Son of God is the Son of Man? Who but God could make a story like this?

DIGGING DEEPER: The twinkle in His eye before time

Psalms 139:16 – The plans for all of us were made before creation, just as God's plan for our redemption was made before creation.

The painting

Like all people, the story of the Son of Man begins before the creation itself. Before the beginning, there was God – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The one-person God was three persons; a person and a community at once. Before God created a universe constrained by time, He knew the end-point of it all. It was as if the Creation was a painting and, before He drew it, in His mind He saw what He wanted this painting to look like, who he wanted in it, at what location each person would be and in what point in time each person would be.

- Unlike everyone else, God was alone before the point in time that He created the picture.
- Like all people, He entered the picture as a seed growing in a womb and left as one dying.
- Unlike everyone else, His conception was miraculous, and His death was followed by a spectacular resurrection (spectacular enough to "stun" the Roman guards).
- Like all people He would be hungry, tired, disappointed and angry.
- Unlike all people, He would not allow any of his emotions to cause Him to sin.

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In the picture He painted, He was fully human, although in His essence He was also fully God. So when we look at this Creator/creature we see God revealed and we also see the unblemished expression of what He intends for us to look like; creatures made in His perfect image. At least, that what was He had intended. However, as we have seen, we with all of creation are broken. Our bodies, minds, souls and spirits are broken by sin and we are even born as rebels against God. Yet, despite our sinful nature, the earnest desire of the Holy God is so great for us to know Him that He put aside all His glory when He entered history.

The long preparation

So humbly did He enter our world that He needed to prepare us for the inauspicious arrival of the Son of Man. To this end, the Creator revealed His coming through many prophetic announcements given through many people, particularly in the two thousand years before His arrival.

- He gave us many hints along the way, beginning with His prophecy to Eve that our redemption would be through the son of a woman.
- He cleansed the earth with a flood to prepare us for a cleansing by fire.
- He prepared us for His Holiness by separating us by language.
- In the course of time, He chose one man from one tribe to let us know that He needs to choose us before we can choose Him.

DIGGING DEEPER: The long preparation

Genesis 3:15 – The first prophecy of the coming of the Son of Man, the seed of the woman. (see *The breaking of creation p. 32*).

Genesis 8:21; 2 Peter 3:10 – **The Great Flood.** God promised not to destroy the earth with a flood again, but He will destroy the earth again – by fire. (see *p.27*)

Genesis 11:1-8 – Holiness means set apart. Separating the languages was the beginning of the creation of the nations of which He would choose one through which He would bring salvation. (see *The first Diaspora p. 48*)

Genesis 12:2, 3 – The second prophecy of the Son of Man. All the peoples of the earth will be blessed through Abraham. (see *The promise delayed p. 42*)

Abraham

Abraham was a man of faith but of average circumstances. He would not be from the rulers of a great kingdom, but he would be called out of one kingdom to another place that God had chosen, just as God has intended to call us out of our ordinary circumstances to God's circumstances. Yet in the midst of the calling to Abraham was also the revelation that the blessings of mankind will come not from somewhere else but from the seed of Abraham. Indeed, the continuous theme that flows from the time of Adam is that just as God has given us authority over living creatures, He has also intended to work His purpose through us, even arranging for the blessings of mankind to come from or through mankind. The impossible is put in front of us, from out of the hopelessly corrupted man, would come the hope of man and from the Son of Man would come the Son of God.

DIGGING DEEPER: Chosen to bless others¹⁹

1 Peter 2:9-12; Deuteronomy 7:5-7; Colossians 3:12-15 – We are not chosen for any accomplishments. We are merely the people God has chosen. Some Jews will hold that it was the Jews that chose God (as in Abraham responding by faith to God's request) but God needed to choose who to ask.

The patriarchs

Despite God's revelation to Abraham, the generations succeeding Abraham gave no encouragement. The record of Abraham's descendants is a record of fallible human beings no more deserving of God's love than anyone else. Yet God has called us as His chosen people, chosen not for great numbers, great culture or any great

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accomplishments. We are merely the people that God has chosen to bless the world through. All of this is incredibly amazing, because if anything is apparent, there is nothing more redeemable about God's chosen people than any other peoples. We are simply, the people through whom God chose to bless the world, the people through whom God would send his Son.

If we examine the line of ancestors through whom the Son of Man would come, we would see all sorts of people. The family tree of Israel was not the kind whose overall characteristics stand out as impressive by human standards. There is a lot of royal blood to be sure, but with the exception of a few outstanding ancestors, the record of those kings is more a record of moral failure than success. Jesus' family tree even includes products of incest and a prostitute.

The Nation

Israel as a nation was not impressive either. In the 2000 years of Hebrew history prior to Jesus, the nation of Israel existed as a unified independent political state for only 120 years, after which it split in two, went into decline and eventually became a vassal state. The only significant product produced by Israel was its literature. In fact, when the time had finally come for the Son of Man to be born, the nation of Israel was a guest in its own land, the then current landowners being the Roman Empire. The puppet king that ruled the nation at that time was brutal, but obedient to the Roman Empire. The religious leaders were steeped in political intrigue. The mortal emperors and kings of the world at that time hoped to earn immortality, certainly not thinking that the Immortal One would take on mortality. There was a sense in which the world did not seem prepared to receive the Son of Man, but God had been preparing the world for His coming since the beginning of time, even to the imposition of a political empire using a borrowed common language.

DIGGING DEEPER: Orchestrating the arrival of the Son of Man

Just some of the players:

The Roman Empire secured the great *Romana Pax* (Roman Peace) that would create optimal conditions for the spread of the gospel and called the census that got Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem (*Micah 5:2; Luke 2:1-7*)

The Greek Empire which preceded the Roman Empire provided a common international language.

The Pharisees who held closely (well, too closely) to Jewish law.

The Magi from the east who knew when to look for the new "King of the Jews." (*Matthew 2:1-12*)

Herod the Great was a brutal, savage puppet-king (*Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:16*) who fulfilled prophecy by slaughtering the babies, causing God to send Joseph and Mary into going to Egypt (*Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:14*). When Joseph and Mary returned from Egypt they went to Nazareth (*Isaiah 9:1-2; Matthew 4:12-16*) to avoid Herod's half brother.

Prophecy fulfilled

The fulfillment of a seemingly odd assortment of prophecies concerning the coming of the Son of Man was orchestrated in ways that could not have been predicted. Using the political will of a vast empire, the place of the nativity of the Son of Man was arranged by a census. Using the brutality and political intrigues of a puppet king, the location of the Son of Man was arranged by persecution that would drive the parents of the Son of Man to escape to Egypt and then to Nazareth. In the middle of all that, the Son of Man would be found by a group of seekers from a distant province of the empire.

However, for the most part, the hearts of men were not ready for His coming. So unprepared were they to look for Him that He would be hidden in plain sight. He was born to a family with no high standing, in humble surroundings, and during a town occupied with the confusion of an imposed census. Even though the Magi from the East could figure the time of His arrival and even though King Herod's advisors could read the prophet Micah and figure out where the Son of Man would be born, they otherwise had no idea. When Herod tried to kill the baby, the family scurried off to Egypt. The Son of Man would be a refugee child, while back in Bethlehem many babies would be killed because of him, continuing the rage of violence that has gone on since

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Abel was murdered. This killing causes many to ask why the all-good, all-powerful God would permit this, but the answer, still partly shrouded in mystery, would not come until the cross.

DIGGING DEEPER: Birth Arrangements

Luke 2:1-7; MRHWQ 1:1-23 – Is this the way we would have arranged the birth of the King of Kings?

Condition of the world

In the meantime, it seemed that the fear, hatred, abuse and killing would go on. This is the world the Son of Man would enter as a human baby; yet somehow, we see the Son of Man entrusting himself to the care of a human couple, a man and a woman made in His image and made as stewards of His creation and stewards of the children given to their care. Just as His birth awaited the time appointed after the conception, so the troubled world would await the time appointed after it was created. How hard it is for us to grasp what the fullness of time is when He will end all this suffering which seems so grievous to us. How could a good God wait? Perhaps there will be a time for us to know, but for now we must wait. Mary and Joseph waited in Egypt until Joseph was told in a dream of the death of Herod. They intended to return to Bethlehem, but having been warned in another dream, Joseph the carpenter took the family back to Galilee where they stayed until the time of His ministry.

Credentials

The Son of Man would remain in Galilee, hidden in plain sight until the time had come for Him to begin His public ministry. Normally a young man would be trained and verified by a rabbi and then would be released into public with the credentials of the rabbi who trained him. Curiously, we do not find the Son of Man being taught in a synagogue where promising young Jewish men would receive instruction from a rabbi. Therefore, He did not begin His ministry with any credentials other than Himself for He had not received schooling from a rabbi. Without the testimony of a rabbi to introduce his ministry we find that the Son of Man would be introduced by the prophet John the Baptist. Even John did not have any credentials from the religious authorities, but the people were ready to respond to his call for repentance. John did not come to testify of himself but of Jesus. Later Jesus would testify of John. The Scriptures would testify of both John and Jesus.

DIGGING DEEPER: The testimonies

John 1:29-34 – John the Baptist was sent to preach repentance of sins, to prepare the people for Jesus' ministry.

Matthew 11:7-14 – Jesus not only verbally confirmed John's ministry, but sought to be baptized by him.

Matthew 3:5-6 – Many people confirmed John and Jesus by responding to the plea for repentance.

Luke 4:16-21 – The Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus by His anointing.

Authority

We find the Son of Man spending most of His time with those who had no personal "standing" in society. He had come to show us that our hope lay not in any human institution, but only in Him. Only those who were willing to put human wealth and power to the side to follow Him could follow Him. The Son of Man did not come to abolish human institutions or condemn power or wealth, but to subject them to Himself. He was willing to put Himself underneath the authority of those institutions, but only as much as they fulfilled His purposes. The Son of Man had given man authority on earth, but everything was subject to Him and He would challenge the hearts of men who had that priority misplaced. The Son of Man among men, voluntarily subjected himself to the authority of men who, in reality, were subject to Him. The Son of Man subjected himself to the paying of taxes and to death on the cross. We could ask what is the risk He bore if He could produce coins from the mouth of a fish to pay His taxes, but the larger perspective looks at His suffering at the hands of men whom He allowed to beat and crucify Him.

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DIGGING DEEPER: The cost of following

Luke 9:57-62; 18:18-30 – Jesus demanded to be second to none. People with wealth were asked to put it to the side in order to follow Him.

Mark 1:32-34; 4:3-41; 5:1-43; 6:45-52; 7:37 – Everything is subject to Jesus.

Matthew 17:24-27 – Jesus told a disciple to pull a coin out of fish's mouth in order to pay taxes.

Shepherd

If our hearts are open, they are drawn to this Creator/creature, because we sense His love and we desire to be with God so that we can be more like Him. However, because we also sense His righteousness and because we are aware of our own unrighteousness some of us shy away from close examination of the Creator/creature out of shame and some of us push away. But we need to examine God if we want to understand what He has revealed to us, for we will see not only who God is but who we should be. He knows that none of us can become what He wants us to become by our own power and so He comes to us as the Great Shepherd, calling us to Himself and to His power. And this is our hope, that the one who know us completely has still called us, that the Holy and Righteous God comes to us as our Shepherd.

