



# Beholding the Triune God:

A Lifelong Journey of  
Spiritual Transformation  
and Service

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*But we all, with unveiled face,  
beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord,  
are being transformed into the same image  
from glory to glory,  
just as from the Lord, the Spirit.*

*2 Corinthians 3:18 (NASB)*

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## Introduction

Walking through the journey of life at ground level oftentimes feels like we're trying to slash our way through a jungle. Sometimes we need to take a break and jump into a helicopter to view the big picture. The following is an attempt to take such of view of our spiritual journey.

Now you may not like to fly. You may prefer ground level experiences. So we're taking this trip together. And when we come back down, we hope you'll have a new map for your continued journey.

We invite you to take a seat and pull out your pen so you can journal your thoughts, a-ha's!, questions and action points as we begin to *Behold the Triune God*.



### *Peter's Perplexing Journey*

*Sometimes things seemed very clear. Other times life presented only emotional chaos. His relationships seemed to work at times and then at other times pain overwhelmed him.*

*Awhile back, a close friend had confronted him on issues of selfishness, greed, emotional detachment and sometimes just plain rudeness. He knew he needed to change and over the past year*

*of walking with Jesus, he could see changes. Even his friend had mentioned changes. But he wanted more change now. The crush of life—relationships, finances, job and school demands—simply did not afford him the time to really deal with his inner world. He had enough to do just trying to hold things together.*

*Yes, he wanted heart and soul transformation, but gradually he was learning that desiring transformation could be a mask for self-centeredness—like a bride more in love with her lovely dress than with her bridegroom. The more he focused himself, the more he felt his soul shrinking from life.*

## *Mystery vs. Predictability*

The mystery of the Triune God and of spiritual transformation defies simple explanation and predictable steps.

And yet God has revealed much to us through the Scriptures. In this booklet we will explore a lifetime journey of beholding God—deeply knowing God—a journey that transforms us to be like Christ in the inmost regions of our souls and throughout all our relationships. Each person's journey is a story that emerges within the grand story of God's glory and creation, His redemptive love and eternal kingdom.

Spiritual transformation is an inherent by-product of an authentic relationship with the Triune God. The Spirit of God transforms us as we ...

*BEHOLD God's glory in 24/7 worship,*

*TRUST His sovereign power and authoritative will,*

*RECEIVE His mercy, grace and abundant love,*

*ALIGN our hearts, minds and souls with His godly jealous love for us,*

*and HUMBLY follow Him and His ways of life.*

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NASB) best portrays this process. *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”*

Spiritual transformation impacts all of who we are, what we do and what we imagine. Our very souls are transformed into a beauty that reflects the beauty of God's holiness. We are transformed into the image of Christ.

This transformation is not contained inwardly. It radiates into all our relationships with family, friends, enemies, society, the body of Christ and nature. It radiates paradoxically as the smell of life to some and of death to others (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).

Before we are redeemed in Christ, God, in His jealous love that is unencumbered with human over-possessiveness, is drawing us to Himself. It is He Who initiates to reconcile our relationship with Him. At redemption—at our genuine positive response to His drawing—we become new creatures. We become adopted children in the family of God. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And

we begin a progressive journey of being transformed into the likeness of Jesus. It is a lifetime journey of beholding the Triune God and being transformed.

Transformation in this life leads to ultimate glorification in eternity. There we will be completely like Him and reign with Him as co-heirs in Christ. A symbolic picture of transformation in nature is the grubby caterpillar being morphed into a beautiful butterfly. The end result seemingly unimagined from the original state. Our natural state as fallen humans cannot change on its own to attain the beauty of His holiness. That transformation is an act of God. He chose to simultaneously make us new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and empower us, through His Spirit, on a journey that is progressively transformative. We are complete in Christ, both now and later. The limitations of our space-time bounded minds to perceive God's work that transcends time and space inhibits our ability to understand. Thus, much of spirituality seems paradoxical. This limitation implores us to trust the One Who is not bound by time and space as we face the paradoxes of life. Ultimately, He will glorify us in heaven and we will be like Christ and be co-heirs with Him—but we will not be “God.” Only God is God.

To focus primarily on spiritual transformation is a journey that can lead into deceptive self-worship: a focus on self rather than on God. However, to not think in terms of transformation can also become deceptive. Worship that does not result in transformation is on a disconnected journey that can lead to disillusionment in God—disillusionment in His relevance for living on this earth. This disillusionment can be preceded by perfunctory, inauthentic worship—a comfortable delusion wrapped in genuine apathy toward God. Beholding God, as the passion of our hearts and minds, dispels both self-worship and apathy, each of which are supported by self-righteousness.

No two journeys of beholding God and being transformed will be identical. Each is a story. However, in some ways our journeys may have stages that are identifiable but not necessarily sequential. Some people go through periods that have been called dark nights of the soul. Others have extended periods of ministry to the economically poor or those in need of physical healing. God will guide us through the various stages He desires for us. We should be sensitive to His leading, within His prime directives, while not comparing our journey with that of another. God enjoys diversity—He sure created a lot of it. He delights in the uniqueness of our stories, our journeys.

## LIFELONG PRIME DIRECTIVES

Along this lifelong journey, God has given us directives to embrace His purposes, plans, and ways as we experience His glory. These prime directives include: love God, love others as ourselves, partner in Jesus' Great Commission, engage the culture and nature commandments and accept the invitation to live life well with Jesus.

Across the diversity of Christian traditions, other directives may be emphasized. The six presented below are offered as foundational to beholding God in 24/7 worship and service. Practical expressions of our faith, such as baptism, partaking of the Lord's Supper, lectio divina, care for the poor, etc., can be seen as outworkings of these prime directives.

## #1 Love God – The Great Commandment

We have just laid the foundation for a framework from which to consider a lifetime journey of worshipping God, being spiritually transformed, and serving God in His purposes, plans and ways. It is the journey of life; it is life to behold God.

Beholding the Triune God and spiritual transformation are intrinsically connected. As we genuinely move into the jealous heart of God and the glory of His beauty, we cannot *not* be transformed. Let's examine a few of the core ideas of this journey. These ideas are mostly summarized by what is called the Great Commandment—which has direct bearing on Jesus' Great Commission to His disciples and God's Culture and Nature Commandments to Adam and Eve.

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27 NASB).* This straightforward directive, often called the Great Commandment, implies that we have an increasing experiential knowledge of Who God is and that we deeply like Him. To truly love someone means we long to know them. But this knowledge is not a distant head pursuit. It is knowledge with soul intimacy.

A love relationship implies intimacy of hearts and respect of beings as well as understanding of minds. In loving God with understanding, we are to behold His glory—the glory of creation, the glory of His Son and of His Kingdom. This glory implies beauty worthy of honor and compelling awe.



God has revealed much of His glory. *“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14 NASB).* The journey of beholding God includes beholding Jesus—Who lived, died, rose and lives today in heaven and will return some unspecified day—and beholding the kingdom of God, the rule of God in the Body of Christ and all creation.

