

Waiting to be Wanted

Introducing . . . God, Part 1

Selected Scripture

On January 7, 1855, a pastor stood to preach to his congregation in Southwark, England; and he began by saying; The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of God. It is a subject so vast that all our pride is drowned in its infinity; and all our thoughts are lost in its immensity.ⁱ

So preached Charles Spurgeon in London, England, 100 years ago when he was, remarkably, barely 20 years of age.

One of the constant challenges by Charles Spurgeon to his generation was the nearly universal lack of desire to study and to know God.

Five years after Spurgeon died, another preacher was born and began his ministry in America. His name was A.W. Tozer – and he also became known for his persistent warnings directed at the church for her doctrinal weakness and her theological shallowness – he wrote in his classic work entitled, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, this opening statement; What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us . . . what is

God like? The answer to that question will predict the spiritual future of that person; and it will predict the future of the church.ⁱⁱ

What is God like?

Listen, who we think God is, determines how we walk with Him; why we obey Him; how we talk to Him; what we enjoy about Him; what makes us fear Him; what we expect of Him; and what we think He expects from us.

All of this and volumes more is bound up in the question of who God is.

Let me ask and answer briefly three questions in this opening session to sort of prime the pump.

1. First, what exactly is the study of God?

The ten-cent term is the word, theology. Theology comes from a combination of *theo* – the Greek term for God; and *logia* – which is Grecian terminology for logic or reasoning.

So, theology is a logical, reasonable study of the person, the nature and the attributes of God.

In a rather unusually positive statement for Tozer, he wrote in his classic work, *The Pursuit of God*, these words; In this hour of all-but-universal darkness, one cheering gleam appears; within the fold of conservative Christianity there is an increasing number of people whose lives are marked by a growing hunger after God Himself. They are eager for spiritual realities; they are thirsty for God, and they will not be satisfied until they have drunk deep at the Fountain of Living Water.ⁱⁱⁱ

This study is for all those who are thirsty.

2. Question #2: What can I study to know God better?

Well, one resource is creation – the natural world.

Which is why the Psalmist is constantly inviting us to look at creation around us – the beauty of this world and the stars in the sky.

David wrote, in *Psalms 8:1*, “*O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Thy name in all the earth, who has displayed Thy splendor above the heavens.*”

In *Psalms 19:2* he writes, “*The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.*”

I love the paraphrase of the Message that renders it, “Madame Day holds classes every morning and Professor Night lectures each evening.”

The older I get the more I marvel at the incredible creativity of God’s handiwork in creation.

Early yesterday morning I stood in the breakfast room with a cup of coffee in my hand, looking into the backyard at the collection of bluebirds and mourning doves and cardinals and finches – with differing shades of color on their wings – some with brushstrokes of white and cream across their brow or under their eyes; brilliant red and peach and blue and gray and black; and then, in the pasture – just then in the distance – three horses galloped across the fields.

I stood there and worshipped God for His glorious creation: it doesn’t get any better than that.

And it was all free! I had to pay for the coffee beans and the bird seed – but you know what I mean.

In *Romans 1*, Paul writes that even if someone never hears the gospel of Jesus Christ, they are still guilty of rejecting God and without excuse because they had the natural world to study and observe.

And if they hadn’t worked so hard to suppress the obvious truth of creativity and complexity and

color – they would have easily put together some of the amazing attributes of our Creator God.

Another resource for the study of God – beyond creation, and by far the most significant – is revelation.

While creation opens the door to observation, revelation opens the door to inspiration.

All scripture has been given by inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16). Inspiration in the Greek languages is *theopneustos* - it means the breath of God.

What does God’s word breath about God? “Who is God and what is He like?” ultimately then drives you to the scriptures where God discloses the truth about Himself.

But keep in mind that even the scriptures aren’t comprehensive. There’s much more about God than we have revealed.

So we’re effectively to live with this tension. We pursue Him to know Him and at the same time know that we’ll never know everything about Him because not everything about Him has been revealed.

Our finite minds can’t grasp an infinite being anyway – and infinity can’t be reduced to a paragraph or even a set of encyclopedias as large as the 30 volume set of the Encyclopedia Britannica I actually bought as a seminary student from a salesman who knocked on our apartment door . . . I actually bought it . . . because I was out of my mind. But it was only \$39 dollars a month . . . for 300 years.

