

Hope and Beholding the Triune God



Wharf and Bearings

I

Ralph C. Ennis

Wharf and Bearings I

*Essays on
Hope and Beholding the Triune God*

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Introduction to WB Series

As land dwelling beings, when we are at sea, two thoughts are always in mind—even if in the back of our minds. Where’s the wharf—a safe place to dock? What’s my bearing—which direction am I going and will it in time get me to a safe wharf?

We all need safe places. Fundamentally, life is filled with uncertainties. Sometimes we feel in control or at minimal risk of danger, but that is always only temporary. Our common human experience inevitably involves risks of the unknown. And through death, not to be feared, we journey to an eternal wharf in Jesus.

We all need a bearing that will get us where we want to go while preserving the ability to plot a course to a safe place. We can play far from this wharf, but we desire home.

Wharf and Bearings Series, a collection of essays, poems and a short story, is intended to present a journey—my journey. I share it with the hope that it will give some guidance as you seek your bearings and wharf throughout your life.

At no time are these essays to be considered exhaustive, they are pathways I have taken to find wharf and bearings for me. And collectively, they represent “philosophical peace” for me.



I dedicate this series to my wife of 40 years (in 2013), our four children and their spouses and our 13+ grandchildren and the generations to follow! Here's an overview of the series:

Wharf and Bearings ONE:
Hope and Beholding the Triune God

Wharf and Bearings TWO:
Spirituality and the Triune God

Wharf and Bearings THREE:
Knowing, Beauty, Ethics and Reality

Wharf and Bearings FOUR:
Love, Longings, Success and Consequences

Wharf and Bearings FIVE:
Poems from the Soul

Wharf and Bearing SIX:
Oneness in Marriage

Wharf and Bearings SEVEN:
The Mind, Decisions and Artificial Intelligence

Wharf and Bearing EIGHT:
World View and Culture

Wharf and Bearing NINE:
Gospel Implications

Wharf and Bearing TEN:
Our Times and Futures

*"... we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power,
and the wonders He has done ..."
Psalm 78:4 -6*

Is There Any Hope Left?

*cynicism develops at an early age ... why not
with all we've seen in pictures*

*is there any hope left for this generation to run on ... every generation runs on hope and meaning ... did
the last one use that all up too*

*let's run the "rescue the planet" software to
access all the options ...*

*headlines:
terrorist seeking nuclear material (got ya in an instant) ... global warming (got ya this century) ...
meteor collision probability (the universe's russian roulette - got ya blindsided) ...
pollution and genetic viral adaptation ...
(sounds like a decaying piece of meat this planet of ours)*

god should explain all this pain ... what does it mean ... maybe he's to blame ... surely someone must be!

*is jesus undead - still around but not really alive
- offering no real hope for this mess*

can I just have a glass of milk or a beer or some table crumbs

searching for scraps of meaning in a world of consumption

*swallowing misery is hope or maybe just numbness
can I wake up with hope or with ...*

... fLAWed

is something fatally flawed around here or what

*the family of nations seems flawed. russia is like an abused wife ... china an lost child ... usa a self-
centered adventurous brat ... africa like feuding brothers ... india as spiritual sisters ... hollywood as the
adulterous world-roaming seductress ... we've had bully brothers like the mongols of old and an
arrogant colonializing brothers*

*our global house is flawed...
our earth family is deeply flawed ... present tense ... past tense ... no tense ... intense*

so do our birth families ... no need to explore that one ... just look ... deeply flawed

and the universe? we've gone from classical order to

*embracing the beauty of chaos theory and multiple universes just within the past few decades ... is it
flawed too*

*whatever this 'flaw' disease is ... it is rampant.
our deep sense of shame is masked
only by our public politeness.
but we cannot seem to offer that same politeness
to our own souls ... without numbing them.*

... ever hope for a new heaven and earth?

What are we looking for?

The world of people runs on hope and meaning as well as energy-material, space and time. Making sense of the present world is a difficult task. It's enough to make one cynical at a very young age.

A few hundred years ago a child's world was contained within a few miles and the extent to which his/her eyes could gaze heavenward. Today, a child can see images of virtually every place on the planet and galaxies extending to the edge of the universe. *A child is left to interrupt the universe mostly by himself.* A child is bombarded with this strange universe with black holes, UFO's, repeating time, and super viruses and must integrate it in order to have hope and meaning. Scientists have given us understanding into a strange world of uncertainty in space, time and energy-material. A child today must integrate that into her understanding of life. Adults don't seem to have done this integration or maybe they don't have time to feel the implications of so many fragmented images and ideas.

Our planet is looking for a new model of a person. What does it mean to be fully human? Can we survive with only anti-heroes for 21st century. To be like LJ or Lady Gaga or Tiger or Justin, etc. just will not do. As humanity has evolved, the Renaissance man led us forward for a while and then passed the torch to the Industrial man who is handing it off to the Information humanoid and anti-heroes—those among us who are immensely popular but who offer no real hope.

Our planet is looking for more than just a new type of person—though that would be very nice. It looking for a new way to view meaning within a world. We desire to be defragmented. Our heart's desire and the realities around us are so skewed that something universally seems missing or wrong. *Are we simply in the wrong universe! Were we meant for a different one? How can we become new humans?*

Did we miss something?

