



Essays on Spirituality
and the Triune God

Wharf and Bearings

II

Ralph C. Ennis

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Spirituality and the Triune God*

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Spirituality and 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*

A Space Beyond

Perspective on Various Spiritualities

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 this question, but one way is through the lens of “point of reference for considering a space beyond”. What is our primary point of reference 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 his or her mother. That will change as he/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 might live in this beyond? What does this say about who I am? What do I see reflecting back at me?”***

All this may seem very confusing and philosophical. It is! The following chart illustrates various points of reference in addressing the 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, the common agreement of a space beyond provides a basis for exploring various spiritualities.

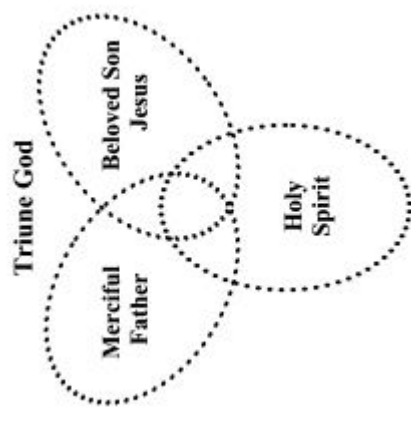
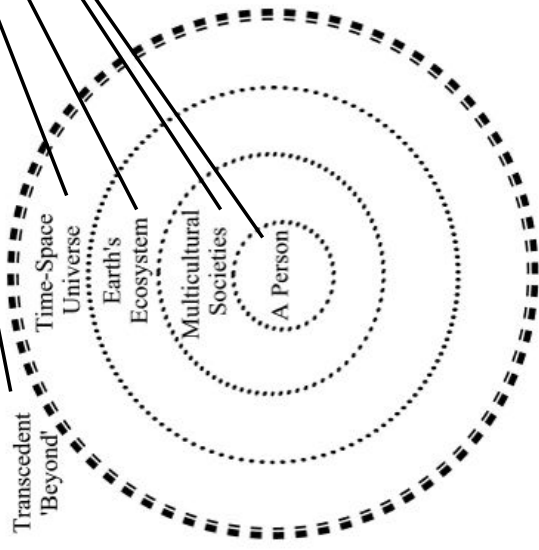
If there is *nothing beyond me*, if my mind is ultimately all there is, then I may conclude that I am a *god or goddess*. If I conclude that even my mind is an *illusion* with “beyond” an illusion, then all pursuit of life is a meaningless game including all spiritualities—all is illusion.

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 His involvement in human affairs. I essentially believe in *humanism* and may be an *atheist* or *agnostic*.

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.

Why Are There So Many Spiritual Perspectives?

Spirituality involves addressing
"What is beyond?"
 That is, what is my primary point of
 reference for life & what do I see
 reflecting back at me?



An Incomplete View of the Incomprehensible God

What Do I See Reflecting Back at Me?

- If there is nothing beyond my mind,
 then I may believe I am a god or goddess or an illusion.
- If society is my primary point of reference,
 then I may be a humanist, atheist or agnostic.
- If nature, the living ecosystem, is my primary reference point,
 then I may believe in animism.
- If the universe or multiple universes is all there is beyond me,
 then I may believe in pantheism.
- If there is/are 'god(s)' in a transcendent beyond,
 then I may believe in polytheism, Satanism or monotheism.
- If my primary reference point is a God Who is relational,
 then I may believe in a Trinitarian God.

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 and regenerated by the universe.

If the universe was created, i.e. it didn't always exist and there is a *transcendent beyond*, 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 and power of that or those gods has been debated.

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 (i.e. human love and jealous symbolically tell us of God's jealous love),
- spiritual experiences as evidence for God
- abstract ideas of beauty, goodness and perfection as from God
- power to change us implies God's work in our lives
- inability to disprove God implies God exists
- concepts of eternity and a transcendent beyond planted within human hearts and minds imply a God who is eternal and beyond creation.

If humanity reflects the image of God and humans are relational beings, then I may believe in the paradox of the *Triune God, Who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. But in tension with this paradox is the possibility that people have simply created God in some imagined perfected image of humanity.