God's glory is also revealed in nature including the heavenlies bodies (Romans 1:20; Psalm 8; Psalm 19:1-6). And Revelation 4-5 displays a picture of the throne of God in which creatures in heaven behold the glory of God and the Slain Lamb. Such creatures are moved to honor God in His glory.

Beholding God involves engaging His works in the natural world even as King David concluded, *“The earth is filled with your love, O Lord” (Psalm 119:64).* King Solomon wrote, *“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings” (Proverbs 27:2).* Though few of us are kings, we can all experience the joy of exploring the glory of God concealed in mystery, in nature, in mathematics, in music, in sexuality, in societies. Tuning our minds and hearts to the diversity of life opens us to experience the glory of God the Creator expressed all around us.



Foundational to loving God is knowing Him. However, in today's world the idea of knowing has come under fire. Though much could be said regarding knowing God, the element of trusting Him as trustworthy, without absolute proof, will always surface in the end. Beholding God and being transformed is a journey of faith—not a faith without reason but faith in a Person Who shows Himself to be trustworthy, while not always predictable and never manageable.

In order to love God unreservedly we must truly like Him—for He is beautiful, holy and trustworthy. This implies we trust His power, His wisdom and the goodness of His will in a world that is often filled with short-term pains and long-term suffering. Resolving these issues leads us deeper into His heart. It seems that a common part of our journey with God is to question His intentions in the face of human pain. Both individually and as a human race, we have suffered much. Authentically walking through this part of the journey requires trust, facing fear and perseverance.

In this part of life's journey, Job, a man who suffered great losses, serves as our example. At the end of his struggle he concluded, *"I am unworthy"* (Job 40:4) and *"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You"* (Job 42:5 NASB). The journey of beholding God while clearing seeing ourselves—this will deeply impact our relationship with Him even in seasons of suffering. In such times we see the severe mercy and kindness of God in a fallen world. Life is broken far more than we tend or want to embrace. And God, in His godly jealous love, has provided us mercy—a mercy so severe and so completely unthinkable that He sent His Son to embrace all of sin's evil on our benefit—for our reconciliation with God. In the face of evil, suffering, severe mercy and godly jealousy, we can readily like God as we behold Him.

Loving God also implies that we love what God loves and hate what God hates. Stated differently, we are jealous for what God is jealous for. God revealed His jealous heart within the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:5). Later He declared that His name is "Jealous" (Exodus 34:14). God is jealous for people—He longs for our souls to be at a gentle and tender peace with Him.

This is godly jealousy, not the over-possessive jealousy that can cripples human relationships. It is a jealousy that frees, delights in, protects and possesses us as His dear children. It is a jealousy that desires goodness and beauty for us even when we persist in the filth of lust and arrogant pride that lead to broken relationships and human strife.

God is not only loving; He is the Lover of our souls. God's heart is one of jealous love. As we grow in love with God, we face His jealous heart and surrender our hearts to Him. Sometimes this surrender comes with glad ease. Sometimes due to our prideful and envious hearts, we struggle to hold onto those things that would cut deeply into our hearts and imprison our souls. We are jealous not for God but for material wealth, for human affection, for selfish pursuits, for whatever with idolatrous passion declares "I'm more worthy to be loved and possessed than God." This lifetime spiritual transformation journey aligns the jealousies of our hearts to the jealous heart of the Triune God our Maker.

Loving God implies loving the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In doing so, we become deeply acquainted with the merciful and tender heart of the Father Who loved His Son Jesus and was loved by Him (John 14:31). We encounter Jesus—the pre-existent One Who came as a child, lived as a servant, died as if a criminal, rose as Savior, ascended into the heavens as the Slain Lamb Who prays for us and matures our faith, and will return someday as the Reigning Lord. And we embrace the Spirit of God that can be delighted and grieved by us, Who is our Counselor and Guide and Whose indwelling presence empowers and assures us that God will fulfill all His promises. In the journey of beholding God, we behold each of the Persons of the Triune God with increasing devotion.

## *#2 Love Others as Ourselves and as Jesus Has Loved Us – The Second and New Commandments*

The Second Commandment directs “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). Loving God leads to loving others for He loves us all. Our love does not reach only to the loveable but to the unlovable—even as His love reached to unlovable, undeserving us! We extend love to our families, friends and enemies, the poor and the rich, the elite and the disenfranchised, the abused and the abuser, diverse races, ethnicities and nations—to society and the body of Christ. We are called to love people without partiality—that is the way of God.

Our human love is always limited in capacity and quality. We can never fulfill all the love needs of any one individual much less that of humanity. We can never love without the flaws of this fallen world. However, God has not only given us the privilege of loving friends and the unlovable but the power to do so through His Spirit. This does not imply that loving others is simple or easy. It does imply that loving God is a solid basis from which we can learn to love others and be empowered to do so.

Fundamentally, loving God and others involves loving ourselves as creatures He created. If we rage at ourselves and condemn ourselves, we indirectly rage at and show contempt toward God Who made us (Isaiah 45:9). Our lifelong journey includes facing these inner issues.



The journey within to face pride, ungodly jealousy and envy, to deny self its lusts, to humble ourselves before God—this journey often leads us through feelings of contempt, anger, fear, shame and guilt. As we choose to do so, we begin to see what God already sees within us.

A common reaction to this part of our journey is self-condemnation (“I hate who I am”) or self-deception with denial (“It’s not true”). We will either surrender to the loving and merciful heart of God or, in hopeless pride, turn from Him in the face of your own inner depravity. A lifetime journey of beholding God leads us to accept His tenderness toward us at a level where we truly are at peace with ourselves as well as with God.

The story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is powerful at many levels including loving oneself. The prodigal son came to understand that he was undeserving and unlovable. The father, nonetheless, received him and adorned him with a robe, a ring and sandals. Part of a prodigal’s journey is to wake the next morning and be at peace with wearing a ring and clothing that he didn’t deserve but was given.

For many, the journey to self-acceptance is a long and rugged journey laden with shame. God is peeling away those layers of shame and putting on us robes of righteous beauty, rings of honor and sandals for protecting our fragile souls as we journey forward. And as we truly love ourselves, we can love others with the love from which we have received from God.

Furthermore, Jesus calls us to love as He loves. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34,35). Shortly thereafter He sent the Holy Spirit to work that kind of love into our souls.

After a woman wept at His feet, Jesus asked a Pharisee who loves most—the one forgiven little or much (Luke 7:36-50). Part of the way Jesus loves us is by forgiving us much. We receive this love ourselves and follow His lead with others. The quality of our love should go beyond “as we love ourselves” to “loving as Jesus loves.” This quality is only exhibited through the work of the Holy Spirit in and through our lives. Fundamentally, this new commandment implies that we first receive Jesus’ love before we offer love to other. It is in openness and trust that we receive the love of Jesus and become agents of His love to others.