Surely the solution is among us and we've simply misplaced it among the family of nations. Or maybe all the parts are within the family and we need desperately to assemble them in a more meaningful way. What if China has a piece and India another and Japan and the USA, Europe, Russia, etc.? Do the ancients' gods hold the keys to be merged with today's insights? *Maybe the task is one of assembling the pieces that are all there as in "some assembly required."*

If such assimilation isn't hope, then is there any hope left on the table. None of the systems of cultural meanings can stand the furnace of modern life on a tiny polluted overpopulated planet within a supposedly 12-15 billion old universe which could have multiple sisters and where ultimately time and consequences are irrelevant since our star will not survive forever or someone from the future will return to change it all. *What would then be left is to simply swallow our misery and go forward – just do it – no fear, no hope.*

Take Another Look at Jesus

Honestly can't we just bury the dead? Jesus may seem like the undead. He's dead—we can't seem to get rid of him—he offers no real hope. Please take a seat on a comfortable bench and reflect again or for the first time on His views on the universe, on material-energy, time-space, on hope and meaning.

Jesus Promises a New Family and a New Heaven and Earth

Jesus didn't come to rescue the planet from its current fatal or near fatal flawedness by bringing it into perfect harmony or by abolishing the flawedness disease. He recognized humanity's flawedness. He was deeply touched by the people who honestly felt the flawedness around and in them and sought healing. And he stonewalled those who refused to look at their own personal flawedness but rather rested on their holy values as enough for themselves ... religious self-righteousness just didn't impress him.

A brief tangent. If you've already judged Jesus by judging his followers in the religion called Christianity, consider that Jesus may be more ... much more and that Christians are still affected by flawedness but they too hope for more.

Jesus pointed a way to something far greater than we might hope for on this planet and in this universe. He pointed a way to a new heaven and a new earth. He understood the magnitude of the problem. Something is fatally wrong with the human race, the ecosystem and the heavens. Meaning and hope are not to be found in this plane of existence alone. We are meant for a different universe—a new heaven and a new earth—or at least we long for a new reality.

Sounds like science fiction? Yes and no. Yes, reality, defined as that which can only be consistently physically measured, proclaims Jesus was into science fiction. However, the longings of the heart proclaim that Jesus was speaking to our souls. So how do we decide? Is only material

evidence reality? Does heart evidence count for nothing? Shouldn't both lend clues? And why is this so hard? Is this a test from a schoolmaster—a distant and harsh God-Master?

Jesus also spoke of a new human family identity that he called the “kingdom of God” and “His whole family in heaven and earth.” He understood that our family of origin, the union of sexuality, and the family of nations don't satisfy (but do reveal) the human soul's thirst to belong, to be wanted, valued and delighted in.

All this may sound very strange ... just like the present universe. But search your heart? Does it long for more than what is in its reach? If so, keep pursuing the one who pursues you ... Jesus. If not, stop. Don't sacrifice your integrity; but do challenge it. Jesus taught his followers to pursue integrity of the heart and mind.

At this point, this writing needs to pause. If you're still interested, you will want to read for yourself what Jesus said about himself, the flawedness he saw in the world, the hope for the future he presented to his followers. The books in the Bible called the Gospels (Jesus' Good News) records Jesus primary teachings. There are four of these: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. If you choose to read them, you may want to discuss them with a trusted friend. You might consider reading through one of these books rapidly, and then going back and reading smaller sections and discussing them. Matthew is the first of these readings. Some of the sections may seem less than apparent due to their cultural context, but overall most sections should be clear. Ask yourself as you read, “How did Jesus view reality?” and “How does this speak to my heart and mind—my realities?”

The Bible speaks of a Creator-God, but Who is He? Many people believe that there is a God of everything that lives and exists. Others believe in a godless existence or that the universe is God. Many believe in many gods—or god as they define him to be. Some believe it is possible and desirable to have a personal relationship with the Creator, that one can know Him and enjoy being with Him. Still others try to keep as far away from God as possible. They try not to think about creation, death, or probabilistic cause-effect relationships of events in our world. This kind of belief often turns into reasoning: “Yes, there is a God. I hope that He will judge using a scale for good and bad deeds. I hope I make the grade before this tolerant God. But for now I'll pursue my own agenda for thriving.”

Some are confused by His power that seems to have two faces. He created the wonderful and magnificent nature that does not lose its beauty through all the seasons. And then that same power lets people become like beasts in their brutality, and lets disease and natural disasters rage on the planet.

The journey of seeking God can take many routes. Many are dead-ends, some are cyclical or never-ending. One that has captivated and satisfied many is found in the Bible. This journey begins with creation and leads to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, where the Creator sent His Son as a little child—an innocent, perfect gift to the human race for the completion of hope in this life and beyond the death-gate.

How was it possible? How could God and man fit into one personality and shape? It is a mystery and an absurdity for many. It was a matter of hot discussion at the early regional gatherings of the Christian church and is the main difference between Christianity and some other religions. Jesus was not just God in human appearance or just a perfect man. He was God in the flesh who came to save us through his death and resurrection. But do we really need saving? Or do we just need a sense of personal and corporate harmony and power while here on earth?