With all these evidences, we are still left with a trust decision. We will use our limited free will and mind to explain a space beyond in some manner. We will trust something—if only ourselves. However, the Triune God calls us to trust in Him.

How can we know if space beyond is real or an illusion?

That's a question some people ask and others don't care about. But for the ones who ask it, it's an important question to consider. Like knowing any truth, the truth about reality requires a degree of trust while considering our doubts with limited verifiable facts. In a world that offers so much virtual reality, we are increasingly confronted with the question of reality. Are thoughts real? Are our senses more real than our thoughts? Are dreams more real than other types of consciousness? Is consciousness real? Is spirituality real? How can we decide?

One avenue to consider is probabilistic cause and effect. We make decisions with some sense of an imagined outcome. For instance, when you walk across a busy street, your outcome prediction governs your fear level. Imagined outcomes are formed through experience with outcomes of behavior. Over time we grow in our ability to discern outcomes, but we can never predict the future with 100% accuracy—experience tells us that.

So how can we know what is real? Our ability to feel pain and pleasure helps. Our ability to reason helps. Our ability to perceive when we transition from various levels of consciousness helps. But in the end we must choose to trust someone 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 of trust is ours.

The journey of spiritual transformation from a Biblical perspective always requires trust. The Triune God has built a trust system. Though we can't eliminate all doubt as we look at space beyond, we can choose to trust "someone" who is trustworthy. God always calls us to choose to trust. If we seemingly refuse to trust God, our suspicions reveal our trust in ourselves. Spirituality is relational and thus is a question of who is trustworthy to trust. Though much reasoning can be given for any spirituality, ultimately, I trust, the Triune God has wired humanity to engage in trust with our hearts, minds, bodies and souls.

Obviously, the above is a brushstroke. The philosophical intricacies of addressing the issue of a "point of reference for considering a space beyond" can be complex, including the problem of meaning in language and the nature of space. However, the above is intended to serve as a perspective of how reasonable people can form such different spiritual perspectives.

This journey into "beyond" 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 associate with people who don't trust as we trust or doubt as we doubt. My prayer is that this essay can serve as a bridge for discussing and 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*

Written 2008

**The Jealous Heart of God
and
Spiritual Transformation**

Introduction

LORD Yahweh has revealed that His name is Jealous in Exodus 34:14. This article explores implications of God's jealous heart. The American culture currently views jealousy as a negative emotional construct. Does this view of jealousy implicate God as flawed or is there a perspective of jealousy that we need to recover from Old and New Testament teachings that will inform our spiritual journeys? Jealousy can be viewed as a universal human emotion and one that often surfaces within sexuality. Thus jealousy is central to our understanding of relating with God and living in His ways.

The concept of jealousy is examined within Jesus' teaching as well as the writings of those within the spiritual formation movement. The implications of jealousy for spiritual transformation include our understanding of spiritual adultery and our intimacy with God. Spiritual transformation can be framed as aligning the jealousies of our hearts with the jealous heart of God.

God's Jealous Heart

Various names of God are used many times in Scripture and others are used only a few. God's name Yahweh occurs 5,311 times in the Hebrew¹. The meaning of this Name reveals that God is the Self-Determinate One Who is always present². We can learn much about God's heart as we experience Him as the non-dependent One Who is always present in our lives and the world around us. Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus reveals something of God through His name which indicates "he will save his people from their sins."³ Understanding God's means of saving us through His Son can help us perceive His heart more clearly. There are many Names of God and each reveal much about God and how He desires to relate to us.

A name of God that is used only once in the Scriptures is Jealous⁵. In Exodus 34:14 LORD Yahweh reveals to Moses that His very name is Jealous. It would be easy to neglect this one passage as less than central to the heart of God, except for the fact that God had previously revealed to Moses within a strategic moment in time that He is a jealous God. This first direct revelation of jealousy came when the great I Am gave the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel as they began their freedom from slavery. God embedded several "for" clauses within these commandments. These clauses give sense to the reasons behind our ethical understanding. The first "for" clause is: "for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God ..."⁶

Is the precious heart of God revealed among the core ethical commandments for the nation of Israel? These stone commandments, along with manna and Aaron's rod that budded, were later placed within the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was then placed upon the seat of mercy and within the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and illuminated by His glory. Within this shadowland that foretells of Jesus and His sacrifice for our redemption, Yahweh revealed an extremely important aspect of Who He is. He is jealous. Then, this revelation of God we cannot ignore for it holds a prominent place in the overall story of God.