### *#3 Jesus’ Great Commission*

By embracing God’s loving heart for us and others and His purpose of drawing people to Himself, the Great Commission of Jesus is compelling: “... *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*” (Matthew 28:18-20). We are called to partner with God in this venture in which Jesus has all authority and promises His constant presence.

Our words, our actions, our relationships, our non-verbal communication, the images we produce, the works of our lives, these all form a smell. The Apostle Paul called this an aroma of life to some and to others an aroma of death (2 Corinthians 2:14-16). God uses this paradoxical aroma to draw people to Himself.

As we walk with God, we become aware of the spiritual gifts He has given us (1 Corinthians 12). These gifts are part of loving others as ourselves. Each gift embeds something within us that brings joy to the heart of the Giver. Each gift is fashioned to serve others in love. And each gift really is a precious gift from God to us individually and as communities of believers. All these gifts can serve to draw others in to God’s kingdom.

Central within Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples is what the Apostle Paul later called “*the ministry of reconciliation*” (2 Corinthians 5:18). This reconciliation is between God and humanity and between humans (as individuals, families, social groups, ethnicities, races and nations). To neglect one reconciliation for the other is to shortchange being Jesus’ disciples. Jesus Himself linked these reconciliations. “*For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins*” (Matthew 6:14,15). Paul elaborated on reconciliation across human divides by stating that Jesus had destroyed the “*dividing wall of hostility*” between Gentiles and Jews and had reconciled “*both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility*” (see Ephesians 2:11-22).

Jesus’ commission also implies spiritual generations of disciples continuing to reach out to people even when they demonstrate little or no interest. It implies going to the nations and living among people of all walks of life. It implies ministering to the very young as well as the very old. And it implies that the Good News of Jesus really is good news for all people at all times across history.

## *#4 God's Culture and Nature Commandments*

The aroma of life in Christ has many implications. It speaks into the Culture and Nature Commandments—God's first commandments to humanity. *"God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth'"* (Genesis 1:28 NASB). Jesus, the Son of God and the Root of Jesse, authenticated these commands by serving His social community as a carpenter for many years before He served them in ministering grace and truth (John 1:14).

In being fruitful as humans, we have families and generations of families. We build cultures to support our fruitfulness. We form societies and nations to manage and extend our fruitfulness. And the ethical goodness of the Gospel should be evident within all these enterprises. If only the love of God flowed freely within these human experiences!

Our love for God extends to and impacts how we treat life in nature. When He made heaven and earth, He called it "good", taking delight in His creation. If our hearts are aligned with God's heart, we too will take delight in nature and not *"destroy the earth"* (Revelation 11:18). We will embrace our original purpose to be rulers with Him in nature (Genesis 1:26-28). Respecting nature shows respect for the Author of nature—as we acknowledge Him as Creator. Beholding and respecting nature, its beauty, power and life, is a significant means of experiencing the omnipresence of God and of smelling like life to others.

## *#5 Live Life Well with Jesus*

As we follow God's directives, we will live life well on a daily basis (1 Thessalonians 4:1-12). *"Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody"* (vs. 11,12). In this daily living, we follow the very ways of Jesus. These ways are of love, humility, mercy, truth, and the cross—the power of powerlessness.

The Good News of Jesus includes the trustworthy truth that Jesus took the humble form of a servant in order to extend mercy to those God jealously loves by conquering sin through the cross. Sometimes the body of Christ has reversed the ways of Jesus while articulating accurate creeds of faith in Him. It is easier for human nature to love the lovable, to expect honor instead of embracing humility, to demand justice instead of extending mercy with intimacy, and to attempt to conquer sin through power rather than the power of powerlessness. Even at the end of Jesus' life, the disciples were still jockeying for positions of honor and wanted to know when He was going to establish His kingdom on earth. The journey into the ways of Jesus leads to life and humility and an alignment with what God loves. The ways of Jesus faithfully lived in daily life is radical good news to all of humanity!

## *#6 Put Off and Put On*

We are new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). We have been changed forever. And thus we are called to put off pride, lust, greed and the behaviors that beset these heart issues. We are called to embrace a life in Christ that puts on humility, respect and contentment—a

life of love and sacrifice (Ephesians 4). We are “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Ephesians 4:1). Thus we are becoming like Christ even as we are new creatures.

Being transformed into the image of Christ in an observable manner is journey not of legalism but of profound grace and wholeness of being. We were designed to be like Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit we can embrace our new identity and live out a life worthy of that calling.

## A LIFELONG JOURNEY

### *An Active and Passive Journey*

The journey of beholding God that leads us to being transformed and serving in His Kingdom is both a passive and an active journey. God alone can transform us; we simply do not have the power or holy imagination within us to do this miraculous work. He has placed the Holy Spirit within us to empower this change. In this sense, we are always passive. However, God has also created us as active agents. We cannot sit by and expect transformation to occur without our authentic engagement with God. To move deeply into the heart of God requires that we move—and that God carries us!

Transformation and service thus becomes by-products of our authentic relationship with God. The Triune God is always to be our focused passion. Any other primary passion is idolatry. To endeavor to transform ourselves without God may lead to some change in our character, but spiritual transformation is much deeper. It is rooted in our relationship with God and so our very soul identity is transformed as well as our hearts, minds and behaviors.



Living in the power of the Spirit of God enables us to live life in the ways of Jesus; without the power of His Spirit, Jesus' ways are simply beyond human effort. This daily reliance on the Spirit is more than an obligation or a necessity; it is a delight. The Spirit of the Living God delights to dwell within us and He is our delight!

In the miracle of walking with Christ, failures occur. We violate the beauty of God's holiness by our envious and proud hearts and through broken relationships, and yet He extends forgiveness.

God knows our hearts and He is transforming all of who we are. The process is often messy with Him and others, but forever rich as we continue to fix “*our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith*” (Hebrews 12:3 NASB).

The Apostle Paul acknowledged his journey of facing failures and experiencing God's mercy. At the beginning of his ministry he considered himself the "*least of the apostles*", then shifted to "*the least of the saints*" and finally he embraced the reality of being "*the chief of all sinners.*" His descent seems to infer an ever-increasing awareness of his own sinfulness, God's holiness and His mercy. All of the ugliness of Paul's self-righteousness God saw from the beginning. Whatever our failures, God's kindness can forgive them as He draws us deeper within His loving heart.

## *Relational Practices*

Many relational practices (habits, methods) pertain to spiritual transformation and service. Bible study, extended time alone with God, Scripture memory, corporate worship, baptism, the Lord's Supper, fasting, solitude, silence, lectio divina, worship giving, acts of love toward friends, enemies and those oppressed, poor and/or imprisoned, working within society, praying, singing, reflecting on the ordinary, raising children, the arts and music—these and many other practices can extend our depth of beholding and loving God and loving others as ourselves.

Consider the possible consequences of not beholding the Triune God. A. W. Tozer has said, "That our idea of God corresponds as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us... I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God." He also stated, "It is my opinion that the Christian concept of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity."