The Bible tells us that humankind was created in the image of God and that we have a limited freedom of choice. That means that we are free to choose, to make some decisions and to follow our chosen path from certain givens like parents and the time and place of our birth. But we do not have the freedom to choose the consequences of our decisions. We may avoid certain consequences by making good decisions, but we cannot manipulate consequences without other consequences beyond our control. In the beginning, Adam and Eve did not doubt their choices. God's friendship, power and His warm kindness made everything else look meaningful and shameless. It was the blessed time, when they had to choose only between "goods" – except for one option. Everything changed when they ate from that tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They wanted to change their identity, to know everything, to be god and goddess, but their disobedience earned only evil and its consequences – the promise of death. Since then evil and sin have pervaded humanity and have never left mankind. We perceive evil just as Adam and Eve did through feelings of guilt and feelings of shame – feeling deeply flawed.

That first disobedience to God, sin, opened the door to other sins. One garden-sin led to a nature prone to sin and deeply flawed from its original state of being as made in the image of God. The Bible states evil can be both external behavior and motives of the heart. Cain murdered his brother Abel, but his initial sin was envy. That's why Jesus explained: don't steal, but also don't desire anything that belongs to others. How strong is the grip of sin nature—it extends to our very imaginations. And the payment for sin is death ... eternal death. 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 says, "He will punish those who do not know God, and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power..." This is the picture of ultimate despair, without any hope. We need saving from sin and death as well as finding love, peace and power in this life. Jesus came for both reasons.

Jesus came because God loved rebellious Adam and Eve just as He loves their children and grandchildren all the way to us today. Two thousand years ago Jesus came not only to offer hope from sins' consequences, but also to open the way to the Creator God, away from eternal death to eternal life. He came to set us free from the power of sin. John 3:17 says, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

And what about judgment? God has every right to judge according to His standard of righteousness. But even by human standards (which we individually reveal as we judge others in our hearts), we are worthy of judgment. So people are both judged and loved by God. God Himself is love. As a demonstration of His love, He sent His Son Jesus for us.

People long to be jealously loved within freedom and without bondage. However, people often feel deeply ashamed and flawed and do not believe they are worthy to be loved by God or anyone else. The Bible agrees we are not worthy to be loved, that innately we aren't lovable and that God had every right to not love us. However, God has chosen to love us. He demonstrated His love for us by not withholding that which was precious to Himself. He gave us His very Son Jesus to eliminate this problem of evil, shame, guilt, pain and eternal judgment.

Sometimes it is hard to understand how all it is possible. We feel that God can't care about every single individual. He is the One who makes history happen, who holds the earth in its orbit, who keeps the balance of nature. How could He be involved with everyone personally? Too incredible. Often we wonder how God can love us if He sees all the sufferings in the world and does not put an end to it.

What is the God spoken about in the Bible like? Exodus 34:6,7 says, "...The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished..." That's how God answered Moses, who longed to know God, when he prayed that God would not leave the rebellious Israelites.

Every time we hear the call of God or sense His handiwork or presence near us, we have to make a choice: to live ignoring His offer of jealous love and tender mercy or to take the hand of God and go His way. That does not mean we have to first change our jobs, homes, names or cultural identities. We have only to trust our souls and our hearts to God, so that He can adopt us into His family. Changes will come as He leads us into freedom from behaviors and their consequences that don't bring creative harmony with His glory and His design for us.

But how did Jesus manage to save us? Jesus Christ came into this world about 2000 years ago as God in the flesh. He was born of a Jewish virgin. Through the innocence of childhood and the turbulence of adolescence, He experienced our world as a man and thus He can fully understand our sufferings and temptations. He lived about 33 years. During that time He lived a sinless life, never once breaking God's moral standards. He demonstrated God's jealous love to men by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, healing hearts which were broken from years of pain and telling people about God and His view of reality. And then He yielded Himself to be crucified—executed—by men in order to pay people's death penalty for sin.

After three days in the grave, He rose from the dead, as the Jewish Scriptures had foretold hundreds of years before. During the subsequent 40 days, He was seen by his followers. He then ascended up into heaven where He sits on God's right hand. He actively prays for us there. And He will return to earth someday and will rule all nations. He lives and He is Lord of all. Matthew 1:21 says, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

God offers to pardon guilty people filled with shame and guilt on the basis of Christ's life, death and resurrection. In order to receive this pardon, a person must turn and believe in Christ Who gives people abundant and eternal life filled with hope and meaning. Acts 3:19 says, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord ..." And John 20:31 says, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

There are many motives for accepting God's offer. Some people have responded out of respect for Him as the Almighty Creator. Others have come to Jesus out of fear of death and punishment. Some have responded to God's great love for them because they long so deeply to be loved. Some respond as they see miracles. The hope for a better life both now and for eternity is another primary reason some people turn to Christ.

People also find different reasons to not turn to God. Some think that there is no sufficient evidence of His existence. Some are ready to believe, but find it too difficult to obey. Some have not believed there is sufficient reason to believe there is a personal creator God and that Jesus is His Son. Others have been unwilling to obey Him as God. Some have felt too guilty for their behavior and could not believe the God would forgive them. Some see hypocrisy in followers of Christ and use that as an excuse.

Others have believed themselves to be too shameful or guilty to be loved by God, and thus would not accept His merciful love and forgiveness. Their sense of justice demands that they remain unforgiven—thus they deny the love and power of God to forgive and they make their justice more honorable than God's forgiveness. They judge themselves to be beyond the hope of God's love.