God's jealousy seems out of sight for most believers today. Somehow this revelation and its importance to walking with God have been hidden from our modern eyes. Discussions about the proper place to display the Ten Commandments within American society are frequently in the news and from our pulpits we discuss the urgency of these commands. But when do discussions of these commands include an honest look at the jealous heart of God? This begs a question, is God's jealousy something that is essential to understanding our relationship with Him and our spiritual transformation? Was it by accident that He symbolically wrapped His jealous heart with ethical commands and a promise of provision within the holy of holies—a promise that brings forth life encased by a covenant of mercy which overcomes the justice demanded by His own holiness which was highlighted in His eternal glory? These embedded symbols of the Tabernacle (see Hebrews 8, 9) were not to be lost in the community of faith. But unfortunately, they have often been lost in our day.

Today's world is not the first to lose sight of the jealousy of God. In Hosea's time, the people of faith "knew" God apart from His jealousy. They understood that when they sinned they could

¹ Larry Richards, *Every Name of God In the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 21.

² *Ibid.*, 23-25.

³ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Matthew 1:21.

⁴ All Scripture references are from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

⁵ Note: El Kana also indicates that God is jealous. See Deut. 4:24.

⁶ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Exodus 20:5.

always come back to God. “Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.”⁷ They thought they had cracked the formula of God’s restoring ways – “after two days” they reasoned God will predictably give them what they wanted. However, God rebuked them for the shallowness of their love and brought judgment upon them.⁸ Their formula didn’t work. Something was missing in their understanding of God’s love. They had failed to recognize and live into His jealous love. They had trivialized God’s love by making Him Someone they could manage while still playing games of spiritual harlotry.

Today we have a dilemma in our understanding and experience of the heart of God. Is God loving or is He a God of wrath? The popular agreement is that He is loving—a benevolent Being Who welcomes everyone into heaven; but the Scriptural evidence of His wrath is undeniable. Is God schizophrenic? When can we expect His love? When will His wrath appear? How can we manage God’s responses to us? This age-old discussion seldom includes an understanding of His jealousy. Does not jealous love bring both immense tenderness and also a proper sense of anger at being spurned?

In the Song of Solomon, the lover’s song, the nature of jealousy is revealed. “Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame” (Song of Solomon 8:6). Love’s jealousy is unyielding, it can burn, and it is mutually possessive. This jealousy is within the beautiful love described and thus defined in Solomon’s Song: *a jealous love that possesses, provides, protects, honors, frees, and delights.*

In today’s world, though we often view God as loving, we seldom view Him as the Lover of our souls. Consequently, some have formularized and “played” with God. In this view, He can be controlled. He can be scripted to say what we want to hear. He can be predicted. He can be manipulated to allow us all the freedoms we demand by constraining Him to always be “loving”. And if He steps outside any definition of love that would deny us material provisions or freedom to secure sensual pleasure, then we can reject Him as a stingy or powerless God or an angry God who is wrongly judging us. We might even conclude He is a schizophrenic God Who is loving one moment and wrathful the next.

The Scriptures tell us that God is loving and that His love is jealous. His jealousy accounts for both tender mercies and for wrathful judgment. He is the Jealous Lover of our souls worthy of our worship.

Isn’t Jealousy a Bad Thing?

The concept of jealousy is often viewed only as negative within our society. Jealous is over-possessive. It restricts and binds people. It manipulates and controls people. It is selfishly oriented. Jealousy is envious of others and thus drains the life out of others. Jealousy is a disease within relationships that, if extracted, would allow people to live in freedom with one another—even free sexual love. Jealousy is almost always bad for relationships within our cultural framework.

This view of jealous was not always the case. Sociologist Gordon Clanton noted the changing construct of jealousy in the American culture. He stated:

⁷ *The Holy Bible: New International Version.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Hosea 6:1, 2.

⁸ *Ibid.* Hosea 6:4-7.