DIGGING DEEPER: The Shepherd

Luke 15:1-7; 19:9-10 – Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

Holiness

The God, who is so Holy that we cannot look on Him and live and whose plans we can only begin to understand, desires that all people, all those created in His image, will turn back to Him. He has prepared us for His coming in a unique way, but then, we are unique creatures made in the image of the Creator. It is in the complexity of who He is and how He made us and what He had to do in order to redeem us that He planned a way to come to us. We possess a tremendous dignity as a reflection of His Holiness, a holiness that cannot be taken away no matter what anyone does to us or even what we do to ourselves, a holiness which even He will not violate. How else can we comprehend that the archangel, Michael would not even slander Satan? To that end, He came to us as a servant. Indeed we needed Him to serve us for we did not have the ability to even approach Him in His Holiness. In order for us to recognize Him when He came to us as a servant, He chose an entire nation to work through, providing revelations and prophesies not only about Himself, but about events in general, so that our hearts would be prepared to recognize Him when He came to us so humbly.

DIGGING DEEPER: Weddings are good!

Genesis 2:22-24; Revelations 19:6-8, 22:17 – The relationship of husband and wife is an image of the relationship between God and man.

DIGGING DEEPER: The two sides of holiness

Isaiah 6:5 – On the one hand, while we are sinful we cannot even be in God's presence.

Jude 9 – On the other hand, the archangel Michael would not dare to slander Satan.

2 Peter 2:10-12 – Yet we are sometimes so bold as to despise authority.

DIGGING DEEPER: Come to Jesus with vulnerable open hearts

Matthew 18:1-6 – Adults must come to Jesus as children

Matthew 13:10-17 – Jesus spoke in parables in order to reveal the truth to those who are ready and to hide it from those who are not.

Humility

In His humility, He made Himself so approachable that even children attracted to Him and He also invited adults to come to Him in the same way. When the Son of Man spoke to the crowds, He mostly used parables –

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stories we all can clearly understand. Curiously, in ways we cannot comprehend, those who are spiritually blind are confounded, but at the same time, those who are willing to accept His word are able to see His truth.

Wedding

The authority of the humble Son of Man was also testified to by miracles. It is very interesting to note that the first recorded miracle of the Son of Man was quietly done in response to a need at a wedding celebration, an event that wraps together the union of a man and women with the union of man and God. I would find it hard to believe that He would look at that wedding celebration and not be thinking of the Great Wedding which He would be celebrating with the Bride of Christ.

Healing and restoration

Most of the miracles performed by the Son of Man involved healing, indicating His strong sense of compassion. However, compassion was not His only motive for healing, otherwise one would assume that he would have healed everyone and that there would be no sickness. He was more interested in the state of our souls and in our faith. He wanted people to recognize that the Son of God had come as the Son of Man, to be willing to turn to Him in order to be healed. It is not just the healing of the body that he was interested in, but the healing of the soul, for whether the issue was sickness or sin, the idea was, "Go and sin no more."

DIGGING DEEPER: The reason for healing

Matthew 8:5-13; 9:1-, 20-22; Mark 1:40-45; John 5:13-15; 9:1-45 – Physical health is good, but it means so little if the soul is disconnected from God.

Many times, he seemed to be interested in process. In the case of those being healed, he some times had specific instructions. He would put mud on the eyes of a blind man and then instruct the man to wash the mud out in a particular place. He would tell the healed lepers to go to the temple. He also paid attention to process when he trained His disciples. He didn't just make His disciples instantly perfect, but He gave them instruction and training opportunities -which included opportunities to fail as well. Why should we be surprised? The Son of Man had been waiting for opportunities and processes to unfold since the beginning of creation, waiting for the 'fullness of time.'

DIGGING DEEPER: It's important how you do things

Luke 17:11-19 – Jesus healed ten lepers, only one came back to say thank you
John 9:1-11 – Jesus healed a blind man, but to be healed the blind man needed to use mud to wash his eyes
Luke 9:37-45 – Jesus' disciples couldn't heal a boy with an evil spirit. Jesus chastised them
Galatians 4:4-5 – God sent his Son only in the 'fullness of time'

With the arrival of the Son of Man, we see one more part of the unfolding process of God restoring man to Himself. We know that relationships take time. Even in this day of instant communication, relationships take time. Relating to God takes time. Time is needed for us to go through experiences with one another so that we can learn to trust one another. There is the old saying of, "time will tell;" not that time itself will reveal the truth, but that the processes that will happen in time will bear out the truth. With that said, righteousness also demands a process. Time is needed in order for righteous action to bear righteous fruit and for sinful actions to bear the consequences of sin.

Setting the new stage

When the time had come, Jesus allowed the secular and religious authorities to arrest Him, unjustly put Him on trial, beat Him and then crucify Him. He allowed Himself to be tortured to death for our sins, in order to suffer what we deserved so that the righteous requirements of His law would be satisfied and our relationship with Him could be restored. The crushing impact of His death sent His disciples into despair and even abandonment,

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but the despair would be replaced by joy three days later when He was resurrected. Then in another impossible to predict moment, the Son of Man remained with his disciples for only a short while after the resurrection then departed, leaving the disciples to wait for the promised Holy Spirit.

DIGGING DEEPER: I'll see you in the air

Acts 1:4-11 – Jesus only stayed for 40 days after his resurrection – then He went back to heaven

When the Son of Man left, he did not leave behind a set of writings, nor a carefully constructed creed, nor a set of laws. Considering that He would be leaving His disciples for a long time one would normally expect that He would leave a set of explicit, clearly defined instructions on how to organize, etc. Instead, we find that the Son of Man had not told His disciples to follow a creed, but rather to follow Him. When He began His earthly ministry, His first instructions to His disciples were, "Follow me." At the end of His earthly ministry, the evening before He died on the cross He said, "I am going ... I am coming back ... I am the way, the truth and the life." In another impossible to understand moment, the disciples would not be waiting for the Son of Man to walk among them again, but within them.

DIGGING DEEPER: Following the living God – not a rule book

John 14:6; Matthew 16:24 – Jesus said that *He* is the way and to follow *Him*

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He Came in Humble Splendor

He came in humble splendor
The Son of God and Man
Glory came into the universe
To be held by human hands

Entrusted to a man and wife
Of ordinary means
The Glory of the Universe
Came to be heard and seen

Majesty wrapped in simple clothes
Who lived among the dust and dirt
Glory came into the universe
To suffer shame and hurt

He lived with common men
Wrapped their sin in grace
Healed the broken-hearted
With a gentle warm embrace

Brought dignity to humble hearts
Replaced the fear with love
And with his death He gave us life
And gifts from up above

Bible reading: Luke 2:1-39; Revelation 21:22-24

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Discussion Questions:

1. How do you understand that Jesus “grew in wisdom”? (The circle)
2. In what ways is Jesus like us? Different from us? (The circle)
3. If you were God, how would you prepare people for your arrival in the midst of people? (The long preparation)
4. How did the Great Flood and the Tower of Babel prepare the way for the Son of Man? (The long preparation)
5. God has chosen you to bless the world. How shall He do that through you? (Abraham)
6. Herod killed many babies in his attempt to kill the Son of Man. Mary and Joseph were warned and fled. Why do you think that God did not warn the others – or why did He not try to stop Herod? (The nation/ Prophecy fulfilled)
7. What were Jesus credentials? (Credentials)
8. How does Jesus view authority? (Authority)
9. The archangel Michael was careful not to slander Satan. How should we treat others with whom we have a disagreement? (Holiness)
10. How does the relationship between man and wife reflect the image of God? (wedding)
11. Jesus did not heal everyone in Israel. What does that tell us about him? (Healing and restoration)
12. How is following the Son of God different than following a set of rules? (Setting the stage)
13. How do you respond to the knowledge that the Creator of the universe experienced what it is to be born like and live like us? (He Came in Humble Splendor)

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God Reveals Himself in His Bride

(His Holy Nation – Part 2)

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. (New International Version, Zondervan, Revelation 22:17)

It's hard enough to understand that the eternal Creator of the universe could put Himself in a human body. But then, how do you explain that within His enormous created universe that there is a tiny speck of a planet lightly sprinkled with a thin layer of tiny creatures, some of whom have the privilege of sharing the Spirit of that Creator. How do you explain that those creatures can, in some sense, be the body of the eternal Creator? Of course, there are even more difficult questions, but let's look at this one.

Greater miracles

When the Son of Man left His disciples, He told them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, which would enable them to be His witnesses in the world. One week later, the Holy Spirit came dramatically with visible and audible effects, but more importantly, the Holy Spirit transformed the disciples. The Holy Spirit filled them with boldness and clarity of thought and confirmed their authority by performing miracles. The effect was to jump start a tremendous campaign of evangelism that would sweep through the entire Roman Empire and beyond, despite the external pressure of persecution and the internal weakness of the fallibility of the members of this 'Jesus Movement.' This campaign was successful in spite of these problems because the work of the Holy Spirit was not limited to the apostles but rather extended to all who responded in faith to the gospel. By the year 300, various estimates placed then number of believers from between 10% to 50% of the empire.

DIGGING DEEPER: Growth of the early church²⁰

Exodus 18:13-26; Acts 6:1-7 – In the three years of His ministry, Jesus kept Himself mainly within the boundaries of Israel and served primarily the people of Israel. Then, without having written a word or laying out an explicit strategy other than, "Go and make other disciples," the ministry of Jesus exploded through the world.

New problems

The first years of this new expansion were not encumbered by organizational inertia because the Lord's imminent return was expected, but there were problems, of course. While there was sharing of resources among the disciples, there were issues of organizing that sharing, giving rise to the office of the deacon. Other needs were to crop up as well, but the resolution of these needs was to recognize that while the Holy Spirit empowered each disciple, the empowerment came with the distribution of different abilities - different gifts that have been allocated according to the needs of the disciples and the plans of the Creator.

DIGGING DEEPER: Servants of the church

Exodus 18:13-26; Acts 6:1-7 – It took Moses' father-in-law to tell Moses that he might be the leader of the people, but he still couldn't do everything. The apostles also found that out when they heard complaints about people's needs being overlooked. This prompted them to select a group of people, mature in the faith, to oversee this ministry. They called these servants, deacons.

New Body

Over time, because of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believers, it became more apparent that a new work was being done in the world. The expanding group of disciples started to take a definitive form - a

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form that was more than just a man-made organization. At first, the group of believers began mostly as a group of believing Jews strongly focused around Jerusalem, then God used the persecution of the believers to expand His work. One of the first major expansions came with the scattering of the believers in Jerusalem so that His work was expanded in Samaria. It was at this point that the group of believers was referred to as the "church."

DIGGING DEEPER: The church is born

Acts 8:1-3 – Technically, the church began on Pentecost after Jesus died, when the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to do great things. But the organization of the church occurred over time, and it was in Antioch that the name “church” was first used.

One of the most revealing moments came when God encountered a devout and zealous Jew called Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, and asked the question "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" That question brought Saul to the realization that this group of believers was, in essence, the Body of Christ. Saul, later named Paul, explored this revelation in much more detail in some of his letters that he later wrote to the churches in various cities. From Paul's letters, we see how the Body has many parts with different functions. This perspective allows us to see how the gifts given to each of us by the Holy Spirit enable us to participate in the building up of the body to the glory of Christ. It is in that knowledge that we can discern what purpose we have at this place and at this time in the world and particularly in this Body to whom we belong forever.