Some have seen God's justice and concluded He is not a God of love—often not perceiving that jealous love offers both tenderness and consequences.. Others have put off this choice hoping that God will not be involved with their lives. Some refuse to have God make any demands on them and believe they don't need God. Others reject this worldview of an eternal soul within a man. They believe man will live and die and rot like every other animal.

Still God's offer is before us. He offers us hope amidst despair and even ambivalence. He doesn't offer to immediately make all our troubles cease. He offers us His peace and love as we go through life and eternal life afterwards.

God, as the Jealous Lover of our souls, wants us to make a willing choice regarding His offer. We may want to discuss this decision over with close friends and family, but ultimately the decision is an individual one.

The years after people make this choice usually include joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, and despairing with hope. God works in our lives to develop character of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—to bring harmony into life. This journey is not always pleasurable, and it will continue for the remainder of our years. But it is always hopeful and meaningful.

Disillusionment with God and Jesus is always an option. However, He has promised that He will never abandoned or rejected us and He can bear the honesty of our longings. Hebrews 13:5 says, "... God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'" In time, God will replace our nature to sin with His nature of righteousness. (In fact from an eternal perspective, this transformation is guaranteed by the seal of His Holy Spirit living in those who believe.) Then the pains and consequences of sin will cease.

If you are considering accepting Jesus' offer of intimacy and mercy in light of our shame and guilt, and you believe that Jesus Christ is God and that He died and rose from the grave, then in your own words speak to God and gladly tell Him of your belief and willingness to turn to worship and honor Christ. Ask Jesus to come into your life to deliver you from the punishment of morally wrong behavior —everlasting destruction—before a holy and jealous God. Believe that God answers your request. He promises to answer and He does not lie!

If you feel uncomfortable about talking to God in your own words, here is a prayer you can consider praying:

God, I wish to honor You as the Jealously Loving Creator God Who exist before all time. And I wish to accept Your offer of forgiveness and love and freedom. I admit I am a sinful person undeserving of Your offer. Please forgive me out of Your great love demonstrated in Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Jesus, please come into my heart to save and change me and to be my Lord. I desire to get to know and respect You personally in the days and years ahead. I desire to experience Your jealous love always and follow Your ways. Thank you very much. Amen.

Romans 10:9 says, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." You can trust that He will hear you and answer your prayer.

If you need to continue your spiritual journeying or if you need to sit on a fence for a while, recognize that there are decisions to be made and that God is patiently waiting for you. Consider this to be a very significant life journey ... with the clock ticking.

If you have made a decision to turn to Jesus, you also have to decide what's next. Jesus tells us about the next step. John 15:5-7 says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."

Try to find a church with a pastor who teaches the Bible—the Living Word of God—and with believers who love God and each other. Read your Bible, learn to pray and listen and seek to know and obey the will of God.

What should happen in your daily life? In the New Testament Paul, a devoted follower of Jesus, gives us a good piece of advice. 1 Thessalonians 4:11,12 says, "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."

And in Ephesians 4:17-32 Paul says, "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 'In your anger do not sin': Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

*What are your thoughts about all this?
Where is your hope?*

Written 2004

Beholding the Triune God:
*A Lifelong Journey of
Transformation and Service*

*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 to just 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 (His beauty, love and majesty), all creation and God's kingdom (His presence, power and authority at work in our lives and in all reality).

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 and intimacy,

TRUST His sovereign power and the goodness of His authoritative will,

RECEIVE His grace and mercy that satisfies His integrity,

ALIGN our hearts, minds and souls in intimacy with His heart, mind and soul that jealously loves 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 and what we do and imagine. Our very souls are transformed into a beauty that reflects the beauty of God’s holiness. 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 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 time-space 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.”

To focus primarily on spiritual transformation is a journey that can lead to deceptive self-worship; a focus on self rather than on God. However, to not think in terms of transformation can 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.

FIVE PRIME DIRECTIVES

As Creator and Lord, God has given us prime directive for living. We are designed and commanded to follow these ways of life for His glory. As we living into these directives through the power of the Holy Spirit, we experience true life in Him. These directives are not heavy burdens, but rather life-giving ways of living as children of God.

#1 Loving God

We have just laid the foundation for a framework from which to consider a lifetime journey of worshipping God and spiritual transformation. It is the journey of life; it is life. Beholding the Triune God and spiritual transformation are intrinsically connected. As we genuinely move into the jealousy 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 him. 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. 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 Him in song. 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). To behold the Son is to behold the glory of God. Furthermore, the glory of God is revealed in nature (Romans 1:20; Psalm 8; Psalm 19:1-6). 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, in all creation including the heavenlies.

Furthermore, 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 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 and 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)*. Beholding God while clearing seeing ourselves, deeply impacts 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 to embrace. And God, in His 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 for our benefit—for our reconciliation with God. In the face of evil, suffering, severe mercy and kind jealousy, it is readily possible to like God.

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. 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 possesses, frees, delights in and protects us. 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 relationships, 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.