“From the end of World War II until the late 1960’s, virtually all of the articles in popular magazines said that a certain amount of jealousy was natural, proof of love, and good for marriage ... By about 1970, a new view of jealousy was taking root in a substantial and influential minority of Americans ... According to the emerging view, jealousy was not natural; it was learned. Jealousy was no longer seen as proof of love; it was, rather, evidence of a defect such as low self-esteem or the inability to trust. Thus, jealousy was not seen as good for relationships; it was bad for them. From this it followed that one could and should seek to eradicate every trace of jealousy from one’s personality.”⁹

Moreover, the Scriptures repeatedly call us to avoid jealousy. This usually implies being “*jealous of*” someone or something. Jealousy is included with many other aspects of behavior and motives that we are called to flee from. “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, *jealousy*¹⁰, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.”¹¹ What then could possibly be good about jealousy?

If we conclude nothing is good about jealousy, then we have a theological problem since God, Who is good, has proclaimed Himself to be jealous. Is this word really worthy of being His name? So again, what is good about jealousy? A while back I had the privilege of leading a Sunday school class of young adults. One day I asked this question, “Who thinks jealousy is a negative emotion? And who thinks it is a positive emotion?” Of the twelve people, only one voted that jealousy was positive. So we asked her why. Her response was powerful. “When my husband stopped being jealous *for me*, it was the end of our relationship.” In like manner, to frame jealousy within our relationship with God, we might say, “When the God of the universe ceases to be jealous *for us* that will be the end of our relationship with Him.” A “*jealousy for*” someone can be good—very good.

A “*jealousy of*” someone is more appropriately called envy. Gordon Clanton (1998) makes a connection between jealousy and envy. He states:

It is widely believed that jealousy and envy are the same emotion. In fact, although jealousy and envy often are mixed together in real life, they are responses to quite different situations. Jealousy always involves an attempt to protect a valued relationship (especially marriage) from a perceived threat (especially adultery). Envy is resentment toward someone who has some desirable object or quality that one does not have and cannot get. Envy, in other words, is hostility toward superiors, a negative feeling toward someone who is better off. Envy is *not* the wish for the object or advantage that provoked the envy. Rather, envy is the much darker wish that the superior would lose the object or advantage. Envy is the pleasure, the malicious joy, that is felt when the superior fails or suffers.¹²

Thus “*jealousy of*” someone should be seen as envy and dealt with as the type of jealousy that Scripture calls us to avoid.

Moreover, this powerful emotion of jealousy can be seen as a universal emotion. Psychologist David Buss asserts this basic universality:

⁹ Gordon Clanton, “Jealousy in American culture, 1945-1985”. In Gordon Clanton & Lynn G. Smith (Eds.), *Jealousy* (3rd ed.). (New York, NY: University Press of America, 1998), 262-264.

¹⁰ Italics mine.

¹¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Galatians 5:19.

¹² Gordon Clanton, “A Sociology of Jealousy”. In Gordon Clanton & Lynn G. Smith (Eds.), *Jealousy* (3rd ed.), (New York: University Press of America, 1998), 305.

Jealousy turned out not to be merely a mark of some character defect. It is expressed in perfectly normal people who show no signs of neurosis or immaturity ... By uncovering the origins of this emotion, we can better understand its modern manifestations and learn how to grapple with them. Jealousy, I was forced to conclude, is no less basic than fear or rage, its expression no less important than flight or fight.¹³

The nature of godly jealousy – that is, “*jealousy for*” – in a relationship includes being *mutually possessive* of each other, *delighting* in each other, *honoring* each other, *freeing* each other to be who they are individually and together, *providing* what is needed for individual and mutual growth, and *protecting* each other from outsiders who would destroy their relationship. This jealousy is evident between good friends and can be the seal of love within a marriage relationship.