If Tozer's analysis is true for the mid 1900's, then beholding God is not something to be taken lightly. Seeing God beyond the veil of cultural misconceptions is essential not only to our individual spiritual journeys, but also to the welfare of the Body of Christ and to society. Consequently, multiple practices of beholding God in all His glory may be beneficial as we authentically experience the Triune God Who is everywhere and Who jealously loves us.

## *Ten Guiding Questions with Embedded Practices*

The ten questions below are offered to help us guide our practice of beholding God, being transformed into the image of Christ and entering into a life of service in God's Kingdom. You may have different or additional guiding questions and practices, but the aim is the same.

### *Worship and Intimacy*

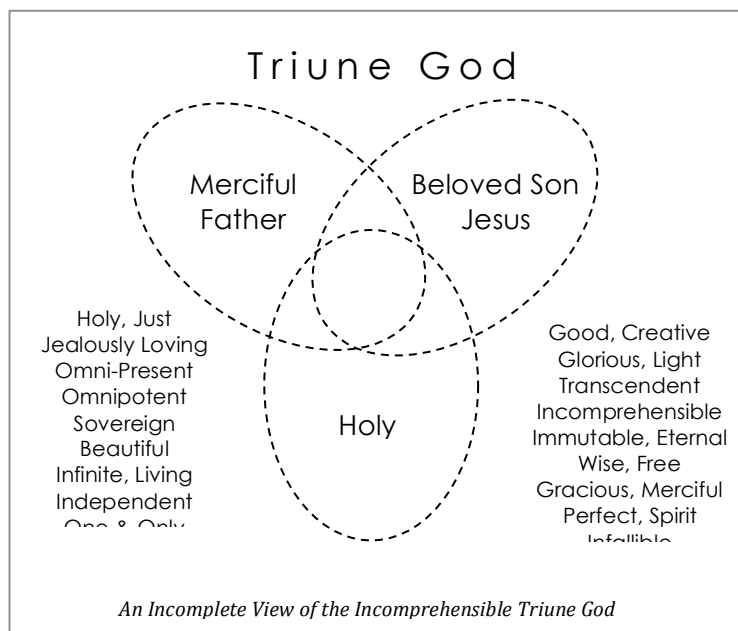
First, "***Am I growing in 24/7 WORSHIP of and INTIMACY with the Triune God – growing as an individual and in community with believers?***" At the human level, forced intimacy is called rape. God does not "rape our souls." Rather, He draws us into His presence as ones who can come boldly (Hebrews 10:22). Intimacy with God maintains an abiding respectful worship of God. He is the Creator; we are the creatures. Our place is one of unreciprocated worship.

He is the Awesome and Holy God—never to be trivialized as “just like us only bigger.” And yet the level of intimacy He offers is beyond our wildest imagination since the fullness of His love for us is beyond our comprehension (Ephesians 3:14-21).

Thus, the passion of our hearts is increasingly moving into the heart of the Triune God. That journey is not one of legalism—of rule obligations, but of freedom and passion. And even when our passion seems to tire or be distracted, God is drawing us to Himself!

Furthermore, this is not only an individual journey. It is a journey with others. *“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” (Matthew 18:20 NASB).* Worshipping God together is an indispensable part of our journey. In fact, the Lord gave us a ceremony to remember Him when we meet together. That ceremony is called the Lord’s Supper—for the Lord Jesus meets us as we meet together. There are many practices and interpretations of the Lord’s Supper, but a core idea is that our journey with God is a corporate one.

Obviously, 24/7 worship extends beyond a ceremony or any spiritual practices. This worship acknowledges and welcomes God presence everywhere—in the pleasures and pains, in nature and at work, in politics and in families, in our bedrooms and our public places of entertainment, God is simply everywhere! There is no space God’s presence can be excluded. King David concluded, *“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there” (Psalm 139:7,8 NASB).* Since God is present everywhere, we can behold Him in 24/7 reverent worship and embrace His loving embrace in 24/7 intimacy.



So where do we begin? We can begin by experiencing God in each of His attributes. This leads us back to the Scriptures and to Jesus. We cannot search out God unless He has chosen to reveal Himself. As we explore Scripture, we encounter the Triune God Who reveal Himself to us. Our spiritually transformative journey of beholding God never leads to boredom, for God is inexhaustible! (Below is an incomplete view of God to explore.)

### *Grand View*

A second question that can help us understand our movement into beholding God, being transformed and engaging in service might be: ***“Am I embracing a GRAND VIEW OF REALITY in the kingdom of God that brings meaning to reality and paradox to my reasoning? Am I embracing God’s view of reality as revealed in Scripture?”*** Do we see life and death, creation and eternity, knowing and relationships from His viewpoint? This requires much time in His Living Word. He has revealed much to us. Obviously, we can only see a little of God’s view—in

fact, we can see only that which He has revealed through His Living Word, His Spirit, symbolically through nature (Psalm 19) and collectively through His people.

Our action is to incline our hearts and minds to see the reality of God present everywhere and for all eternity. Reality is His kingdom and He is the King! Within His kingdom is the full family of God—including the angels, spirit beings who minister to believers (Hebrews 1:14) as well as worship the King before His throne on high (Revelation 4,5). Additionally, we live in a reality that includes the dominion of Satan—spirit beings in rebellion toward God and waiting for their judgment while deceiving and seeking the destruction of humanity. In God’s grand view of reality, we find the meaning of life—for all of life proceeds from the Triune God.

Often this view requires us to think in terms of paradox. A paradox occurs when two or more things considered separately seem true but when taken together seem contradictory. For instance, the free will of humanity and the sovereignty of God form a paradox. The God Who is three Persons in One is a paradox. The power of powerlessness is paradoxical. Paradoxical thinking often leads us deeply into the beauty and complexity of God and His works. Within His life, beauty and works, one’s own humanity can be experienced as truly meaningful while often paradoxical.

### *Identities in Christ*

A third question might be, **“Am I living into my new individual & relational IDENTITIES in Christ?”** Fundamentally, God has changed our very identity in relation to Himself. We are no longer aliens estranged from Him (Ephesians 2:19). We are His children, His disciples, His friends, His bride, His ambassadors, etc. And He is our Savior, Lord, Teacher, Friend, Bridegroom, etc. As we journey with God, we allow Him to define us rather than the voices in our culture or families or our own fallen imaginations. Thus, we can afford to please Him rather than seek glory from others or self-sustained glory. Embracing God’s identities for us, subsequently allows us to shed false identities—images we project to others and ourselves.

### *Heart Issues*

A fourth question might be, **“Am I addressing the deep issues of my HEART (unforgiven sin, shame, fear, anger, legalism, etc.) and growing in the FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT of God while responding to the opportunities and crises of life?”** Scripture and human history affirm that the human heart is filled with pride, envy, anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, greed, fear, shamelessness, lying, etc. Conversely, the fruit of being indwelt by the Spirit of God is that He displaces the mess with “...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22,23 NASB).