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 Loving Others as Ourselves

Loving God necessarily 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 abused and the abuser, diverse races, ethnicities and nations—to society and the body of Christ. Our human love is always limited in capacity. We can never fulfill all the love needs of any one individual much less that of

humanity. 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 and always 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 condemn God Who has made us (Isaiah 45:9). Our 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, often leads us through feelings of contempt, anger, fear, shame and guilt. Having done 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 (“It’s not true”). We will either surrender to the loving and merciful heart of God or, in hopeless pride, turn from Him. 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 (see 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 soft soles as we journey forward.

#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 spiritual gifts He has given us. 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 reconciliation. *"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 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. It implies the Good News of Jesus really is good news for all people at all times in history.

#4 God's Nature and Culture Commandments

The aroma of life in Christ has many implications. It speaks into the Culture & 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).

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 Living and Becoming Like Christ

In loving God and others as we do ourselves, we will live well in daily life. *"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"* (1 Thessalonians 4:11,12). 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. Thus, we are becoming like Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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 for humanity. We are thus called and empowered to live and become like Jesus in this journey.

A LIFELONG JOURNEY

An Active and Passive Journey

The journey of beholding God and being transformed 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 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 thus becomes a by-product of our authentic relationship with God. The Triune God is always to be our focused passion. 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 by broken relationships, and yet He extends forgiven. 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 deep within His loving heart.

Relational Practices

Many relational practices (habits, methods) pertain to spiritual transformation. 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 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 loving God and loving others as ourselves.

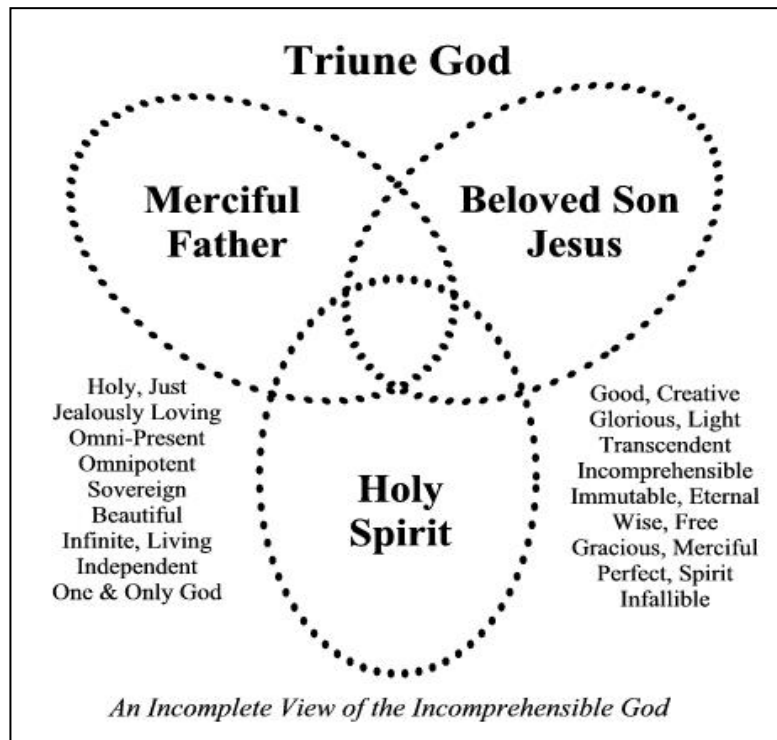
Let's return to beholding God. A. W. Tozer has said, "That our idea of God corresponds as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us... I believe there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect 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

Several questions can help us guide our movement into beholding God and being transformed.

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 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, beholding Him with reverence is 24/7 worship and embracing His loving embrace is 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. Below is an incomplete view of God. Our spiritually transformative journey of beholding God never leads to boredom, for God is inexhaustible!

A second question that can help us understand our movement into beholding God and being transformed 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 relationship 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 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 of God and His works. Within His life, beauty and works, one's own humanity can be experienced as truly meaningful while often paradoxical.

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. 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.

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 FRIUT 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.

A fifth question might be, “***Am I reflecting the PARADOXICAL WAYS of Jesus in all my relationships (e.g. with 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. The prophet Daniel served God by helping lead the pluralistic society of Babylon. The Apostles Peter and Paul called all to pray for kings, to honor systems of authority, to live peacefully in society and to bless everyone by doing good. And Jesus served within society as a carpenter!

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, life and space. Thus, all our relationships with people and in nature are impacted as we authentically behold God.

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 others. 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 some level.

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.

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.

An eighth question might be, ***"Am I growing through the developmental LIFE CYCLE of a human being? Am I becoming a responsible adult who embraces transitional life? Am I a strong-will, submitted and creative person who can both receive and give love and possessions with humility and godly jealousy?"*** 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 human development. 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. Alone 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. And we understand from the heart that all we possess we have received and thus we give with humility. And that which we possess, we possess with godly jealousy, not with greed, envy or over-possessiveness.

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. Furthermore, 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 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, pride and do much harm to the oppressed and to the oppressors. Another 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. Overcome evil with good implies we deeply embrace the ways of Jesus—ways that include loving our enemies and the power of powerlessness—and that we struggle with evil through prayer and with the full armor of God.

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. 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 ...