Similarly, God possesses us while freeing us. This relational paradox seems to stand against the American value of freedom. We seek to be free from attachments—not possessed. The marvel of understanding this aspect of God’s jealousy lies within the mutual aspect of possessiveness. God possess us. And He also allows us to “possess” Him. We can call Him “our God” (see Mark 12:29) and “our Father” (see Matthew 6:9). These commonly known phrases from the Bible reveal that God does not require absolute distance from His created ones. He calls us into a mutually possessive relationship. But this possessiveness frees us. It is not over-possessive. It doesn’t give up on the other without a fight (see Song of Solomon 8:5, 6). God’s jealousy protects us and provides goodness for our souls. He shields us from the Evil One’s desires to destroy us. He also protects us from our own lust and pride as we surrender to His protection.

Furthermore, jealous hearts delight in each other. Jealousy is not just about legal rights (possessiveness and freedoms) and obligations (protecting and providing). It is about the joy of our hearts. Jealous hearts delight in each other’s presence and honor each other. Just being with each other is a wonderful “leaping of the heart” experience. We enjoy times together; we anticipate returning to each other; we seek opportunities for secret times; we speak languages of love to each other; we help each other grow. Love’s jealousy impacts our entire relationship with each other. This type of godly jealousy is being “*jealous for*” someone, not “*jealous of*” someone.

Our awareness of jealousy is often heightened when a breach of relationship occurs. Jealousy, that is always present and seals a relationship, flares when one leaves for another lover. This understanding of God’s jealous heart speaks into the story of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac. God called Abraham to love Him more than Isaac, and Abraham’s heart responded “yes” to his jealous Lord because Abraham’s heart was jealous for God above Isaac.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul had a jealousy for the believers at Corinth. “I am *jealous for*¹⁴ 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

¹³ David Buss, *The Dangerous Passion: Why Jealousy Is as Necessary as Love and Sex* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 26-27.

¹⁴ Italics mine.

to Christ.”¹⁵ We can see the threads of possessing, freeing, honoring, providing, protecting, and delighting within Paul’s jealous ministry to many.

Furthermore, Milne reviews and explains the Old and New Testament words used for jealousy.

The principal OT term rendered as jealousy in the English Bible is *qîn’â* from the verb *qānā’*, root meaning ‘become dark red’ (Nu. 5:14; Pr. 6:34; Ezk. 16:42; *etc.*). The normal LXX translation of *qîn’â* and its cognates is *zēloō* or the cognate *parazēloō* (Dt. 32:21; *cf.* Rom. 10:19), and these are the principal terms used in the NT (Acts 7:9; Rom. 11:11; 1 Cor. 10:22; 13:4). Both Heb. and Gk. words refer to an exclusive single-mindedness of emotion which may be morally blameworthy or praiseworthy depending on whether the object of the jealousy is the self or some cause beyond the self. In the former case the result is envy, or hatred of others (Gn. 30:1; Pr. 3:31; Ezk. 31:9), which for the NT is the antithesis of love and hence the enemy of true Christian fellowship (1 Cor. 13:4; 2 Cor. 12:20; Jas. 3:14). The Bible however also represents the other possibility, of a ‘divine jealousy’ (2 Cor. 11:2), a consuming single-minded pursuit of a good end (1 Ki. 19:10; Ex. 20:5; 1 Cor. 12:31). This positive usage is frequently associated with the marriage relationship where a jealousy for the exclusiveness of the relationship is the necessary condition of its permanence (Nu. 5:11ff.; Ezk. 16:38; 2 Cor. 11:2). Jealousy is referred to God as well as men (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Na. 1:2). Difficulty is sometimes felt with this, due principally to the way in which the negative connotations of the term have come to predominate in common English usage. Scripture however also witnesses to a positive application of jealousy and finds in this idea a highly relevant term to denote God’s holy zeal for the honour of his name and the good of his people who are bound to him in the marriage of the covenant (Dt. 32:16, 21; 2 Ki. 19:31; Ezk. 36:5f.; Zc. 1:14f.; Jn. 2:17). *In this sense the jealousy of God is of the essence of his moral character, a major cause for worship and confidence on the part of his people and a ground for fear on the part of his enemies.*^{16 17}

Thus a positive as well as a negative usage of jealousy must be considered within the discussion of jealousy and we can conclude that the jealousy of God is all positive.