DIGGING DEEPER: The new body of Christ

Acts 9:1-5 – When Saul was on his way to Damascus to persecute the followers of Jesus, Jesus encountered Saul and asked him, “Why are you persecuting me?”

1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 3:11-22 – Saul (aka Paul) explored why the followers of Jesus could be called, in essence, the Body of Christ.

Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-13,27-31; Ephesians 4:7-11 – Just as a physical body has different parts with different functions, so the Body of Christ. These functions are supplemented with spiritual gifts.

Matthew 25:14-30 – When God gives us gifts to carry out our function, we, as stewards of God, are accountable to God for how we use our gifts.

New gifts, new purpose

There is a list of many different spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit has available and He assigns those gifts to every member of His Body as He will. The gifts are meant for building up each other and can be used in the various roles He has for us to perform. There are some roles we like to do and some that we don't, but we need to be listening to God to hear what it is He wants us to do as individuals in the body and as His Body in the world. We are stewards of whatever gifts he has given and we have the responsibility of wisely investing in them.

This principle is even applied to congregations as a whole. All of the different parts and functions are distributed by God to individual congregations in different times and in different places. Not all congregations have made use of what God has made available, whether by choice or by ignorance, but we know that God will carry out His plans.

What a journey this is! Although in a sense we are all born into hopelessness and although we are also born as rebels against God who are unable to correct our own condition, each one of us is also created with the imprint of God and created with the intention that we should be bonded with God. This is possible because of God's intervention in which he offers to repair our conditions. He invites each one to accept His generous gift but He does not broach our dignity by forcing us to accept that gift because He created us with the imprint of His sovereignty.

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Choosing grace

The King of Kings has offered His magnificent royal gift of grace to creatures whose hearts are so unworthy that they could not even choose to accept that gift except that He give them that desire. So difficult it is to understand God's beneficence and the imprimatur of His sovereignty on His creatures, that churches have split over the meaning of it all. Is it possible for us to choose Him at all? Is He the only one who can choose? There are so many questions we cannot answer! What is unquestionable though, is the honor He bestows on us. So wonderfully are we made that despite the grotesqueness of the sin that inflicts us in this world, He still can see us as He intended for us to be and as we shall be.

DIGGING DEEPER: A splitting question²¹

The church was founded on the premise of being people who followed the one who is The Truth. This has naturally made the church a place where matters of the truth, usually in the form of doctrine, is something to fuss over.

The problem in all of this is that we are following a person more than we are following a doctrine, and that person is, in many ways, incomprehensible. Certainly the truth matters, as well as love – and many other principles.

In all of this, the result has been the splitting of church over matters of doctrine, including the doctrine of who chooses whom (aka election)

As unworthy as we may be when we come to Him, He bestows His Spirit on us. As He does so, not only do we receive the gifts of the Spirit, but the Spirit anoints us, guaranteeing our inheritance in the Lord until He comes again. That brings us to the next question: How does God sees us in the future, after we will be united with Him in Heaven?

New reality

As the Son of God is the Son of Man: one person existing in two levels of reality, in a similar way, the Body of Christ is the Bride of Christ: one community existing in two levels of reality. Those people to whom the Son has chosen to bestow His grace and have, in turn, chosen to receive his grace, exist in both of those realities. It is impossible to grasp how the eternal Son of God could be the apparently mortal Son of Man. It is impossible to grasp how the sin-laden community of believers could first be the Body of Christ, His hands and feet on the earth or even how we could be His Holy Nation, set aside for Him. It is even more impossible to grasp that we are the virgin Bride of Christ, untouched by sin and in a relationship with God that is so meaningful and so close that He identifies that group of us who have accepted His grace as His Bride. How is it possible to see the fullness of that reality in people broken by the sin within them and the sin around them?

DIGGING DEEPER: The prism of reality

Ephesians 5:23; Revelations 19:6-8; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Romans 7 & 8; 2 Corinthians 11:2 – When we look in a mirror what do we see? It is so hard for us to comprehend it all, but why not!? We are made in the image of the incomprehensible! We are the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ and the Holy Nation. But how in the world can we look at ourselves in our day-to-day struggle with sin and yet see ourselves as the *virgin* Bride of Christ.

It is so hard for us to see how God sees. We start by looking at people as they are at the moment on the outside and then only gradually seeing who they are underneath, and then perhaps be able to understand them in perspective of the details of their past. Even then we may still not understand who they are because all we can see are flawed people, coping with the advantages or disadvantages of life, working through whatever life's circumstances have brought, and holding onto the hope of what tomorrow brings.

We do not even know ourselves as completely as we would like. Moreover, we truly don't know the future or what test will tempt us, try us, strengthen us or break us down. But God sees both sides of us; as we are in the broken present and as we shall be after we are thoroughly cleansed and healed. In this life, when we marry we see our future spouse only partly as they are now and not as they shall be, while the Son of Man fully sees us as we are now and as we shall be, complete and whole.

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New relationships

It is with such great ignorance that we slip into the role of the Bride. Those of us who have been married a while are very aware of

- How little we truly understood of what lay on the other side of the wedding vows.
- How fruitless it would have been to try to fully explain it all to us ahead of time,
- How fruitless it would have been to try to explain what it means to be a spouse to a person who is wired so differently than you are,
- How fruitless it would have been to try to explain all the things we should know in order to work together to raise those children that result from the marriage.
- How little we understood of the role that would become ours.

It is with equal ignorance that the Bride of Christ approaches the day of her great union with Christ. There is so little we understand. As a group we are confused and unprepared. Most of us have great intentions and we can even do some things well, but we fall miserably short in other ways. One would think that it ought to be easy to return the love that our Bridegroom has given to us, but just as we fail to grasp the depth of the love given to us, we also fail to respond in kind. It is certainly a wonder that we are loved at all.

DIGGING DEEPER: Marriage counseling²²

Now that I have been on the other side of the wedding vows for a while, I can say that while I do appreciate the pre-marital counseling that I went through, there is no way that the counseling could prepare anyone for the full experience.

New love

New love is always so wonderful. You can see the effect on the church when it first began at Pentecost. Before they received the Spirit, the apostles were clueless and confused, but after they received the Spirit, the apostles were transformed into bold witnesses of the one who loved them. The love seemed to be contagious and spread quickly through the Roman Empire. But the apostles' letters revealed that just as quickly, the zeal of new love gave way to a myriad of problems as the flaws in the character of the Bride started to emerge.

DIGGING DEEPER: Isn't new love great!²³

Don't we love love? It's the primary topic we sing about in pop music, but the themes we usually encounter are 1) how great our new love or lover will be or 2) the problems we found out once we got into it. In the same way, the zeal of the new church helped it grow quickly in the early years, but as the church grew so did the problems.

The Great Miracle

Jesus is able to do healings and other fantastic miracles, but the greatest miracle of all (the miracle that makes the most difference of all) is the gift of new life when He gives us the Holy Spirit. It is with great wonder that we can read Paul's litany of charges against the church in Corinth in his first letter (which include quarreling, jealousy, immaturity, sexual immorality and lawsuits) and then, within the second letter, he states his intention to present the church at Corinth as a "pure virgin." Indeed, that is the second part of the Great Miracle. The first part of the Great Miracle happens when the Spirit of God enters us, binding us to God in a covenant. But until now, God's Spirit must contend with our old nature and our will seems to be divided. We are constantly torn between the choices offered by the old and the new, but the promised day awaits us when we throw away our broken bodies and the old nature we inherited with them and we will be presented to Christ in our new bodies, pure in heart and spirit, unblemished by sin.

DIGGING DEEPER: The Great Miracle

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What we are:

1 Corinthians 1:11; 3:1-3; 5:1-2; 6:1 – describes us as we are

Romans 7:7-25 – describes our battle between our two natures

The first part: the deposit

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 – It's one thing for Him to make a covenant with us.

The second part: the fulfillment

1 Corinthians 15:35-58; 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10; 11:2 – It's another thing to change us.

This Great Miracle gives us hope when either we are torn apart by the sin within the world or within our own nature. It is not intuitive, but what we need to do is to cling to the truth of our own inability to help ourselves and to our total dependence on God in becoming the people He wants us to be. If we cling to that truth, then we will be able to look past our own failures so that we will not be discouraged and we will also be able to look past the failures of others around us (although our pride would prefer us to compare our "lesser" sins to their "greater" sins) and offer the same hope to them; but we need to remember that it takes God's Spirit to enable us to see our own brokenness and our own need for God, His grace and His healing. As we then remember those things, we will be better able to serve others who by the same grace of God can see their own brokenness and need of God's grace. If only ...

But the record of the Spirit-sealed Bride of Christ seems no better than the record of the nation of Israel with cycles of triumph, tragedy, lives inspired by grace and lives unfilled by grace and mercy. We can read of the record of the nation of Israel in the historical books of the Old Testament. The New Testament begins the record of church history which is appended to by books written throughout the last 2000 years. It is Christians who can be found in the vanguard of social justice - starting hospitals, schools, orphanages, ending slavery, etc. But then you can also find Christians (or people who claim to be) committing atrocities against others, misusing power and authority for self-gain, being judgmental instead of compassionate, etc. If there is any clear message given by church history - it is that salvation must be by God because it could not be by the stumbling and often disobedient Bride.

DIGGING DEEPER: For the record²⁴

The history books written since the New Testament don't say anything new or anything different about the church: same kind of love, same kind of sins.

Rules and relationships

There are those who are part of the Bride who say that we should be defined by our relationship with God and should not be defined by a set of rules. There are also those who would say we should be defined by what we do (or do not do). But we are so easily led astray that as we attempt to follow Him, we often do need to focus on both the rules God has given and by our relationship with Him. We need to avoid the extremes - trying to have a relationship without rules or rules without a relationship. We need to work on a relationship that is defined in particular ways.

If we examine God, we find that there is one God but there is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit and each person has a definite role. The Bride is an extension of that set of relationships. If you will, the Bride flows out of the outpouring of the relationships within the Godhead. Indeed, there is a cascade of relationships: as the Son submits to the Father, so the Bride submits to the Son. Then the flow of honor and submission is continued in the various roles within the Bride, particularly within the family. We are told that the wife submits to the husband as the husband submits to Christ, the children submitting to the parents, and all submitting to each other.

Honor and submission

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Unfortunately, our sinful and simple minds tend to abuse the pattern of authority and submission, either forgetting the honor and submission or forgetting the inherent equality. On the one side, the wife submits to the husband, husband to the Son, Son to the Father. That is balanced by the equality expressed by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in honor, respect and glory. In all these ways is the Bride honored as well as the relationships within the Bride.

DIGGING DEEPER: Honor and submission

Ephesians 5:21-6:6; 1 Corinthians 11:3-16; 12:4-31 – In these passages, Paul tries to give us an idea of what the relationships look like in the family. The remarkable thing is that the relationships match the relationship between God the Father and God the Son!