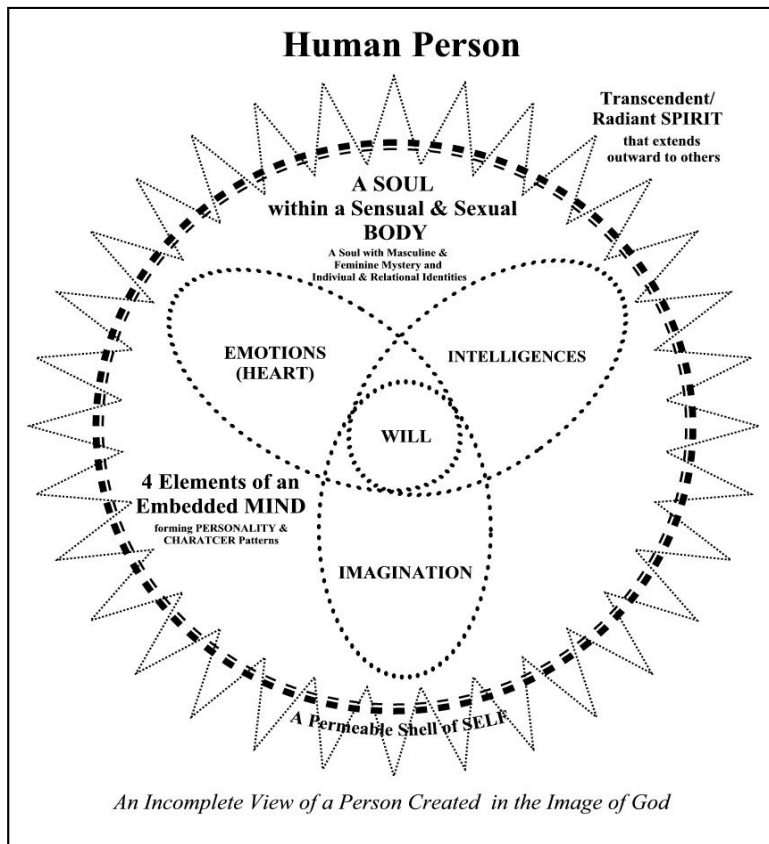
- ❖ 24/7 worship of and intimacy with the Triune God
- ❖ God's grand view of reality and His Kingdom
- ❖ Relational identities in Christ
- ❖ Deep issues of our hearts
- ❖ Paradoxical ways of Jesus
- ❖ Ministry of reconciliation
- ❖ Spiritual generations
- ❖ Development throughout our life cycle
- ❖ Resisting Satan and overcoming evil with good
- ❖ Groaning 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). It is always beneficial to remember that God is faithful and good. Sometimes and for some seasons the journey is painful, but He is always good and greater than our hearts and our consciousnesses.

The following diagram is offered not as a final word in describing the human person 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 as 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 this transformation is completed as we join Jesus in heaven as glorified beings with new bodies.

The power for such is 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. 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). As we continue this 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.

Much more could be written about beholding God and a lifetime journey of spiritual transformation. 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 of angels and demons 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 and spiritual transformation.

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 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

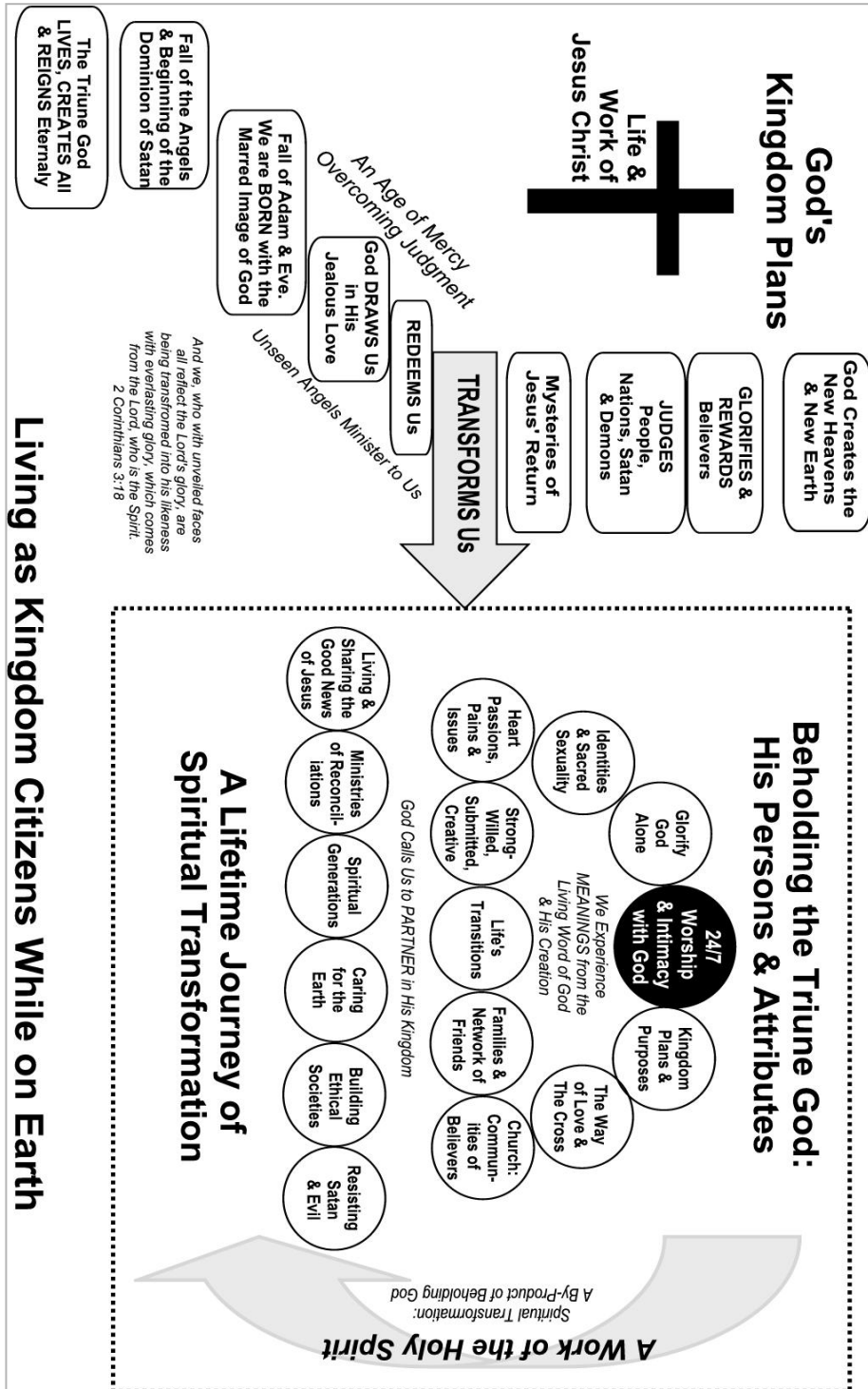
I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. Hosea 2:19