Connecting to Jealousy through Sexuality

How does humanity even have the capacity to connect to the concept of the jealousy of God? Since we are created in the image of God, what aspect of His being would we not intuitively understand if we had not been created sexual beings? God could have made us asexual beings (like earthworms) and thus secured the multiplication of human bodies. But He made us male and female. He complicated humanity by making us sexual beings. Within sexuality and regardless of behavioral practices (heterosexual, homosexual, bi-sexual) with the possible exception of bestiality, jealousy remains a significant component of the dance of sexuality. It’s everywhere in human society, but often just below the surface of our normal recognition and dialogue.

¹⁵ *The Holy Bible: New International Version.* (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), 2
Corinthians 11:2, 3.

¹⁶ B. A. Milne, “Jealousy”. In Wood, D. R. W. ; Wood, D. R. W. ; Marshall, I. Howard (Eds.): *New Bible Dictionary.* electronic ed. of 3rd ed. Downers Grove : InterVarsity Press, 1996, c1982, c1962, S. 544.

¹⁷ Italics mine.

The Hollywood film industry often tries to diminish jealousy in order to justify “free sexual love”. In the long run, however, jealousy always surfaces (even in films) unless people have dulled this powerful emotion beyond recognition. The pornography industry is an attempt to access sexual love freed from the strings of jealousy. Viewing naked people in various positions, interactions and combinations may excite our lust, but it doesn’t free our hearts from the bonds which jealousy provides. These bonds can help secure healthy relationships between sexual beings. These bonds can cause severe pain when a foreign lover is interjected within any bonded relationship. The dance of sexual beings is fundamentally a dance of jealous hearts. And within this dance, we are called to a greater dance with the Jealous Lover of our souls Who rejects all foreign lovers between us and Him. Understanding this symbolic meaning of sexuality can impact our sexual identities and behaviors as well as our relationship with God. As we foster jealous love as sexual beings, we learn to possess, free, provide, honor, protect and delight in ways that nurtures all our human relationships.

In the dance of sexual beings, men and women often connect to jealousy from different perspectives. Gordon Clanton and Lynn Smith report:

Men are more apt to *deny* jealous feeling; women are more apt to *acknowledge* them. Men are more likely than women to express jealous feelings through rage and even violence, but such outburst are often followed by despondency... Women often *internalize* the cause of jealousy; they blame themselves. Similarly, a jealous man is more likely to display *competitive* behavior toward the third party while a jealous woman is more likely to display *possessive* behavior. She clings to her partner rather than confronting the third party.¹⁸

Whether from a male or female perspective, the play of jealousy in human relations can be a foretaste of God drawing us into His jealous heart.

Within this understanding of God’s jealousy, the prophet Ezekiel exhorted his fellow Jews, with the most highly sexual terms used in Scripture, to return to their God. First he calls them prostitutes who pay their lovers and then God announces His jealous response.

You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband! Every prostitute receives a fee, but you give gifts to all your lovers, bribing them to come to you from everywhere for your illicit favors. So in your prostitution you are the opposite of others; no one runs after you for your favors. You are the very opposite, for you give payment and none is given to you.¹⁹

I will put a stop to your prostitution, and you will no longer pay your lovers. Then my wrath against you will subside and my jealous anger will turn away from you...²⁰

In His intent to shake them loose from their spiritual adultery, God gave Ezekiel even stronger sexual language that reveals His jealous heart as a spurned Husband.

When she carried on her prostitution openly and exposed her nakedness, I turned away from her in disgust, just as I had turned away from her sister. Yet she became more and more promiscuous as she recalled the days of her youth, when she was a prostitute in Egypt. There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose

¹⁸ Gordon Clanton & Lynn G. Smith (Eds.), *Jealousy* (3rd ed.). (New York: University Press of America, 1998), 11.

¹⁹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Ezekiel 16:32-34.

²⁰ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Ezekiel 16:41-42.

emission was like that of horses. So you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when in Egypt your bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.²¹

When the people ceased to have any sense of their adulterous behavior before God, God was disgusted and He equated their actions to those of prostitution and bestiality in hopes of shaming them into good judgment and into returning to His faithful and jealous love as their Husband.