While the pattern of relationships seems simple enough to talk about in general, how it all plays out in specific places and circumstances is not always so straightforward: We find some families and churches tending to emphasize hierarchy and submission and some emphasize equality of honor - sometimes we would wish that the process was simpler and more straightforward, but the God in whose image we are made is not so simple. How does the Bride properly reflect the character of God,

- the Lord of all who is the servant of all
- The Creator who took on the form of a creature
- The God of all wisdom who became a creature that grew in wisdom
- God the Son who obeys God the Father and each giving honor to the other.

DIGGING DEEPER: The paradox of power and authority

Matthew 16:19 – What a privilege it is to have the “keys to the kingdom” knowing God will bind what we bind and loose what we loose, but what does that mean?

Romans 13:1-6 – We are still to be obedient to the secular authorities.

1 Corinthians 11:10 – Women are to have a sign of authority.

1 Peter 3:22 – All beings (angels, authorities and powers) submit to Christ.

(See also, page 33, "Under Authority")

How is the relationship of the Bride to the Christ supposed to work out? We are given His authority on earth (keys of the kingdom) but we are also to simultaneously show submission to His authority and to the authority of others.

We necessarily try to discover God in the context of our personalities, our experience and our culture. While God is able to meet us and use us wherever we are, we need to be "as wise as serpents" so that we can distinguish between the things of God and the things that are of ourselves or of our culture; to be the 'salt of the earth' but not be like the earth. Unfortunately, in this area the Bride has historically had trouble, allowing the world to influence her rather than the other way around. This has particularly been true with respect to power and authority.

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DIGGING DEEPER: Spirit wise

In the world, we need to be spiritually sensitive.
Matthew 10:15-17 – We are supposed to be as wise as serpents.
Matthew 5:13 – We are supposed to be the salt of earth.

Finding strength

Whatever our position is in society, we should be more concerned with how we are handling our position in Christ. Sometimes when the church or its members have had the position of authority the position has been used to impose authority instead of using the position in pursuing the cause of justice and righteousness. At other times when the church or its members have been under authority, the authority was rejected because we want to be "the same as everyone else." In either case, we should humbly remember that we are under the authority of Christ and serving Him. Whenever we are serving under or over others, we will be most effective if we remember that we do not derive our power from our position in society, or even in the church - rather our power is derived from Christ.

DIGGING DEEPER: The paradox of spiritual strength²⁵

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 – God's ways are often counter-intuitive to the world's ways. According to the world we may look like we are in a weak position, but if we are relying on God's power instead of ours, then we are strong.
John 13:34-35 – If we are practicing ultimate love, sacrificing our needs for another, then we are releasing our own power of control of the world around us. However, this frees up God to work on our behalf. This is why Jesus said that the church would be known by its love.

That being the case, we would be better off recognizing that our 'weakness' is our 'strength' and focus on compassion instead of authority. For instance, we would prefer it if the secular laws of marriage were in line with our theology and that everyone was thus 'encouraged' to have the kind of marriages we know would be best for everyone. However, we might be more effective if instead of using our position in society to create laws that impose our view, we focus instead on compassion and healing.

We should recognize that sometimes those who are lost may not do everything we would agree with but they can still get some things right. At the same time, the church hasn't seemed to get it all right either. Those in the church have managed to mangle marriage enough to earn some criticism, and yet there are some outside the church who though not 'officially' married have solid devoted long-term partnerships. If we wish for the church to be more influential, we should keep in mind that the church has grown fastest when it lacked secular power. It is not secular power but sacrificial love that has shown brightest through the darkness. Even the Son of Man said the church would be known by its love.

New path, new purpose

One mistake that we could make in our life, is to think that once we have received Jesus as Lord then that is the end of our spiritual journey – after all, if we are right with God, what more do we need! However, to stop there is not only to deprive us of a great opportunity, but to deprive God and His church of a willing servant. On the one hand, it would be "good enough" that God has rescued us from the penalty of our sin, on the other hand, we would be like an unplanted seed – a life that has not been lived.

DIGGING DEEPER: It would have been enough²⁶

Dayenu – This is a name of a Jewish Passover song that addresses the idea that there are events in life that we could think are "good enough," and we would be tempted to stop there, but the blessings that God intends are so much more.

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We are living creatures of the living God, invested with His image – the one God, the Triune God who was a community before there was creation. It is His prayer that we might be as one as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one. What a fantastic desire He has for us! Certainly, if we looked at church history we would not find overwhelming evidence of this oneness in the church, but it is His desire for us.

What a pleasure it will be to not only discover what God's purpose for us is as individuals, but to also see what God's purpose is for the congregation He has placed us in. As surely as He has placed us as individuals in a particular place and time for a particular purpose, so also has he strategically placed particular congregations. When the Son of God became the Son of Man, He put His face in our face; approaching us so that we could know that we could approach Him; suffered with us to pay the price for all the sins that we committed and reconciled us to the God that we have refused to submit to since we were born.

DIGGING DEEPER: Prayer for unity

John 17:11 – This prayer of Jesus flies in the face of what we now know about church history, that we might be of one heart and one desire as God the Father is with God the Son.

Body of Christ

As His body then we represent Christ when we put our face in the world's face; serving those around us as He has served us; seeking the lost; caring for all; proclaiming His love, righteousness, justice and holiness; being zealous for doing what is right; restoring relationships; being willing to sacrifice ourselves for others; patiently enduring suffering as His ambassadors, servants, brothers and sisters, friends, His Body and His Bride. While there are many functions within the church, we need to keep in mind that of all the tasks there are to do, the only task we can do here but we cannot do once we leave for home is to reach the lost. That is not to say that other tasks are not important – indeed, we need to give attentions to our relationships in the body as well, because a healthy body needs nourishment as well as exercise.

As we try to become a healthy body, we struggle with the sinful part of the reality of who we are at this particular time and place and with understanding the sinless part of the reality of who we shall be when we are presented as the virgin Bride. Like the amphibian which lives part of the time in water and part of the time on land, we are creatures that live in two different worlds. Before the Holy Spirit came into us, we were in one world, and when we are in heaven, we shall be in another, but now we are on the shore not completely understanding who we are.

It is normal to be confused but, wherever we find ourselves, there is a purpose for us. However, the purpose can't be sorted out by just looking around trying to reason it all out. The purpose can only be found if the one who gave us life shows us that purpose.

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I See and Don't See

Gangly legs or pudgy
Zits and warts galore
Hair in places I don't want
And not in places I want it more

Categorize things I shouldn't
Not the things I ought
Focus on things that are quickly gone
And not on what my heart has sought

See the obvious problems
Quick to criticize
Just not seeing all the work
Of what's gone on in other's lives

Fill my daily planner
Meetings, tasks and more
Urgent needs crowd out real needs
And crowd the love right out the door

Other people's issues
Can't seem to make me see
Distractions are not what they seem
A child in need is a blessing indeed

Bible reading: *Matthew 6:19-34*

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Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways can a church organize itself to see that all the physical and spiritual needs of the members are met? (New problems)
2. In what ways does the church do “greater miracles” than Jesus? (New body)
3. How does the church express itself as the “body of Christ”? (New body)
4. In your day-to-day life, do you feel as if you’re living in two different realities? (New reality)
5. What can we do to help us see others as God sees them? (New reality)
6. Despite our sin, we will find ourselves uniting with Christ as a “pure virgin.” Does that affect how we live today? (New reality)
7. What unexpected things did you experience after you got married? (New relationships)
8. What can we do to help us see beyond the shortcomings and sins of others? (New love)
9. The Crusades and the movement to abolish slavery were both done in the name of Christ. How do we help non-believers make sense of that? (The Great Miracle)
10. How do you define your relationship with God? (Rules and relationships)
11. (Re: Mat 8:8-8) The Centurion expresses how he has authority because He is under it. He also recognized the same kind of authority with the Son of Man. How could this relationship be reflected in the Bride? (Honor and submission)
12. In this life, our spirit is divided. What does that do to our ‘witness’ to others? (Finding strength)
13. Think about how God can use even those who are opposed to Him. How does that knowledge affect how we treat others? (Body of Christ)
14. How can we help ourselves to see the distractions in our lives as blessings and to focus on the things in life that are really important? (I See and Don’t See)

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

God Reveals Himself in His Vision

*I can't always try to walk in another's shoes
And even if I could
Even if I could hear their words
I cannot ever be
Truly in their minds and know
How they truly see*

How many times do we wonder if we are seeing the world correctly and if we are truly understanding it. How much more difficult it is for us to understand how others see and understand the world. Particularly, how are we to see and understand the world as God does? Certainly, if the Creator wished to remain hidden, He could, and we would have no way of discovering what He would want to keep hidden, but fortunately, our Creator does seem to have intentionally revealed Himself to us.

Revelation

We tend to divide God's revelation to us in two ways - general revelation, which is available to everyone through normal means of our conscience and our observation of creation; and special revelation, which is God's particular communication with specific individuals. Both forms have particular issues for us to wrestle with. So hard it is to comprehend the magnitude and the details of God and His plans, especially in the midst of the world's corruption and our own, that we often must verify/qualify His revelations given to one person with the revelations given to others in order to confirm that the revelation is real.

In both kinds of revelation, we need to engage in a constant sifting, sorting and careful discernment. Of course, even when we get beyond all of that we often find that God's plans are simply too much for us to comprehend and, quite frankly, just too far different from our own perspective for us to be able to understand on our own terms. There is no way for us to get around our need for His Spirit to connect with ours - we simply cannot hope to grasp God's revelation by using only rationalism. At best, rationalism can get us only part of the way to understanding.

Spiritual vision

Fortunately, God has provided us different means to explore the world around us. He has provided us different senses. Our taste, touch and smell reveal the very nearby world around us. Our hearing can detect very loud noises a few miles away, but our ability to see can allow us to detect objects even light years away. Even more, when we see objects that far away, we may be looking at them as they were in the past. Our vision is also astonishing in its ability to see such a wide range of light frequencies and to see such fine detail in objects close up. It is no wonder then that this is the physical sense that is metaphorically used to refer to how we are able to perceive God's revelation of Himself and of His plans. How wide ranging His plans are and so full of detail! The use of vision to refer to the immense breadth and depth of His plans is so appropriate - but just like our physical vision is limited, so is our ability to 'see' His plans.

DIGGING DEEPER: Spiritual sight

2 Kings 6:8-23 – What does it mean to see spiritual things: To see acts of love and kindness; to see evidence of God's hand at work; to see angels?

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

Our brains are so wired to see! Because of our sight we can imagine flying, build the planes that fly and then fly them, study geology and astronomy, swim, drive submarines, build instruments to see for us or to see things in ways our eyes cannot, write music, build instruments, and enjoying sunsets and artwork. Our vision doesn't give us everything, but it enriches our experience so much! Then God expands our vision even more. There is much to see in the physical world, but there is a spiritual world around us as well. If only we could see like Elisha, who opened the eyes of his servant to see the angels that stood between them and an advancing army.

DIGGING DEEPER: Prophecy

Hosea 1:1 – Some prophecies are given as a conversation words from God.

Isaiah 1:1 – Some prophecies are given as visions of what God has shown.

Revelation 21:1-27 – Think about what it would be like if someone from 4000 years ago stepped into a modern city.

Another splitting question: Some churches hold that the gift of prophecy ceased with the ministry of the apostles. Some churches proclaim it within their congregations.