Facing the guilt and shame of humanity’s fallen condition and finding the merciful heart of God is a journey of transformation that includes joy and pain, but always healing in the long-term. Like a doctor restoring health through surgery, the Great Physician reveals what He already knows—the depths of our hearts and minds. In that revelation, He purifies us for Himself. Ultimately, Christ is bringing beauty to His bride (see Ephesians 5:25-27). Our part in this process is both passive and active; we are to address our deep heart issues and to trust the Spirit of God to transform us.

Often, the true state of our hearts is revealed in the crises and opportunities of life. Pain can reveal a heart of thankfulness that surrenders to the Great Physician or a heart of bitterness that ultimately blames God for all evil. Pleasure can reveal a heart of contentment or an envious heart that wants to be rid of any dependence upon God; even as Adam and Eve in a garden of pleasures fell to



the temptation to be “like God”. Our journey of beholding God includes a deep journey into our own hearts—where we find what He already knows. It is there that the Spirit of God births the fruit of joy, peace, love, and more.

### *Paradoxical Ways*

A fifth question might be, **“Am I reflecting the PARADOXICAL WAYS of Jesus in all my relationships (e.g. with fellow believers, family, those different from me, nature, work, society) in ways that bring glory to God, draw people into the kingdom, build up the body of Christ, build ethical societies and stewardship nature?”** We are born into the exact place and time that God has given us (Acts 17:25-28). For many of us, we rage at the people who share those times and places. The ways of Jesus regarding people proceed through merciful forgiveness and into loving the unlovable through the power of humility and powerlessness.



We are also called to contribute to the building of ethical societies. We may have a major role in this enterprise or a behind the scene part to play. Jesus served within society as a carpenter and He did it with integrity. The prophet Daniel served God by helping lead the pluralistic society of Babylon. The Apostles Peter and Paul called all followers of Jesus to pray for kings, to honor systems of authority, to live peacefully in society and to bless everyone by doing good. And sometimes ethical love extended to confront the evils of society as John the Baptist did.

Likewise, our endeavors in nature reflect our honoring the God of Creation. His first directive to humanity involved ruling the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). There is no disconnect between our walks with God and our life within the ecosystem. To dishonor what God has created is to dishonor the Creator. And to respect all of what He has made is to respect God Who delights in diversity of life and space. Thus, all our relationships with people and in nature are impacted as we authentically journey into beholding God.

### *Ministry of Reconciliation*

A sixth question might be, **“Am I intentionally engaging in the MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION between God and people and among individuals, families, social groups, ethnicities, races and nations?”** God sent His Son to reconcile us to Himself and also to each other. Do we intentionally seek reconciliation among people or are we content to live within walls that keep societal hostilities at bay? We are not all called to ministries of social mercy; however, we all can participate in reconciliation between people at multiple levels.

As God desires our relationship with Him to be restored, He also desires broken human relationships to be healed. The beauty of reconciled relationships draws others to God and builds up the body of Christ. This good news of Jesus living through us can impact our friends, our families, our networks of associations, our enemies and the diverse societies of the world.

## *Spiritual Generations*

A seventh question might be, ***“Am I seeing SPIRITUAL GENERATIONS of believers living and discipling among all types and ages of people?”*** We obviously have different functions and forms in this great endeavor to which Jesus calls and empowers us. And we have the limitation of where we live and the resources He provides. However, as communities of believers, we seek spiritual generations of believers extending through biological generations throughout the nations of the world. In this way, the good news of Jesus is multiplied through the lives of believers. As they live among all types and ages of people, these believers learn to disciple others in their walks with Jesus. Thus, we engage in Jesus’ directive to “make disciples of all nations”—not just of individuals.

## *Life Cycle*

An eighth question might be, ***“Am I growing through the developmental LIFE CYCLE of being human? Am I thriving as fully human? Am I becoming a responsible adult who embraces transitional life?”*** This question address our life cycles: we mature, we transition through discernable stages, we grow in competences and wisdom, and our bodies age and eventually die. The journey of spiritual transformation is a journey across the human life cycle. The questions of life for a teenager are different for those of a forty year old. The presence of God impacts each step along our life cycle. We are to become responsible adults who embrace the transitions of life—even unto death. Along this journey, we grow to be strong-willed, submitted and creative people who can both receive and give love and possessions. We are not to be weak-willed or rebellious. That which we possess, we endeavor to possess with godly jealousy, not with greed, envy or over-possessiveness. And we understand from our hearts that all our possessions including our own lives, we have received from God and thus we give and serve with humility.

## *Discern—Resist—Overcome*

A ninth question might be, ***“Am I putting on the armor of God, DISCERNING good from evil, RESISTING Satan and OVERCOMING evil in the world’s systems with good?”*** We live in a fallen world—within the dominion of Satan. God has allowed Satan a place in this world, but ultimately Satan is defeated. In Christ, we are victorious as we put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:13-21) and resist Satan (1 Peter 5:8,9).

The ways of human culture sometimes defy the ways of Jesus. At other times, culture simply explores the natural world that God has given us. We are called to discern the culture we live in (Hebrews 5:14) and to honor God where He has placed us. In so doing, we partner with God in overcoming evil with good (Romans 12:21). This godly discernment and activism within the paradoxical ways of Jesus does not come easy.

Moreover, legalistic isolation from our context is not the path Jesus took—else He would have remained in heaven with the Father! Walking with God in this world is truly a walk of trust, depending on His Spirit to guide and empower us through the deceptions and oppressions in our world.

In today’s world, words, music and images are powerful influencers on human consumer behavior. Global economies create and sustain consumer needs in order to sell products. Those products can be material goods, services or ideas. Our world is filled with images—a proliferation of

ideas supporting economies—many of which are not in harmony with the true ways of Jesus that lead to life. We must discern the good and evil in these forms of communication. Part of our spiritual journey requires that we evaluate these influences (in pictures, words and music) and act in concert with the ways of Jesus. Otherwise, the subtlety of images can lead us where we didn't intend to go—into godlessness, pride, greed and lust. We can exchange the beauty of holiness for the promised beauty of sensuality in its many forms. This is an ugly exchange—from sensitivity to the Spirit of God to sensuality of the material world (Ephesians 4:20). The lure of the material and sexualized world is truly deceptive for it offers no lasting hope, meaning, love or power.

Another aspect of overcoming evil with good involves discerning the specific evils of our day. Those evils include hatred and injustice across people groups, races and genders. These evils provoke wars, arouse envy and pride and do much harm to the oppressed and to the oppressors. A pervasive evil is pornography. It's promise of freedom and pleasure descends into an evil of fake nudity—an exposure of body while the soul is increasingly hidden and shamed to oneself and others until shamelessness numbs the soul. However, it is all too easy to employ the ways of the world to counter the evils of the kingdom of darkness. To overcome evil with good implies we deeply embrace the ways of Jesus—ways that include a bold humility, loving our enemies and the power of powerlessness—and that we struggle with evil through prayer and with the full armor of God.