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, these 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).

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



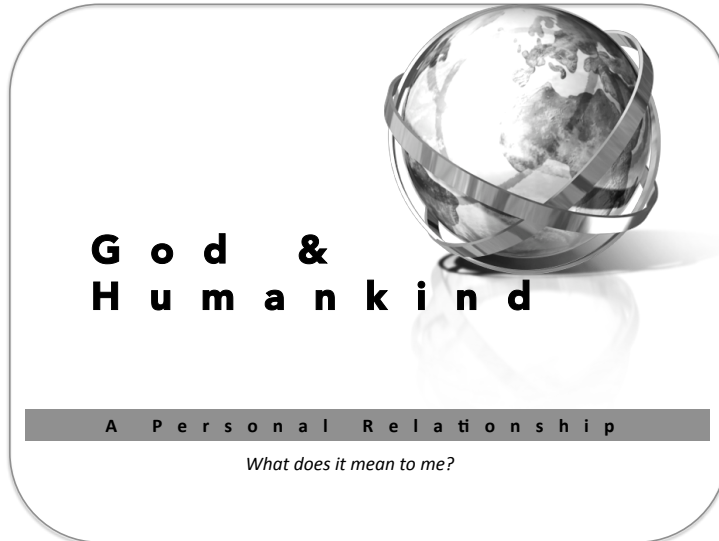
Immersing the apprentices (of Jesus) at all levels of growth in the Trinitarian presence. This is the single major component of the prospering of the local congregation: the healing and teaching God in the midst.

Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*

Written 2006

God and Humankind

Written 1992



Many people believe a Creator God exists; some don't. Many believe it is possible and desirable to have a personal relationship with this Creator, yet few seem to know Him personally. Whether we believe in God or not,

**w e a l l l i v e i n a w o r l d
t o r n b e t w e e n
h o p e & d e s p a i r .**

HOPE comes in many forms:

world peace movements, computer technology, medical advances, psychological theories, new energy sources, agricultural advances, space exploration, communication and transportation achievements.

DESPAIR surrounds us in:

wars, political corruption, economic disparity, racism, family breakups, sexism, sexually transmitted diseases, environmental disasters, and death.

*Against this backdrop
of hope and despair,
we need to address
the relationship between...*



G o d & H u m a n k i n d

A P e r s o n a l R e l a t i o n s h i p ?

Let's explore what the Bible says...

**P e o p l e a r e c r e a t e d
i n t h e i m a g e o f G o d
a n d a r e m o r a l b e i n g s .**

***We can appreciate love, truth, justice, beauty and goodness.
We have the freedom to make choices.***

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:27

Moreover, we are loved by God!

God has compassion on people and desires all of us
to be in a right and loving relationship with Him.

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

**The wonderful existence of a complex universe
is compelling evidence for a Creator.**

Though we have seen this and other evidence of God as Creator, we have not honored Him as God...

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. Romans 1:20

We also tend to judge others by standards that we cannot live up to ourselves. Yet all people are judged by a perfect God and found guilty of morally wrong behaviors and thoughts. Guilty people deserve to be sentenced by God in His wrath to everlasting destruction in hell—forever removed from the presence of God.

*He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power...
2 Thessalonians 1:8,9*

Eternal punishment is a picture of ultimate despair...

Yet there is HOPE!

People long for love.

God is love. As demonstration of His love, He gave His Son Jesus for us.

People strive for justice.

God is just.

People desire to do good and not be hypocritical.

God is good.

People need honest relationships.

God is truth.

People seek direction and meaning in their lives.

God is the Creator, and He is all powerful.

People hope for meaningful existence after death.

God is eternal.

People have the freedom to make choices.

God does not violate our freedom to choose,
nor does He negate the consequences of our choices.

*The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished...
Exodus 34:6.7*

StiII there is HOPE!