So incredible it is to be able to see the spiritual realm that that kind of seeing is also described as understanding. The phrase we use, "Don't you see?" is actually saying, "Don't you understand?" To be able to see the spiritual is also be able to grasp the timeless truth of the past, present and future and to be able to comprehend God's work in all of that. Sometimes there are people called prophets who are chosen by God to communicate these spiritual realities to others. The revelations given to these prophets sometimes come as words but at other times they come as visions or dreams. While it may be straightforward for a prophet to repeat the words they have heard from God, it can be very difficult to describe all that they have seen in a vision. This difficulty can "seen" if we read what those prophets wrote. For example, if we read from the books of Isaiah or Revelation the prophets seem to be describing items which they seem to have no concepts for. It probably would be similar to asking someone from Abraham's time to describe a visit to a 21st century city.

Seeing a broken world with broken eyes

In the case of general revelation, we are dealing with trying to understand God's characteristics through a broken creation that includes our own broken ability to discern and make sense of what we do see. General revelation is simply there, though we must be careful with it. Many of the attributes that we can discern of God by general revelation I already unpacked in the first chapter. Insights from special revelation permeate the chapters after that. Beginning with Adam, we see God revealing Himself through specific people in history. When He does so, there are two general points of focus: the current condition (which is usually not good) and the future.

DIGGING DEEPER: Dangers of special revelation

Claiming to speak for God is a risky business because special revelation is a personal experience.

2 Corinthians 11:13 – We must careful of deceiving spirits.

1 Corinthians 3:18 – We must be careful we are not deceiving ourselves

1 Corinthians 13:12 – We must remember that we cannot see spiritual truth with total clarity.

In the case of special revelation we must be careful of deceiving spirits or even self-deceit, therefore, we need to compare any claim of it to the rest of revelation. When God reveals a vision of the spiritual realities of our current condition, it is often unpleasant because part of that reality is sin. Over and over again, God wants to see us as we are in order to more clearly see how He is. Unfortunately, because of our sin, we cannot see God clearly nor can we respond appropriately. Yet in many ways, God keeps trying to reveal Himself, sometimes in ways that are mysterious. Often times however, God uses things that are familiar to us, because He has intended that our physical realities reflect the spiritual realities.

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Viewing the future

Sometimes the future is given conditionally and is described as good if we are or not good if we are not. Other times, the future is given unconditionally, where God is described as being in control and He has a particular future in mind; but in all the variations of revelation, God is intentionally uncovering His character and His plans.

DIGGING DEEPER: How good is the future?

2 Chronicles 7:11-22 – God will see that our sin will bring troubles and that our righteousness will be rewarded.

Micah 4:1-5 – In the end, God will restore righteousness on the earth

Origin of the Holy Bible

The book that we call the Holy Bible is a collection of documents written by different people over time and was assembled over time as God's people carefully examined those documents and verified that the contents of each writing and the impact of each writing measured up the exacting criteria that would merit the recognition as a God-inspired writing. It was not a case of one individual who selected the documents that are included in the Bible. Rather, over time, the church as a whole discerned that whatever documents emerged as the apparent Word of God documents written by a prophet/apostle, documents whose writer was confirmed by acts of God, documents where the truth about God is not contradictory, documents that have the power to transform, edify and/or evangelize. It was only after that process that individuals attempted to list the books that have been accepted by the church.

DIGGING DEEPER: Who selected the books that went in the Bible?²⁷

The Holy Bible is a collection of 66 books written by more than 40 authors over a period of 1500 years. The 'books' were actually a variety of works: prophecies, poetry, biographies, histories, and letters.

The decision about what documents to include was not done by one individual or even one cohesive group of people, but by various people or groups of people at different times who were trying to determine God's work.

For nearly 2000 years, God's people have had the opportunity to work with this collection of books that we call the Holy Bible, a collection written by various authors over the course of 1500 years. In it we have found various history and biography books, books of wisdom and poetry, books of prophecy and letters written by apostles. As we examine the books, we find that God has used all sorts of methods to communicate with His people: Sometimes by dictation, sometimes by word pictures, sometimes by allowing consequences and rewards, sometimes by inspiration, and sometimes by dreams and visions.

We may wonder why God has not more directly communicated to us and written his own words, but He seems concerned that we come to him by faith and not coercion. To this end His communications have come through individuals so that we need to use the collective vision of His people to determine if those individuals are hearing God's voice being spoken. It is part of the sovereignty that He has bestowed on us that He has allowed us the working of our collective vision to determine what should be regarded as His voice. This collective determination is not a precise, clean-cut, easily-defined process. It is a process of working through the Dynamic Tension of our wisdom and His inspiration. As described in previous chapters, God has chosen to work differently through different individuals in different times. He dealt one way with Abraham, another with Moses, another with the prophets, another through the person of Jesus another through apostles and another through the church.

As we examine the Holy Bible we find not only examples of how God has acted in history, but we also see examples of other ways in which God has revealed Himself: sometimes by descriptions of what He sees,

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sometimes by visions of heaven or the future, sometime by using nuanced and colorful language within poetry or proverbs, and sometimes by storytelling (word pictures or parables).

Using language

The reason that we have any ability to describe is because God has given us the marvelous capability of language. Although different languages have their different characteristics, many languages have a rich capability for description using not just physical descriptions, but also the ability to use linguistic devices like metaphors and similes. The Old Testament particularly has sections devoted to poetry and proverbs.

Describing our future

When God reveals what He sees today, He gives us descriptions of all sorts of unrighteousness both within and outside His Holy Nation with many examples of unjust treatment of others, stealing, murder, idolatry, sexual immorality, etc. Then typically, after such descriptions are given, God describes how He will respond. It is notable that since God sees no one as righteous, He not only uses Israel as a tool to punish others nations but He uses other nations to punish Israel.

DIGGING DEEPER: God's toolkit

Romans 3:10,23 – In books like Isaiah, several nations are prophesied against, including Israel. Sometimes Israel was used to punish other nations, but then sometimes it was the other way around. No one is righteous.

DIGGING DEEPER: Heaven's Building Code

I Corinthians 3:10-15 – We need to be careful of the work we do here in this life

When God reveals what He sees in the future, He sometimes shows us more of the same pattern that we see in the present – but then He also unveils his resolution and how He will come at one point as a humble servant and at another point as the King of Kings, to restore His rule on the earth. When He tries to reveal Heaven to us through the prophets they usually find it very difficult, not only because of their own unrighteousness, but also because heaven looks so much more different from anything on earth.

It is most interesting, that even when our Lord appeared as the Son of Man and walked among us, He left it to the church to record His words. Even then, His apostles did not commence writing until it was apparent that His imminent return of which He promised was not as soon as they had thought. If we do examine what He had spoken, we find that just like the Son of Man was hidden in plain sight, so parables bring us the truth hidden in plain sight. In the time of Isaiah and in the time of Jesus and in the present time, God is working and speaking, but not everyone wants to be healed and not everyone wants to turn to God. Isaiah explains that the righteous God has ordained that the consequences of sin will flow just as water flows, the sin that is sown will reap consequences. Although, God is able to intervene and does from time to time, God wants us to become mature and understand that he is a God of order and righteousness.

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DIGGING DEEPER: Parables: truth hidden in plain sight

You'll know it when you see it

... if you can see it

How does the invisible God make Himself known to us? God has designed our world and our language so that there is a rich source of imagery available for Him to refer us to, but we will see the connection only if our hearts are ready.

Sometimes the imagery comes as parables (*Isaiah 6:9-16; Matthew 13:10-17*). Some of the images are given as marriage (*Revelation 21:2*), adultery (*Hosea 4:10*), stray sheep (*Isaiah 53:3*), soil (*Matthew 13:3-23*), refining fire (*Malachi 3:3*), and pottery (*Isaiah 64:8*).

DIGGING DEEPER: Empirical evidence

2 Peter 1:19-21 – As we trust God and look for His work and listen for His voice, we will see evidence of God.

Everyday realities on earth: life, farming, our senses, family, etc. serve as tools for God to reveal His eternal truths. God uses parables and other ordinary things so that everyone, including children, can catch the truth if their hearts are open. It is said to us; therefore, that we are to come to God as little children because it is more important to have an open trusting heart than it is to have knowledge.

- Our relationship to God is supposed to be like a marriage and turning away from God is compared to adultery.
- We all like sheep have gone astray.
- The success of God's word in our heart depends on the kind of soil that is there, is it dry, full of weeds or fertile.
- The trials that God allows us to experience will purify us just as fire is used to refine gold or silver.
- He is the potter, we are the clay.

All of these are examples of ordinary things of life that God uses to reveal Himself to us. However, to see God through these things requires that God give us the spiritual vision to see them as He intends.

Dim lights

Despite all the opportunities God has given us to discover Him and see Him; we still encounter difficult situations in life where we find it hard to understand how God's love and justice fit in. At such times, the light of God seems like a dim flashlight that barely allows us to see where to take the next step. At such times, all the grandiose visions we have of God and His plans are shrunk to a very personal moment. At such times, if all we did was look right around us in the dim light, we could never find an answer to why life is so unfair and unjust. At such times, our hope will only be found in our faith.

While we may enjoy all the ways in which God has taken the time to reveal Himself to us, there is still more that we do not see. In this life, we will find that there is much opportunity for us to live by faith. Thus, we find ourselves on an adventure, a journey where we get a chance to position ourselves to see God's revelation of Himself in different circumstances. As we experience God on that journey, listen to His voice through His word, and listen to other saints describe their journeys with God, we become eyewitnesses of God's work in the world and we will have the word of the prophets made more certain.

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

Directions

*I have a lamp that lets me read directions God has written
Then I walk into the night
Fearful shadows seem so long*

*Comfort comes from faithful friends who walk along the way
Sometimes I feel very frightened
I'm sure the road I took is wrong*

*Comfort flows like a silent river, unexpected and so strong
The weather seems the fiercest
I am feeling faint*

*The directions are not like a map that tells where I will be
Give me hints of distances
Or on which paths I'll roam*

*The directions they don't tell me which path I'll travel on
Only that the Lord will meet me there
And one day take me home*

Bible reading: *Psalm 19; Psalm 119; Proverbs 18:24*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

Discussion Questions:

1. What aspect of God do you see in creation? (Spiritual vision)
2. Compare God's righteousness to the laws of the physical universe. (Spiritual vision)
3. What aspects of God's creation do you find to be amazing? (Seeing a broken world with broken eyes)
4. What aspects of God's revelation of Himself do you find to be amazing? (Origin of the Holy Bible)
5. What things has God revealed about Himself do you find to be confusing? (Origin of the Holy Bible)
6. Give an example of an everyday reality that show you eternal truth? (Describing our future)
7. How do you make use of the "collective vision" God has given us? (Seeing a broken world with broken eyes)
8. What parts of the Bible do you relate to most? (Origin of the Holy Bible)
9. Have you had a "refining" experience? (Describing our future)
10. As you look at the parables, do you think any of them are hard for anyone in today's society to relate to? How could you adjust that parable so that it could be more easily understood? (Describing our future)
11. In what circumstances do you find yourself leaning of faith? (Describing our future)
12. What method has God given you to express His vision? (Dim lights)
13. How does the Holy Bible give you direction? (Directions)

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

God Reveals Himself in Our Cry

If He cannot cry with us

Then He has not truly identified Himself with us

- In the beginning was the Word. God spoke and –BANG!! – the Creation began.
- God said ... and there was.
- God spoke the words that commanded existence.
- When there were creatures, God spoke to them.
- When God created beings in His image, those beings spoke.
- In the beginning, those beings had words to communicate their thoughts to one another. There was one Spirit.