### *Groan with Joy*

A tenth question might be, **“Am I GROANING WITH JOY while living in a world that groans from the impact of sin?”** We live in the victory of Jesus. And we live in a world that groans with evil even as it often seeks freedom and happiness. People groan and even creation groans (Romans 8:14-25; 2 Corinthians 5:1-11). It is paradoxical to experience joy and weep at the same time, however Jesus is our example. He offered joy and peace to His disciples even as He cried out before the Father on the dark night preceding His crucifixion. An authentic emotional world precludes playing the game of impressions. Jesus didn't just put on a happy face for the right occasions; He lived authentically before His disciples, including weeping and rejoicing. Moreover, we are called to share in the suffering of Jesus. The Apostle Paul declared, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10,11 NIV).

As a summary, these questions can help guide our journey into ...

- ❖ 24/7 worship of and intimacy with the Triune God
- ❖ God's grand view of reality and His Kingdom
- ❖ Relational identities in Christ
- ❖ Deep issues of our hearts
- ❖ Paradoxical ways of Jesus
- ❖ Ministry of reconciliation
- ❖ Spiritual generations



- ❖ Development throughout our life cycle
- ❖ Discern good and evil, resisting Satan and overcoming with good
- ❖ Groan with joy.

## *Perceivable Transformation*



The perceivable by-product of this journey with the Triune God is a beauty that reflects His glory in our whole being. *“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV).*

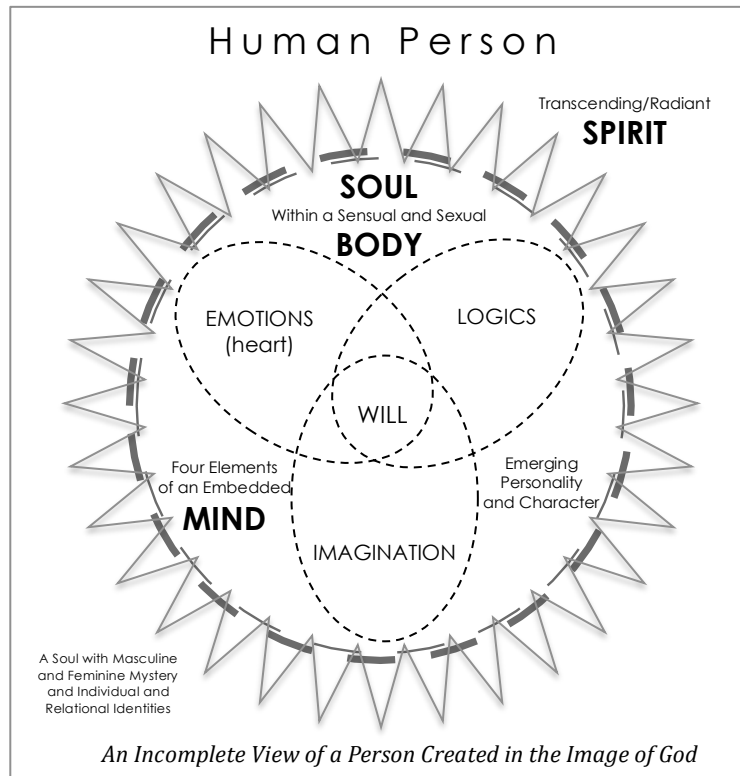
There are times during this journey that we don’t feel beautiful. In fact, the ugliness of our hearts can overwhelm

us into disillusionment, leading us to conclude there is no true possibility of change. During those times it is helpful to remember the Apostle John’s words *“This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything” (1 John 3:19, 20 NIV).* If our hearts or others condemn us, it is always beneficial to remember that God is faithful and good. Sometimes and for some seasons the journey we speak of is painful, but He is always good and greater than our hearts and our consciousness.

The “Human Person” diagram (p. 21) is offered not as a final word in describing people created in the image of God and marred through the fall. It is offered for reflection and prayer. God is at work to transform our whole being. Ask Him to transform each aspect of who you are. Over time you will see His handiwork in your life. Some changes may come quickly; others may take decades.

One image of spiritual growth to consider is that of a dirty glass of water. God is in the process of purifying the water. Sometimes we see great progress: some of that may be due to purifying (the removal of dirt) and some may be due to the settling of dirt. At times, God stirs the water so the settled dirt can be clearly seen and dealt with. We humans often prefer to accept settled dirty water rather than pursue purified water. God doesn’t. In His goodness, He stirs the water at appropriate times as He transforms our whole being—our emotions, wills, intellects, imaginations and bodies. All of our transformation is completed as we join Jesus in heaven as glorified beings with new bodies.

The power for such a life is not within us. Though human life is not self-sustaining, living in the Spirit of God provides the strength we need to follow Jesus and the power to be transformed into eternity. Indeed, we mortals are being “swallowed up by life” (2 Corinthians 5:4) even as we shed this land of the “living-dying” for the eternal city of God (Hebrews 11:2).



Much more could be written about beholding God and a lifetime journey of spiritual transformation and service. These thoughts hopefully will provide an overview and a guide as you journey forward in your relationship with the Triune God, yourself, others, the spirit world and in nature.

The Apostle Paul gives us insight into his journey in 2 Corinthians 5:1-20 (NASB). This short passage weaves many ideas of beholding God, spiritual transformation and service.

*For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord — for we walk by faith, not by sight — we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each*

*one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

## *A Call To and Away From*

We are call to the Triune God and we are call away from idols—entanglements of the heart that supplant our devotion to the Triune God.

*“In that day,” declares the Lord, “you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master.’” Hosea 2:16*

*I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. Hosea 2:19*

How passionate are you for God? The Triune God, Who is love and Who offers love, is the Jealous Lover of our souls. In the book of Hosea, God reveals His deep desire for relationship with us—not because He is needy but out of His being of Love.

God calls us to respond. As lovers know, daily responses form the fabric of their love and the depth of knowing each other. Lovers impact each other at a soul level. Beholding God, the Lover of our souls Who calls us to the wedding feast as the bride of Christ, transforms us into the perfect beauty of Christ and delights the heart of God! *“... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27).*