***Jesus Christ is not a humanistic religious leader.
He is not an idealist or an undead.
He is unique in all the universe ...***

**God in His love sent His only Son
to live among humankind.**

Jesus Christ came into this world about 2000 years ago as God in the flesh. He was born of a Jewish virgin and lived about 33 years. During that time He lived without sinning—never once breaking God’s moral standards. He demonstrated God’s love to humankind by healing some, feeding some, and by telling people about God and His Kingdom. Then He yielded Himself to be crucified (executed) in order to pay our death penalty for sin ...

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. Matthew 1:21

The name "Jesus" is a Greek form of Joshua, which means "the Lord saves."

After three days in the grave, He rose from the dead, as the Jewish Scriptures had foretold. During the subsequent 40 days, He was seen by approximately 500 people. Then He ascended into heaven where He sits beside God the Father to govern the universe. He will return to earth someday and rule all nations. He lives, and He is Lord of all.

***God offers to pardon all people
on the basis of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection!***

In order to receive God's pardon, we must first understand that Christ came to offer us forgiveness and a personal relationship with God. The personal experiences of millions of believers demonstrate that:

His offer is real and viable for us today.

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord... Acts 3:19

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31

To each person who turns to Christ:

God offers abundant and eternal life.

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23

There are many motives for accepting God's offer. Some have responded out of respect for Him as Creator. Others have come to God out of fear of death and punishment. Some have responded to God's great love for them. Yet the hope for a better life both now and for eternity remains the primary reason people turn to God.

God wants you to make a willing choice regarding His offer.

You may have previously made your choice; or you may want to further explore the claims of Jesus Christ before you make your choice to refuse or accept His pardon.

*If you understand and believe that Jesus Christ is God
—that He died and rose again to pay the penalty for your sin—
and you wish to accept His offer to eternal life:*

G o d w e l c o m e s y o u !

In your own words speak to God and gladly tell Him of your belief and willingness to honor Christ. Ask Christ to come into your life to deliver you from the punishment of morally wrong behavior—everlasting destruction. Believe that God will answer your request. He promised to answer and He does not lie! Thank Him for doing what He has promised!

...if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9

**U n d e r s t a n d i n g Y o u r
P e r s o n a l R e l a t i o n s h i p
w i t h G o d . . .**

- 1. Forgiveness of Sin...** You are pardoned from the death penalty of sin.
- 2. Permanent Relationship...** God considers you His adopted child. He is your eternal Father.
- 3. Two-way Communication...** You now have the privilege of talking to God in prayer and of God communicating with you.

- 4. Comfort...** God's Spirit comes and lives within to support you in a world with no lasting peace.
- 5. Love...** God will continually demonstrate His infinite love to you through His care for your good (but not always your comfort).
- 6. Direction...** God communicates truth for your life. God's directions for living are recorded in the Bible.
- 7. Power...** God gives you power to overcome harmful behavior patterns and to do what is right.
- 8. Purpose...** God empowers you to find meaning in life as you honor and express your love to Him in all that you do.
- 9. Self-worth...** God paid a high price for you—His Son's death. Your life is valuable to God.
- 10. Resurrection...** After physical death, God will give you a new, transformed and incorruptible body.
- 11. Eternal Life...** You will live with God forever.

...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

If you have established a personal relationship with God, as His child you can deepen the intimacy of your relationship by...

- **Getting to know God.**
He reveals His commands, His works, and His identity in the Bible.
(The Gospel of John and the book of Romans in the New Testament are recommended to read first.)
- **Talking with God.**
He is now your Father; He will hear and answer you.
- **Seeking out older, mature Christians.**
They can help you grow in your relationship with God.
- **Obeying God's truths.**
He will give you power to form loving patterns and to resist selfish desires.
- **Sharing with others.**
Tell people what you have found by believing in Christ—pardon from the penalty of disobedience and new life in Him.

**God longs to have
A Personal Relationship
with You**

*Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing... If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love."
John 15:5,7-10*



**God &
Humankind**

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Resources to Explore

CONNECT BIBLE STUDIES

GOD: Connecting with His Outrageous Love
IDENTITY: Becoming Who God Says I Am
SOUL: Embracing My Sexuality and Emotions
RELATIONSHIPS: Bringing Jesus into My World
LIFE: Thriving a Complex World
FREEDOM: Breaking the Power of Shame

IMAGE-BASED

The New Me
Searching the Ordinary for Meanings
Grapplings: Why Do People Suffer So Much?

BOOKS

The Shame Exchange: Trading Shame for God's Mercy and Freedom
Worth a Thousand Words: The Power of Images to Transform Hearts

INVENTORIES

Breakthru: Discovering My Spiritual Gifts
Breakthru: Discovering My Primary Roles

For the above resources see:

www.ralphennis.com

About the Authors

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 Jennifer co-founded JourneyMates, a ministry to help people grow in intimacy with the Triune God through Scripture, silence and solitude.

Unless otherwise noted, the essays of the WB Series have been written by Ralph. However, each work was crafted in the context our marriage relationship and with the editorial benefit of Jen's perspectives and unique abilities.

In 2018 Ralph and Jennifer celebrated 45 years of marriage. They have four married children and 15 grandchildren.



Our web sites:

www.journeymates.org
www.ralphennis.com

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