...

Then came sin and the separation of one being from one another. No longer was there one shared Spirit. There was fear, distress and pain. The words became a cry.

The words spoken and written would become the lore of civilizations and anchors for the soul. It was discovered that naming became a power to build or destroy. Broken spirits cried their cries of hope and despair, love and anger, silly thoughts and profound ... such a wide range of expression. The human soul seems to have no limit of expression.

We began our journey with God's expression of Himself in His Creation, His Image, His Holy Nation, His Silence, His Son, His Bride and His Vision. We end our journey on a personal note, with the cry of a human heart disconnected and reconnected. God may create and destroy the world, build or destroy nations and cast a wondrously wide vision, but for each of us the only point that counts is when God touches our individual heart.

Our assurance comes from the knowledge that the Creator who gave us our hearts and gave us the words to express what is in them also gave us a heart like His – and the depth of our feelings and depths of our expression are no deeper than His.

Jesus cried. (John 11:35)

In the following pages, I open my own heart's cry to you as I have worked through things with God in my own journey. May you be encouraged in your own conversations and meditations with the Creator.

The children never stop being our children. It is a wonderful joy and blessing to watch them become a partner in Christ. As we watched them grow, so did we.

The children never stop being our children. It is a wonderful joy and blessing to watch them become a partner in Christ. As we watched them grow, so did we.

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

Quiet Echoes

*The rooms still quietly echo
With the children's voices and steps
The years of nurture and tending
Have blossomed into joy*

*Memories float through daily routines
Accompanied by smiles and tears
For the children were precious
But now they are gone
Becoming less like children
And more like friends*

*In this season when the children have grown
And they walk on paths they have chosen
We now take delight
As we watch them take flight
And our world has grown larger
As we've learned to see through their eyes*

*Our relationship has also grown
As our children now make their own way
We now have become less like parents
With each other we're more like friends*

*Memories float through daily routines
Accompanied by smiles and tears
For our young days were precious
But now we have grown
And our love has grown stronger
Through the years*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

*When our children were young we held tightly
Then let go as we carefully watched
Then we learned to let go as they grew even more
And our watching turned to waiting and prayer*

*In this season as we recall where we've been
And walked along roads we've not chosen
We still take delight
As we walk in the light
And our vision's grown larger
As we've learned to see through Christ's eyes*

Bible reading: Proverbs 23:24; Psalm 127:3-5; Isaiah 8:18

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

Do we really believe who we are? Do we have a firm grasp on the role our Creator has planned for us?

Who Are We

*Who are we
The King's own sons and daughters*

*Who are we
Holders of His keys*

*Who are we
Sons and daughters of the Savior
Who've received great unearned favor
And His healing and His freedom and responsibility*

*All creation bears the marks of its Creator
Though it's broken by our sin and filled with shame
But the Lord of all creation plans to overthrow
And the purpose He has planned for us will glorify His Name*

*Many are the paths laid out before us
Many good things we can choose along the way
But the Lord bestows His wisdom so that we can wisely choose
And the pureness of our heart will be our guide*

Bible reading: *Matthew 16:19; Romns 8:19; Psalm 102: 25-28; Psalm 95:3-7; Psalm 104:1-36; Isaiah 40: 21-31*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

There are some things that only a properly prepared – and broken – spirit can do. It's only after we lose confidence in ourselves that we can learn to trust God, for it's by depending only on His strength that we are enabled us to do His will.

Broken Spirits

*Only broken spirits fly on heaven's wings alone
Only broken confidence will trust in God alone
The grip of pride must loosen
Our arms must stretch out wide
Then we must fully lean into the waiting arms of God*

*Only falling spirits can be fully made to rest
Only falling spirits have learned fully how to trust
To let go of earthen treasure
The right to pride and pain
Then we must hold on tightly to the grace that leads us home*

*Only broken spirits fly on heaven's wings alone
Only heavens wings can carry all the way to home
For broken joy convinces
We're only on the way
Then heaven's joy can carry from night into the day*

*Only broken hearts can feel the passion God has borne
Only grace from scar-filled hearts can mend the soul that's torn
Broken men can serve
The helpless and distressed
And offer hope that only comes from learning how to trust*

*Only broken spirits fly on heaven's wings alone
No longer bound by laws of earth but bound by grace above
Above the winds that drown
The plaintive, helpless cry
Above the tides of 'whelming grief and selfish human pride*

Bible reading: *Psalm 51:17; Psalm 34:17-18; Psalm 147:3*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

So many things we do not know. We do not know how long we can enjoy the gift of our children: a lifetime, 40 years, 10 years, 1 year or less. We may even lose them before they are born. This is written in memory of Dale, Cara and Dierdre.

This Child Of Ours

*This child of ours we give to you
This little one we surrender
This tiny child we offer you
This helpless one so tender
This helpless one so tender
For ours is not to give and take
But merely hold awhile
It's from your hand that we bring forth
Then return into your hands
Then return into your hands
What we conceive we dearly love
With bitter tears we grieve and lose
But we remember you also grieved
When from your Son you turned away
When from your Son you turned away
And it was yours to give and take
But you let go awhile
And from your Son you turned away
Then returned him to your hands
Then returned him to your hands
And we await the final day
When we shall finally see
The ones we lost beside you
And we shall cease our sorrowing
And we shall cease our sorrowing
It's only for a little while
That we must bear our pain
The hands that brought us all forth
Shall restore us then in peace
Shall restore us then in peace*

Bible reading: *Jeremiah 32:37-41; Habakkuk 3:17-19; Isaiah 43:4-7*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

The wonder of it all. We wander and yet He calls us – again and again. We try to trust and follow – and then we fail – yet He who gave us His best, His life and His name calls us still.

How Far, How Far

*How far, how far I wander. How far, how far from home
How far, how far I go my way. Yet I listen for the voice.
Yet I listen for the voice*

*The voice, the voice that calls me. The voice that calls me home
The voice that would be guiding me, if only I trusted and followed
If only I trusted and followed*

*Followed, followed, trusting. Followed trusting in His Word
Followed trusting in the one who gave, and gave His very best
And gave His very best*

*His best, His best He gave me, His best so freely given
His best He gave to give me life abundantly and so free
Gave me life abundantly and so free*

*So free, so free, the life. So free the life from sin
So free from sin that I could choose to live and follow Him
I could choose to live and follow Him*

*To Him, to Him who calls me, who calls me to His side
To Him I came with open hands, to receive His precious gift
To receive His precious gift*

*The gift, the gift He gave me, The gift He gave to me
The gift He gave me freely for His glory and for His name
For His glory and for His name*

*His name, His name, He gave me. His name He gave to me
His name I cannot ever lose – It's His gift eternally
It's His gift eternally*

Bible reading: Luke 15:11-31; Revelations 22:3-5; John 10:1-18; Matthew 16:24-37

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

We look to the Lord and discover how costly love is. Yet, in the end what is it that we sacrifice for the sake of love? When we look at what we gain – what did we lose when we put aside the things we could not hold onto?

Was it Sacrifice

*Was it sacrifice to have
More time to spend with you
More time to hear your stories
More time to see you through*

*Was it sacrifice to see
Your eyes so clear and bright
Your smile brighten up the day
Your face filled with delight*

*What was it that I gave up
What treasures did I lose
Whatever did I turn away
To have some more of you*

*Could you call it sacrifice to lose
The things I could not hold
But to gain some treasured moments
And some precious time with you*

*Was it sacrifice to lose
Some time to be at work
Some time to make more money
Some time to get ahead*

*Was it sacrifice to spend time
On all our countless walks
On all our countless moments
On all our countless talks*

*What decisions did I make
What did I decide not to do
When instead of doing other things
Instead I spent time with you*

*Could you call it sacrifice to lose
the things I could not hold
But to gain some treasured moments
And some precious time with you.*

Bible reading: *Romans 12:1; Matthew 6:10-21; 2 Corinthians 4:7*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

We receive God's forgiveness at a great cost to Him. For us to forgive we need to give up our right to retribution, but for us to not to forgive is more costly.

Retribution

*We shall flee to hell
Or from the bell
That tolls for retribution*

*The price is grim
For deadly sin
There is no good solution*

*We'll either embrace
The deadly grace
That brings us peace within*

*Or heed the voice
Of imagined choice
And pay for our own sin*

*We'll only heal
When we finally kneel
And grasp and give forgiveness*

*For death's release
Will bring us peace
Or anguish that is endless*

*But in this life
There's always strife
The Angst of partial solutions*

*We must give up our fight
To demand our right
To seek final retribution*

*Nothing here
Is crystal clear
Neither peace nor torment*

*But we must wait
Until we pass the gate
To embrace the final judgment*

Bible reading: *Matthew 5:43-48; 6:14, 11:25; Colossians 3:13; Leviticus 19:18; Romans 12:17-21; 1 Peter 2:23*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

The spiritual darkness was deep upon the world. But some wise men saw the sign in the dim stars and went out to look for the Son of Man who came in the “fullness of time.” As we live life in the community of faith, we will misunderstand and be misunderstood. In the midst of our sin and our brother’s sin we will get hurt. Yet, as individuals and a community, we have a purpose. God help us endure the pain. Let us cry ... let us pray.

Fullness of Grace

*And the stars will shine like many distant promises
As they guide us through the dark and dreadful night
But as we walk into the day
We can look back and see the way
Our footprints have brought glory to His name
And the fullness of our pain
Will be the life that we have gained
And the fullness of His justice and grace
And our pain will be finally erased*

*Wounds inflicted by our brothers will be slow to heal
As our hearts o'erflow with bitterness and pain
But what the darkness has concealed will by our Saviour be revealed
His grace will fill our hearts 'til we are healed
And the fullness of our pain
Will be the life that we have gained
And the fullness of His justice and grace
And our pain will be finally erased*

*As we walk into the storms of our self-righteousness
And our sins engulf the lives of those we love
Let us turn the pain we bear into an attitude of prayer
We are servants of His grace and of His care
And the fullness of our pain
Will be the life that we have gained
And the fullness of His justice and grace
And our pain will be finally erased*

*Until the Lord returns there will be many sorrows
Consequences of our sin and all our pride
But as we go before the cross
Forgive our brothers, reach the lost
We'll endure the pain that we might pray and cry
Our brother cries
Our Saviour cries*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

*And the stars will shine like many distant promises
As they guide us through the dark and dreadful night
But as we walk into the day
We can look back and see the way*

*Our footprints have brought glory to His name
And the fullness of our pain
Will be the life that we have gained
And the fullness of His justice and grace
And the fullness of His justice and grace*

Bible reading: *Genesis 15:1-21; Isaiah 57:14-21; Revelations 22:1-5; 2 Corinthians 1: 3-7; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Ephesians 2:6-10;
1 Timothy 1:15-17*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

If we only look inside ourselves, there is no anchor for our souls. If we only look on the earth there is no justice. If there is hope – it must lie outside all of that.