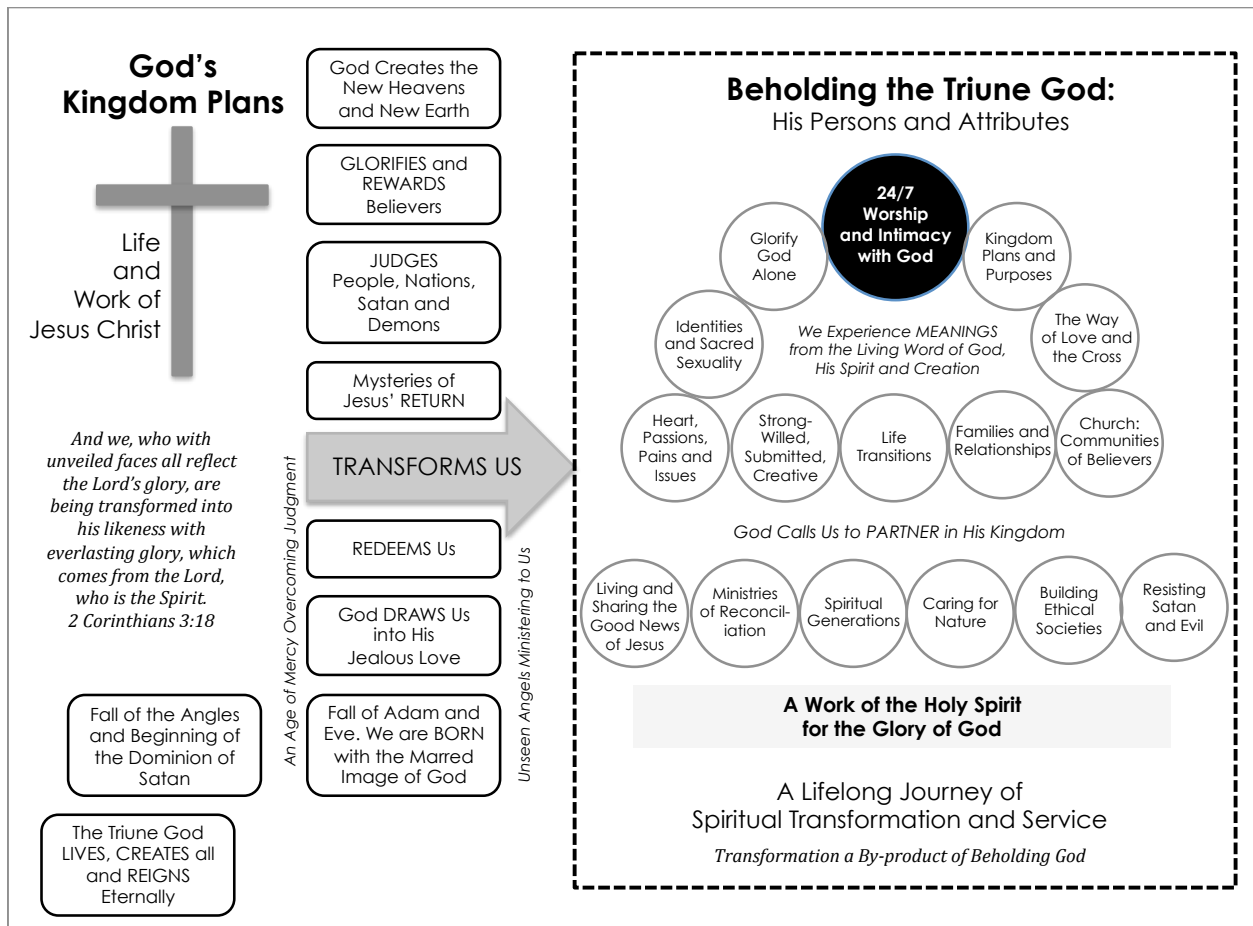
The transformative journey into the heart and mind of God is complex and it is simple. It is a freedom, not a bondage, for the soul. It is a complex lifetime journey that defies boredom and formulas. And it is a simple devotion to Jesus. *“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2,3).*

As we continue this lifelong journey, our prayer is that we all grow in worship and intimacy with the Triune God beyond our wildest imaginations over the next twelve months—and each year thereafter! And God can answer beyond our imaginations for He is far more than our minds can conceive and our heart can hold.

Immersing the apprentices (of Jesus) at all levels of growth in the Trinitarian presence. This is the single major component of the prospering of the local congregation: the healing and teaching God in the midst.

Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*

*The diagram below is an attempt to depict some of the mystery of beholding God and the connected journey of spiritual transformation and service.*





## EPILOGUE: A Perspective on Other Spiritualities

As followers of Jesus, we live in a world of spiritual pluralism. God has allowed multiple perspectives of spirituality to exist and so our spiritual journey may involve choosing one. The Triune God doesn't force us to choose Him. This begs several questions.

In our global society, why are there so many different views of spirituality? How can reasonable people across the planet come to such different conclusions about spirituality? There are many ways



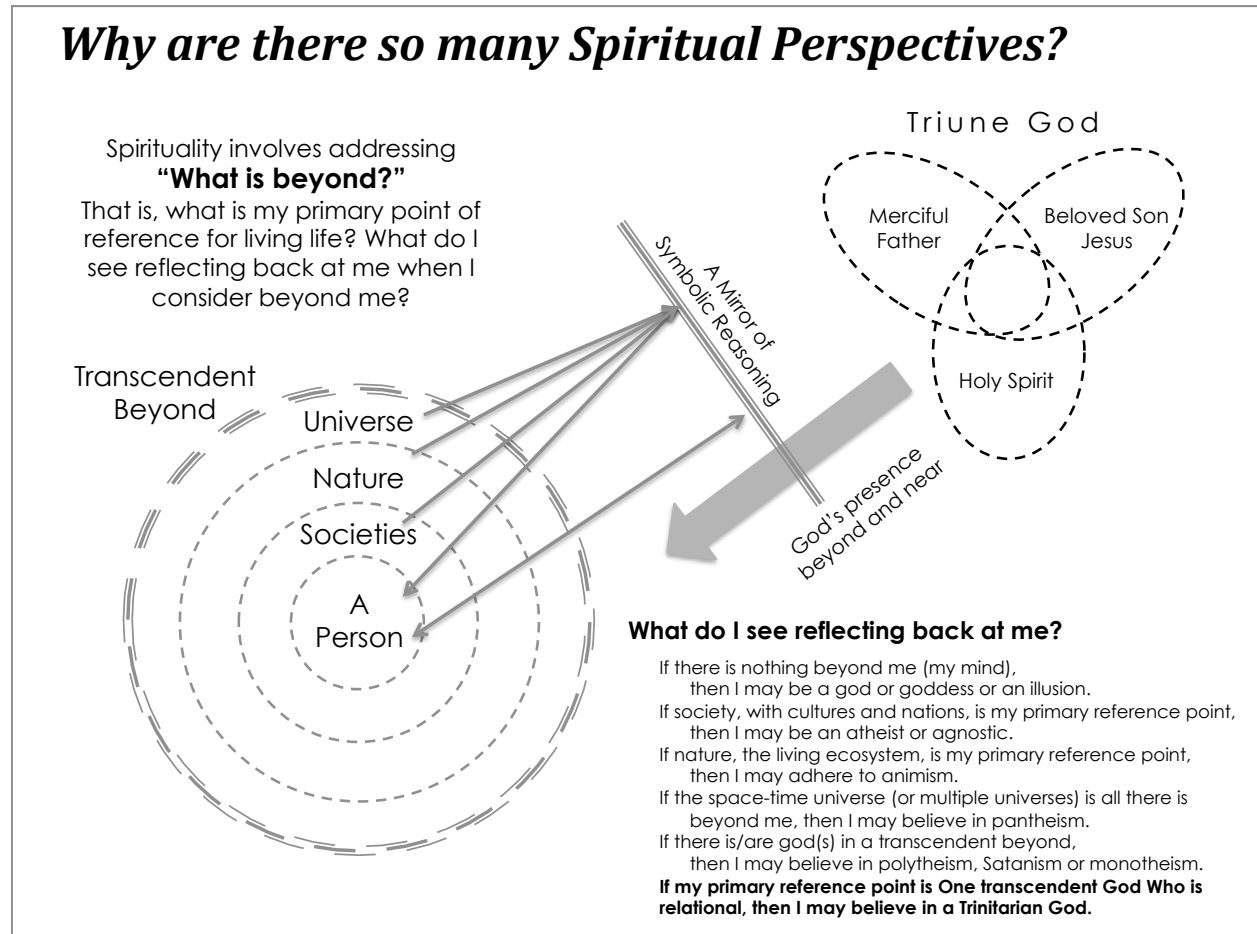
to address these questions, but one way is through the lens of “point of reference for considering a beyond”. What is our primary point of reference beyond us for viewing our lives?