There is no set large enough to reduce the infinite God to pen and paper.

John the Apostle said that if you could fill up the entire world with books – you still wouldn’t have enough space to describe what Jesus did in his ministry of 3 1/2 years (*John 21:25*).

So can you imagine trying to write down all there is about an eternal, infinite, triune God?

The only thing we can do is get a little taste. But even a sip of His sovereignty and His glory and it simply boggles our minds.

God hasn’t told us everything about Himself we’d like to know, but He has revealed everything we need to know – so that we can enter into a relationship with Him and come to love Him and talk with Him and worship Him and serve Him.

And let me add this: anybody who thinks they know who God is, and their knowledge of God is different from this Book reveals, is tragically deceived.

I'm reading a recently published biography of the Wright brothers – my second biography of these amazingly creative and brilliant young men.

The biography contains letters they wrote, pictures of them at work, and a detailed timeline of their creative inventions.

After finishing the book, can you imagine my saying to someone, "You know, those brothers were amazing concert violinists, and they were both afraid of flying machines."

You'd have to wonder whose biography I'd read.

In fact, if you read their biography, you discover that neither one of them could play the violin – but they both loved to fly – it was something they dreamed about ever since they were kids studying the flight of birds in their neighborhood.

Listen, it doesn't matter what we think God is like – the question is, what does the Bible say God is like?

This is the prayer of the Apostle Paul for the early believers in Colosse – he writes, ***We have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will . . . increasing in the knowledge of God. (Colossians 1:9-10)***

Who is God . . . what is He like?

I read this past year the announcement that Chester Nez had died. Chester was the last living member of a team of Navajo tribesmen who came to be called, the Navajo Code Talkers. Chester Nez was one of the original 29 Navajo recruited by the U.S. military to create an unbreakable code during World War II. Navajo is a complex, unwritten language without an alphabet. Only a handful of non-Navajo people could even speak the language. So these men were recruited to come up with a code that couldn't be broken by enemy intelligence. From 1942 to 1945, these Code Talkers participated in every single major operation the U.S. Marines conducted in the Pacific region. Phillip Johnston, the son of a missionary to the Navajo had actually come up with the idea to use these men to communicate in a way no one else would understand.^{iv}

Listen, how in the world can an infinite Creator communicate with a finite creature?

God has effectively revealed the code in the Book you're holding. The Bible is God's own communication with mankind about Who He is . . . and what He's like.

God has spoken to us and revealed to us in language we can understand – it isn't comprehensive . . . but it is definitive; it isn't exhaustive . . . but it is

adequate to reveal enough of Who He is and what He is like so that we can love Him and long for more.

3. Here's another question: What are the benefits of studying God? Let me give you 5 of them.

a. First, wisdom

Solomon writes in *Proverbs 9:10*, ***The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.***

Solomon is effectively telling us that God will show us how to live a wise life.

The knowledge of the Holy isn't related to an IQ. There are plenty of smart people who live foolish lives.

There are people who got A's on their report cards but live their life going from one failure to another. It's not that they don't have enough information; it's just that they don't have wisdom – wisdom enables someone to apply the knowledge they have in making the right decisions in life.^v

And you can't get that kind of wisdom without God.

b. Closely associated with this idea is another benefit of studying God – in a word – direction.

To put it another way, studying God allows you to maintain a proper sense of direction in life.

The Apostle Peter writes it this way, ***Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of him who called us by His own glory (2 Peter 1:2-3)***

J.I. Packer illustrated this idea by imagining how terrible it would be to helicopter into the Amazonian jungle and pick up a tribesman who's never been out of the jungle before, fly him immediately to London, drop him off in the middle of the city and then tell him to fend for himself and try to make it in that world.

Packer goes on to write, We are cruel to ourselves if we try to live in this world without knowing about the God whose world it is and who happens to run it. Disregard the study of God and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of

direction and no understanding of what surrounds you – this is the [perfect] way to waste your life.^{vi}

c. Another benefit from the study of God is fruitful living

Paul wrote in *Colossians 1:9-10* that he was constantly praying for these believers and their local church *to be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.*

One of the evidences of gaining an understanding of God is bearing fruit in every good work.