I've Looked Despair Between the Eyes

*I've looked despair between the eyes
And have clutched it to my breast
And I've looked deeply in my soul
And seen the emptiness*

*I've probed beneath the endless roles
Of all the games we play
And have found that they were all just games
Despite what we might say*

*The values that we cling to most
As we grope for worth and pride
We must release with our last breath
Helpless with arms held wide*

*If we have hope and not despair
Beyond death's final door
There must be truth that we can grasp
From one who's gone before*

*If there is justice on the earth
That hears unanswered cries
There must be more than life itself
That comforts when we die*

Bible reading: Isaiah 51:7; Ezekiel 34:16; Romans 3:25; 2 Corinthians 4:8

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

There is a horror to death. We were created to live with and be with God forever. Physical death and decay is not lovely – but the possibility of physical death gave God the opportunity to restore us to Himself. This is why we have “Good” Friday. In our own dying we have the chance to join Him who died for us. On this side of death is darkness, pain, separation and sorrow. but there is Jesus on the other side and light, peace, fellowship and joy.

The Sweetness of Death

*The sweetness of death all around me
The sweet taste of death in the air
Is the sweet breath of Jesus who's taking me home
And the pain that surrounds me is the pain he will bear*

*Through the pain of the sorrows around me
The incense of heaven comes near
And reminds me of home and that I'm not alone
And the soft hand of Jesus is drying my tears*

*As the shadows of heaven enfold me
And the mercy of Jesus draws near
The pains and cares of this world start to fade
While the comfort of heaven overwhelms all my tears*

*In our room full of shadows we see dark and light
Some things that pain us and some things delight
But as we pass through the portal and out of the night
We'll see shadows of heaven transform into light*

*All the people I regarded so lightly
And the friends I have clung to so tightly
I must let them all go but I'll pray that they'll know
The God of all Comfort who calls through the night*

Bible reading: Psalm 23; Psalm 116-19; Isaiah 25:6-8; 1 Corinthians 15:55; Revelations 1:17-18; Revelations 21:1-4

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

There are some things in life that we seem to go through alone. Other people don't or can't understand. Sometimes it feels overwhelming ... but there is one who knows, who sees and hears.

Only Heaven's Eyes

*When you wake up in the morning only seeing
Another weary day that never ends
And you've barely strength enough
To take another weary step
And in your heart you feel the endless pain each tearful step will bring*

*When the harshness of this life seems overwhelming
And stretches out as far as you can see
And oceans of despair surround
And threaten to engulf you
And your spirit sinks beneath the tide of ever rising tears*

*Only heaven's eyes can see
Your each and every faithful step
And every silent tear
And the wondrous majesty
Of the grace you've left along the way*

*Only heaven's ears can hear
Each weary sigh you breathed
As your courage drew you onward
Though your strength would slowly fail*

*Only heaven's eyes can see the light
Of heaven's reflections in your eyes
Only heaven's ears can hear
The courage in your voice
As you breathe another weary sigh
And take another painful step*

Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 15:58; 1 Peter 5:6-11; Job 23:10-12; James 5:7-11; Galatians 6:9

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

I only knew Milt in the latter years of his life. He was truly alive with love for others. This was written in memory of Milt Nilsen.

My Eyes Have Seen the Morning Star

*I ran as to win the race of life
I ran to win those who were lost
I ran with patience to the Lord of Lords, the King
I ran, but now I rest my weary bones*

*My eyes have seen the Morning Star
My ears have heard the Living Word
My hands have touched the nail pierced palms
My soul's found rest within His arms*

*The treasure that was in the earthen jar
Is now released from chains of grief and pain
My soul has found Jesus at the journey's final end
I wait for you to join me with my Friend*

*My eyes have seen the Morning Star
My ears have heard the Living Word
My hands have touched the nail pierced palms
My soul's found rest within His arms*

*The life we shared together did not end
But in a while more we'll meet my friend
And while you wait gain wisdom and you'll shine like heaven above
So run, until you rest your weary bones*

*My eyes have seen the Morning Star
My ears have heard the Living Word
My hands have touched the nail pierced palms
My soul's found rest within His arms*

Bible reading: 2 Peter 1:16-21; Revelations 22:16; Hebrews 4:9-13; Daniel 12:1-3

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

Discussion Questions:

1. How have children helped you see God more closely? (Quiet Echoes)
2. What responsibility do we have with all the choices we have to make? (Who Are We)
3. How has your brokenness enabled you to serve others? (Broken Spirits)
4. What loss has been most difficult for you to bear? (This Child of Ours)
5. How has God's grace sustained you in difficult times? (How Far, How Far)
6. What blessings have you gotten from serving others? (Was it Sacrifice)
7. How is grace deadly? (Retribution)
8. Is there anyone you have forgotten to forgive? (Fullness of Grace)
9. What do you cling to most? (I've Looked Despair Between the Eyes)
10. How is it possible to find joy in the midst of sorrow? (The Sweetness of Death)
11. In what times in our life have you felt that God was the only one who knew what you were going through? (Only Heaven's Eyes)
12. What legacy do you want to leave? (My Eyes Have Seen the Morning Star)
13. From what you now understand, how would you answer the question. "What on earth am I here for?"

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

Appendix A: A Very Brief History

Pre-Patriarchal

Creation – In the beginning, God created. It was a good start – a very good start – but then it went downhill quickly.

Flood – What kind of mischief could you get into if you lived 900 years? It got so bad that God flooded the earth and started over again with Noah and his family.

Tower of Babel – (Diaspora 1) Well, the family got larger. As it did, instead of spreading out like they were told, they all hung around together in a tight-knit group determined to make a name for themselves. When they started to build a tower as a monument to themselves, God had to mix up their language in order to encourage them to disperse. Nation forming began.

Patriarchal

Abraham – 1st generation patriarch. God starts His own version of nation building by pulling one man from “across the river” (from which we get the word, Hebrew). Abraham leaves the high civilization of Mesopotamia to start building family and wealth in the outbacks of Canaan.

Isaac – 2nd generation patriarch. Isaac’s half-brother, Ishmael, is ignominiously sent off with his mother Hagar. Ishmael founds the Arab nations. Isaac is the “son of the promise,” but he is born when Abraham is 100 years old and Sarah is 90. No wonder that he was given a name that means “laughter.”

Jacob – 3rd generation patriarch. Esau is the older twin brother but Esau despised his birthright and so Jacob took it, deceitfully. After a long learning curve, Jacob finally gets a grasp on God and God renames Jacob to Israel, which means “struggles with God.”

Joseph – 4th generation patriarch. Joseph is just the most notable of the 12 brothers. His jealous brothers sold him off to someone traveling to Egypt where he was enslaved. God uses Joseph’s continued obedience in the midst of unfair circumstances to become 2nd in charge to the Pharaoh. In that position, Joseph was in position to feed his family when famine came.

Captivity – After Joseph and the Pharaoh who knew him dies, the growing nation of Israel becomes enslaved and they are a long way from home.

Visible Nation

Exodus – 400 years away from home is long enough. God called Moses to bring the family home. Despite seeing all the miracles, Israel wasn’t ready to walk into the Promised Land and so God has them walk around the wilderness for 40 years.

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

Settlement – It was a great start. Joshua led the nation in for a startling invasion of Jericho, but foreshadowing the rest of the history, the nation failed to obey God and so God allowed the other inhabitants of the land be a thorn in their side.

Judges – Repeated cycles of despair that would cause the nation to cry out. God would raise up a leader (judge) to deliver them, but they would fall back to their old ways and God would allow them to fall into despair again ...

United Kingdom – Israel finally wanted to get a king “like everybody else,” and they got one – like everybody else. Saul, the first king, started OK and then fell into unrighteousness. David, the second king, wasn’t perfect but at least he kept returning to God. Solomon, the third king started OK but wealth and privilege got to him and his loyalty to God was divided.

Divided Kingdom - Solomon’s son turned away from wisdom caused an uprising that split the kingdom in two. The northern kingdom, called Israel, consisted of 10 of the tribes. The southern kingdom, Judah, was the remaining two tribes. Israel ended up with no kings of good repute. Judah had only a few kings of good repute.

Diaspora

Captivity – (Diaspora 2) Assyria conquers Israel and disperses the residents throughout the empire. A couple hundred years later Babylonia conquers Judah and takes the best part as captives to their capital for “retraining.” To this day, the majority of Israel, now called Jews, remains scattered through the world.

Return – Empires come and go. When Persia becomes the new boy on the block, the first batch of returnees is allowed to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Later on a second batch would go back to rebuild the walls.

Silence – God stops speaking to the Jews through prophets. More empires come and go including the Greeks who leave behind their language for the Roman Empire to use as the international language. There’s a revolt in Jerusalem and the Hasmonians take charge and set up a kingdom that exists independently for 100 years until the Romans come and turn the kingdom into a client province.

Son of Man – The Son of God interrupts history and becomes the Son of Man.

Church – The Son of Man leaves earth with the promise to return. The Spirit is sent to the believers who pick up where the Son of Man left off. They didn’t pick up and go far enough so the Romans scatter the Church (Diaspora 3). 2000 years later, the shakedown continues.

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Appendix B: The Paradoxes of God and Dynamic Tensions

In biological life, it seems that there are no simple formulas, no simple rules. Although, on the one hand, there are underlying precisely defined processes like the laws of chemistry and physics, on the other hand, there are overlying complex and variable biological processes that are adaptable to circumstances around them. Even more, living organisms by themselves are noted by intricately balanced but unstable processes that, if the balance between processes fails, there is a most certain death. One of the standard definitions of life is that living things must maintain themselves away from equilibrium, while at the same time maintaining internal order and organization. If you examine the processes within living organisms, you will see that the internal structures seem to be stable. Yet, in fact, matter and energy are constantly flowing through them and the materials within the internal structures are being constantly refreshed. More remarkably, all of this activity is sustained by an array of complex sets of interdependent processes where one set of processes feeds off the by-products of other processes and visa versa. All this activity is delicate in one sense, if some processes fail at one point the result can be death. In another sense, the process is flexible, allowing an organism to live in a wide variety of circumstances (environments).

You can see this complexity on another level with the interactions of bone and muscle. In a given skeletal muscle, some fibers are attached to one bone in one direction and some fibers are attached to a bone in another direction. As the fibers within a muscle pull against one another the bones they are attached to move. Exactly which way the bones move is determined by the creature that controls the muscles, as the creature interacts with the environment and is determining what direction to go or what task to do. While it seems at one level that in a given muscle the fibers are working against one another and seem to work opposite to one another, they are in fact on a larger scale working with one another to accomplish particular tasks.

All of this seems to be a reflection of what we see in spiritual life. On one level, the forms we see in God, His holiness, grace, etc. never change although they are constantly interacting with each circumstance. As circumstances change, although it may seem that God's response may change, it is not because God has changed, only that God's dynamic response to different circumstances, whether globally or locally, has changed.

On another level, it may seem that some of God's characteristics are in conflict with each other or pulling against one another. For instance, how is God's perfect desire for justice able to be reconciled with God's grace? Or how is it that He can be the Lord of all and able to also be the Servant of all? In fact, God is interacting with the world, determining what He wants to do and then coordinating His attributes to do what He desires. For example, although God's authority and servant-hood seem to be in tension with one another, He is coordinating them to deal with our individual circumstances. Some times He sees the need to demonstrate more authority and at other times, more servant-hood.