That reference point may shift as we grow and experience life. For instance, a newborn child's point of reference may be the face of their mother. That will change as he or she grows into an adult.

Another way of stating this pursuit is, ***“If I stepped outside myself and looked back, what would I conclude? Where would I step? Who lives in this beyond? What does this say about who I am?”*** All this may seem very confusing and philosophical. It is for such is the landscape of religions across the globe!

The following chart illustrates various points of reference in addressing this issue of beyond. Across cultures, humanity has agreed a beyond exists or at least exists within the illusions of the

mind. They just haven't agreed upon what is beyond. However, a common agreement of a beyond provides a basis for exploring various spiritualities based on multiple views of that beyond.



If there is nothing beyond me, if my mind is ultimately all there is, then I may conclude that I am a god or goddess. If I conclude that even my mind is an illusion, then all pursuit of life is a meaningless game including all spiritualities.

If my primary point of reference in life is human society, if society is the dominant force that impacts my life, then I may believe there is no God or I doubt His existence or involvement in human affairs. I am essentially a humanist.

If nature, the living ecosystem, is my point of reference beyond me, then animism may be my belief system. Objects and animal spiritualism may provide sources of inspiration and strength for me.

If the universe (or multiple universes) is all of beyond, then I may conclude that the universe is alive and is god. This pantheist belief allows me to function as a force within the broader life force of

the universe. I may conclude I am a god or goddess. Or I may conclude that life is an accident generated by a godless universe.

If the universe was created, i.e. it didn't always exist, then I can believe in good and bad gods (polytheism and/or Satanism) or in One God (monotheism). Most of the world's population believes in one or more gods. And the goodness of that or those gods has often been debated.

If humanity reflects the image of God and humans are relational beings, then I may believe in the paradox of the Trinity, Three-in-One God. But in tension with this paradox is the possibility that humanity has simply created God as a projection of a perfected image of man.

There are many apologetics of the existence of One God including ...

- the first cause apologetic
- intelligent design of creation implies a design Creator
- human nature implies a Designer whose nature exceeds that of humankind
- the idea of God implies the existence of God
- the human need and desire for God implies satisfaction in a real God
- miracles attributed to God
- symbolic meanings that point to God
- spiritual experiences as evidence for God
- abstract ideas of beauty, goodness and perfection as from God
- the power to change us implies God's work in our lives
- the inability to disprove God implies God exists
- the concepts of eternity and beyondness planted within human hearts and minds imply a God who is eternal and beyond creation.

However, these apologetics never take us to absolute certainty in God. Rather trust is need for confidence in One God as we journey though life. And if our primary point of reference regarding beyond shifts over our lifetime, we may fluctuate from one spirituality to others or mix and match our spiritualities to make meaning of life.

*How can we know if all of this is real?*

The question of "realness" is a question some people ask and others don't. But for the ones who ask it, it's an important question to consider. Like knowing truth, when it coming to knowing what is real requires a degree of trust while considering our doubts. In a world that offers so much virtual reality and the promise of artificial superintelligence, we are increasingly confronted with the question of reality? Are thoughts real? Are our emotive senses more real that our word-laced thoughts? Are dreams more real than other types of consciousness? Is consciousness real? Is spirituality real? And how on earth will we decide if anything is really real?

One avenue to evaluate realness is to consider probabilistic cause and effect. We make decisions with some sense of imagined outcomes. For instance, when you walk across a busy street, your outcome predictions govern your fear levels and thus your behaviors. Imagined outcomes are formed through many experiences with outcomes of behavior. Over time we grow in our ability to discern outcomes, but we never can predict the future with 100% accuracy. Experience reminds us of our foretelling failures.

So how can we know what is real? Our ability to reason helps. Our God-given ability to feel pain and pleasure within probabilistic cause and effect across space-time helps. Our ability to perceive when we transition from various levels of consciousness helps. But in the end we must choose to trust someone (or ourselves) who we perceive to be trustworthy. That may be the Triune God, a person in authority, our culture or it may be ourselves alone. The choice, with its consequences, is ours.

The journey of spirituality always requires trust. The Triune God has built a trust system. Though we can't eliminate all doubt as we look beyond, we can choose to trust "someone" who is trustworthy. God always calls us to choose to trust. If we seemly refuse to trust God, our suspicions reveal our trust in ourselves. Spirituality is relational; thus it involves a question of who is trustworthy to trust. Though much reasoning can be given for any spirituality, ultimately God has wired humanity to engage in trust with our hearts, minds, bodies and souls. That is my conclusion of trust.

Some may feel my life journey of trust in the Triune God to be intolerant of their beliefs and practices. To that I would reply that all differentiation is inherently discriminating. But all differentiation is not inherently unloving. The Triune God I trust offers His loving presence and forgiveness to all—even me.

Obviously, the above is a brushstroke. The philosophical intricacies of addressing the issue of a "point of reference for considering a beyond" can be complex (including the problem of meanings in language and the problem of space with emergent time). However, the above is intended to serve as a perspective of how reasonable people can form such different spiritual perspectives within global humanity.

This journey into cognitive perspectives may not be where you are today. You may have concluded that part of your journey, or it may be in front of you. However, we often interact with people who don't trust as we trust or doubt as we doubt. Our prayer is that this epilogue can serve both as a bridge for discussion and perspectives for extending the love of Jesus to those whose perspectives are different from ours. And that in time they will behold the Triune God Who is "*the great God, the great King above all gods*" (*Psalm 95:3 NIV*).

We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere *incognito*.

C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*

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NOTES

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## About the Author

Ralph and Jennifer Ennis have served with The Navigators since 1975. They have ministered at Princeton University, Richmond Community, Glen Eyrie Leadership Development Institute, the CoMission (in Russia) and in Raleigh, NC. In 2006 Jen co-founded JourneyMates, a ministry to help people grow in intimacy with the Triune God through Scripture, Silence and Solitude.

In 2013 Ralph and Jen celebrate 40 years of marriage. They have four married children and thirteen grandchildren.



Additional information at:  
[www.ralphennis.com](http://www.ralphennis.com)

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