Tony Evans made an interesting comment on this text; he wrote in his commentary on the attributes of God that fruit has at least two characteristics; first fruit is never borne for itself. It is always borne so that someone else can enjoy it – so that someone else can take a bite – when you start bearing fruit, other people want to take a bite out of your life – they want to be around you . . . they want to be like you – because you are a productive person; secondly, fruit always reflects the character of the tree of which it is a part. When you bear spiritual fruit, you are beginning to reflect the Spirit of Christ Himself.^{vii}

That comes from growing in the knowledge of God.

d. Another by-product of studying God is courage.

The three Hebrew men responded to Nebuchadnezzar's command to bow before the idol with a resolved and clear refusal.

Their lives were literally at stake. Bow, or be thrown into the fiery furnace.

Have you ever thought about the fact that they responded out of their knowledge of the attributes of God.

Daniel 3:16 finds them responding to the King, O Nebuchadnezzar . . . our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

Now wait – they'd never seen God deliver anybody out of a fiery furnace. They'd never been threatened like this before. They'd never personally experienced deliverance from a fire before.

But they applied what they knew about God's sovereign power to their particular situation . . . they knew He was more powerful than fire.

But they also understood something about God's divine will – His divine purpose – His divine prerogative and His sovereign right to answer our prayers differently according to own purpose – and so these three men go on to say, "But if He doesn't deliver us . . . He's still the true God and you're just following an idol."

Their courage came from their knowledge of God.

You see, the question isn't, do we really need to know God better – the question is, how can we afford not to?

One more – and the list could go on, of course, much longer:

e. One more byproduct from the study of God is security

David writes in yet another Song – *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride . . . cease striving – be still – and know that I am God (Psalm 46).*

What an invitation . . . stop . . . get to know what it means that I am God (*Psalm 46:10*).

Taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 43:8). God invites us to get to know Him.

Maybe you're convinced that you'd like to know God better, but you're not too sure He wants the same.

I mean, who are we, after all, right? Do you know anybody famous, or powerful . . . somebody way up the ladder in society and maybe you've thought, it would be great to get to know that person – or to get to know them better.

But you're intimidated . . . naturally. In fact, the more famous, the more powerful, the less likely you are to go up and knock on their door.

I mean, imagine walking up to the White House and knocking on the front door and announcing, I'd like to get to know the President of the United States.

The question is; does the President of the United States want to get to know you?

Here's the stunning truth of this study before us; it isn't just that you might want to get to know God better and become a closer friend of God and walk more aware of His presence and find out more about Him – God wants that of you and invites you to that.

A.W. Tozer wrote this staggering sentence in his work, *The Pursuit of God*; I want deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God. The lack of it has brought us to our low estate. The stiff quality about our religious lives is a result of our lack of holy desire. Complacency is a deadly foe . . . God waits to be wanted . . . He waits to be wanted.

God says – Find refuge in Me; find strength in Me (Psalm 46);

Come, let us reason together – let’s talk it over as intimate acquaintances – even though your sins are stained like scarlet red – I will make them as white as snow (*Isaiah 1:18*);

Jesus prayed in *John 17* – Father, I want them – the believers – to know you as I know you.

What security there is in knowing that the one we want to get to know is waiting for us to want to

know Him and He already knows everything about us.

In that sermon preached in 1855, Charles Spurgeon concluded with these words; In contemplating Christ, there is a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is quiet for every grief; in the influence of the Holy Spirit, there is ointment for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead’s deepest sea; be lost in His immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling bellows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a [devoted] concentration on the subject of [God].^{viii}

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/10/2016 by Stephen Davey
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ⁱ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, adapted from his quote in J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 17

ⁱⁱ A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (Harper, 1961), p. 6

ⁱⁱⁱ A.W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Christian Publications, 1982), p. XV

^{iv} *World Magazine*, June 28, 2014, p. 12

^v Adapted from Tony Evans, *Our God is Awesome* (Moody Press, 1994), p. 30

^{vi} Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 19

^{vii} Adapted from Evans, p. 31

^{viii} Quoted by J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 18.