I call this interaction, Dynamic Tension; a process controlled by a person or an organism in which the attributes which seem to be pulling in different directions are actually working in concert with one another to accomplish particular goals.

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

About Chuck Russell

Finding Rainbows : An Investigator's¹ Journey

(1) You May Not See or Hear

*You may not see it in the vastness of a star-filled sky
or across an ocean of raging waves
or in a hurricane
or racing cloud*

*You may not feel it in the volcano's power
or in an earthquake's tremble
or in a tornado passing by
or gentle breeze*

*You may not hear it in the rolling thunder
or in a song of unrequited love
or in a promise made
or child's cry*

*You may not see the hand of God that made it all
or hear Him whisper out your name
or feel His touch
or presence*

(2) One Question Still

*As I look into the star-filled sky
And wonder how and wonder why
and wonder who and wonder when
and ask it over and over again*

*The answers come by much too slowly
as questions come and questions go
as questions rise and questions fall
one question still is, "Who made it all?"*

For those who are looking they can see the signs
A bow in the sky or a tear in the eye
That show God is working in each of our lives

The testimony we share, the brief scan of our lives
No creatures can do except the image bearers of God
And are signs of God's glory like rainbows and stars

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

In elementary school I barely passed grades
At recess I'd go in the corner and hide
And stay there inside of my mind

The teachers were sure that something was wrong
My parents were sure there certainly was not
Christian Science said it could not be true

For God is perfect, He created all
And so therefore all must be perfect
If something seems wrong it's just not true

Christian Science has the gnostics' beliefs
Said the spiritual was real but the material not
Disease sin and death are only illusions

The stories in the Bible are just allegories
Not history's stories, just spiritual tales
But might as well be make believe

So when I was 8, I chose not to believe
Nothing I thought could be proved absolutely
You can make up whatever you want to believe

Then a couple years later one day in bed I lay with a cold
Constantly coughing, cough after cough
My parents disturbed by this coughing disease

They both said "Stop that. You don't have to do that"
And while I knew there were many ways that they cared
There'll simply be times when they just cannot

In looking back, I see that was the time
When my emotions would start to shut down
And be sealed off till the day I was freed

Now community service my parents held high
They bought a house with a pond for the neighbors to share
And a hill for the children to run and to slide

And then to make sure the sharing would go on
Before they died they gave that hill and the pond
To a local community land trust

(3) Excerpts from my mother's eulogy -- Down by the Pond

*And children, generation by generation by generation by generation
Could catch the turtles and frogs and toads and snakes
Or they could dig or run or skate or hide
Or in the winter take a slide
From the house at the top of the hill
In summer nights the peepers and frogs
Would sing a chorus so loud so loud
And lull to sleep and lull to sleep and lull to sleep and lull to sleep
Go softly, go softly, go softly into the night*

...

*That legacy of touching lives
Would pass onto her children and their children
From the west coast to the east coast
From Africa to Asia
A lesson that it's lives not things that count
It's memories and a life that's lived
That makes a difference that makes a difference that makes a difference that makes a
difference*

I was in grade 7 when they tested IQ
The teachers discovered there was more I could do
And surely my grades they did quickly improve

And then in grade 8 I discovered poetry
Writing it helped me express what I think
And was something even now I continue to do

(4) My first published poem, published in the high school literary magazine

Just After Sunset

*'Twas just after sunset, when in through the trees
I say a small cabin, hidden, unkempt
Weary from traveling, I fell on my knees
Crawled to the cabin and in through the door
I sprawled on the floor, by the old cabin door
I slept from exhaustion, but soon was awake
Could just about feel my sore limbs ache,*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

*The fever crept upon me, I couldn't sleep
My heart was the ticking while my death clock did creep
'Twas just after sunset when in through the trees
I saw a small cabin.*

Then while I was in high school my grades did OK
But emotionally I was only shades of gray
And I wondered if living was really worthwhile

After high school when I thought of careers
Poetry did not seem to pay enough to live
And so instead I chose psychology

And so for a year at a local branch of a college
I took the courses I needed but then
The next courses I wanted were at the main campus

To my chagrin when I tried to transfer
I got frustrated when I could not
That's when the Air Force recruiter did call

In the section in their aptitude test in electronics
I got the 90th percentile though I only knew
Two sentences of actual electronics knowledge

Then while in the Air Force my compliance grew thin
I developed rebellion against the rules
And got out quickly after only one tour

When I returned home to my chagrin
I discovered my younger brother had become a Christian
And now I was really trapped between

Christian Science parents and a Christian brother
And my hostility grew and grew
And my brother warned his friends to stay away

At the end of the summer he returned to college
And I worked some temp jobs while I tried to figure
What my next steps would be

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

Then I remembered that aptitude test
So my next step was to enroll
In electrical engineering at a technical college

Then in the next summer my brother returned
And my hostility continued to grow but then
An unexpected turn of events

For no earthly reason I snuck in his room
And started to read the books that were there
JI Packer RC Sproul CS Lewis and others

For the next several weeks I read those books
And then one day I was surprised
As in morning's twilight I could suddenly see

While I hadn't had memorized all that I read
I had understood what I did
And more than that I now believed

My brother was befuddled by my change of heart
But I was more than ready to grow
And eager for church and what else there could be

(5) Called to be Holy

*We are called to be holy
Not yet where we want to be
We are called by the grace of God
It is from the distance we all see
Where we need to be
We know by grace the one who calls
For you, for me and for others
From many paths we come
From many paths we travel
But only one who is the Way
He is near and yet distant
He is Holy*

*We are called
He is the destination
And the journey
The one who calls is Holy
The who calls us is the Way
The one who simply is*

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*Is apart from the world
And the Holy One calls us to be with Him*

*We are already Holy
Set apart to be apart
To live as a people of God
Becoming more like the one who's called us Holy
And is calling us still*

*Called not so much as to a particular place
But more to a particular journey
To follow a particular living God
His particular way
And particular holiness.
The path we follow is not fixed in unchanging time
That breaks us if we fail to follow
But is fixed in the one who is
Is living in time
Is also the Living Word*

*The path we follow is not unchangeable Law
That knows naught of our temper or strife
But rather we follow the living Stone
That shelters us when we need it
And gives us a firm place to stand
The path we follow is not unchanging rules
That break us if we fail to follow
But rather we follow the Living Word
That gives us courage and hope
That gives us knowledge of Life.*

(6) He Made Us More than Perfect

*He made us more than perfect
He made us more like Him
He made us more than hearts with hope
He made us free from sin
He gave us more than beauty
He gave us endless grace
He filled our lives with so much glory
It shows upon our face
He gave us more than intellect
He gave us minds like His
Along with wisdom for each day
And boundless, endless grace
He gave us more than peace on earth*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

*He gave us peace with Him
And peace within our willful hearts
That overflows our brim
He gave us broken bodies
So that He could make us more
More beautiful than angels
And more holy evermore*

*He gave us more than circumstance
More than hopeless chance
He gave us time to know Him
And to more than catch His glance
He made us more than holy
Despite our will to sin
He made us more than beautiful
He's starting from within
He gave us more than courage
Though our spirit had been broken
He gave new life to precious souls
Through His power and grace He strengthens
He made us more- more like Him
More priceless than earth's treasures
More beautiful than angels
Much more than can be measured
He gave us broken bodies
So that He could make us more
More beautiful than angels
And more holy evermore*

The Lord was ready for this investigator's heart
And for my very first Sunday School class
I was assigned a paper to write

I wrote a paper on the Peace of God
And was challenged when I discovered
The peace of God was most clear

When the conditions of peace were not there
And while I might not have needed that insight right then
The need surely would come in due time in my life

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

It was also then with a small group I spent a year
That took a year to study Philippians
While covering the rest of the Bible

The following summer twas in a cow pond
I was baptised in the water and mud
At the very first Jesus event in PA

And that was the time that the Spirit broke through
The emotional wall that I built through the years
The proof is the rainbows that look like my tears

In a community church up near UCONN
I offered my gift of service just as
My parents had lived their service before

It was in the singles Bible study the next summer
I met the woman I married the very next year
In a double ceremony with her sister

When looking for a job after college I saw
A large ad for instructor when I remembered
What my mother had said 10 years before

She said unlike your brother and sister
You have to work to get good grades
So you'll probably make a good teacher

The next ten years were full of life's changes
3 miscarriages the birth of 2 daughters
Moving twice a new town and new church

(7) *This Child of Ours*

*This child of ours we give to you
This little one we surrender
This tiny child we offer you
This helpless one so tender
This helpless one so tender
For ours is not to give and take
But merely hold awhile
It's from your hand that we bring forth*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

*Then return into your hands
Then return into your hands*

*What we conceive we dearly love
With bitter tears we grieve and lose
But we remember you also grieved
When from your Son you turned away
When from your Son you turned away
And it was yours to give and take
But you let go awhile
And from your Son you turned away
Then returned him to your hands
Then returned him to your hands*

*And we await the final day
When we shall finally see
The ones we lost beside you/
And we shall cease our sorrowing
And we shall cease our sorrowing
It's only for a little while
That we must bear our pain
The hands that brought us all forth
Shall restore us then in peace
Shall restore us then in peace*

Then the school-owner's sin caused the school to close down
And in the year of recession I was left to hold
No insurance, unemployment and hospital bills

With the grace of God and the church we continued on
Worked for a community college for 23 years
As we served in a church for 30

Taught Sunday School and confirmation
Served on various boards and the leadership team
Rewrote bylaws and guided revitalization

And in the meanwhile I created 3 books
Forty years of poetry, a Biblical overview
And lessons on the Tabernacle and Passover Seder

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

And then in my wife's unexpected career
She ended up working in New York the last few years
But was commuting back to Connecticut

So this last year when I turned 62
I retired early so we could be
Living under only one roof again

So with my children in Boston and Chicago
My wife in Kingsborough college
I've been only 8 months in Brooklyn full-time

With the help of Blue Apron I've learned how to cook
And I do all the shopping and errands
As I investigate what to do in this next stage of my life

(8) *Quiet Echoes*

*The rooms still quietly echo
With the children's voices and steps
The years of nurture and tending
Have blossomed into joy
Memories float through daily routines
Accompanied by smiles and tears
For the children were precious
but now they are gone
Becoming less like children
And more like friends
In this season when the children have grown
And they walk on paths they have chosen
We now take delight
As we watch them take flight
And our world has grown larger
As we've learned to see through their eyes*

*Our relationship has also grown
As our children now make their own way
We now have become less like parents
With each other we're more like friends
Memories float through daily routines
Accompanied by smiles and tears
For our young days were precious
But now we have grown
And our love has grown stronger*

God Reveals Himself, ver 2.0

*As we have grown through the years
When our children were young we held tightly
Then let go as we carefully watched
Then we learned to let go as they grew even more
And our watching turned to waiting and prayer
In this season as we recall where we've been
And walked along roads we've not chosen
We still take delight
As we walk in the light
And our vision's grown larger
As we've learned to see through Christ's eyes*

¹ According to Enneagram

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END NOTES

¹ How do we know things?

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