Jealousy, Ethics and the Teachings of Jesus

In the Old Testament God revealed two linked ethical systems. We are most familiar with the laws of good and evil behavior. These are based in the authority of God to detail His commands to humanity. A second system is based in the rules of “clean and unclean”. This ethical system is linked with the laws of good and evil behavior, and yet it stands apart by bringing an aesthetic aspect into the discussion. Both systems of ethical reasoning are ultimately based within the beauty of God’s holiness and His jealous heart. From a Biblical viewpoint, that which is ethical relates to that which God values. To fully grasp this, we must understand that which God values comes from His jealous heart.

Again Ezekiel illustrates this jealous heart of God. The children of Israel had corrupted both ethical reasonings. “Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them”.²² To live ethically requires that we embrace both the lawful and the clean. This ultimately requires that we seek the beauty of God’s holiness. And that holiness is revealed through His jealous heart toward us.

In the shadowland of the Old Testament, jealousy was revealed. But the noticeable omission of the term jealousy from the teachings of Jesus would bring into question the importance of jealousy within our relationship with God. Not one time did Jesus directly speak of God’s jealous heart. He spoke of the Ten Commandments; He gave us a new commandment to love one another; He gave us the Beatitudes; He said many things about Himself, the Father and the Spirit, but He never spoke directly about jealousy. If the heart of God is jealous, we would have to conclude that Jesus left it hidden or considered jealousy unimportant. In one sense He did leave it hidden; in another sense Jesus often spoke from the language of jealousy.

When Jesus tossed the moneychangers out of the temple, He revealed His jealousy for the Father. When Jesus saw His Father’s temple, which was designed as a place of worship, turned into a business venture, He did what His jealous heart demanded—He cleaned house. Jealousy calls us to cleanse the rooms of our hearts from things that supplant God as the true Lover of our souls. Jesus calls us to this path of worship, a jealous path.

Consider the core teachings of Jesus from Luke 13-17. These are amazing windows into the heart of God when viewed through the lens of His jealous love. Below are a means of viewing God’s jealous love through Jesus’ teaching:

²¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Ezekiel 23:17-21.

²² *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), Ezekiel 22:26.

1. A jealous love that sorrows over His children (13:34).
2. A jealous love that invited us into the honor of fellowship and feasting with Him (14:15-17).
3. A jealous love that can be aroused when we spurn Him (14:18-23).
4. A jealous love that requires total allegiance above all other relationships, even to oneself (14:26).
5. A jealous love that rejoices at the return of one lost person over the smugness of ninety-nine who have no apparent need for the pure righteousness that God's jealousy offers (15:7).
6. A jealous love that diligently seeks that which is precious and rejoices at being sought in return (15:8).
7. A jealous love that clothes us with symbols of honor, privilege and protection—with the best robe, a ring and sandals (15:22).
8. A jealous love that celebrates with music, dancing and lavish dining (15:23) over the possessiveness and freedom in relationships. "This son of mine ... was lost and is alive again" (15:24).
9. A jealous love that spurns the rival of the material world (16:13).
10. A jealous love that is symbolically understood through the marriage relationship, divorce and adultery (16:18).
11. A jealous love that reserves hell for those who reject Him and heaven for those who yield to be embraced by Him (16:19-31) Who rightfully owns us.
12. A jealous love that brings woe to those who would cause others to stumble in their relationship with Him (17:1-3).

When jealous love is breached, Jesus implicitly makes it clear that God is longsuffering. The story of the prodigal son (see Luke 15:11-32) reveals the heart of God Who will jealously receive back a wayward child. He delights in his son's return. He honors him with clothes, sandals, a ring and a feast. He freely restores him to the position of a son rather than receive him back as a servant. The jealousy of God is strong; He is longsuffering when we turn from Him. He is quick to receive us with love and honor. Yet, His jealousy can lead to anger. In this regard, He is unpredictable, untamed, and unsafe while at the same time remaining our security and hope and allowing us the full privilege of calling Him Father. Such is the paradox and consistency of jealous love.

Jealousy as Transformative

How might all this impact our understanding and experience of the transformative Gospel of Jesus? ***If the jealousies of our hearts are being aligned with the jealous heart of God, would we not then, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be transforming from the inside out to become like Jesus?*** This idea runs the risk of overstating the importance of jealousy. However, to say that if our hearts are growing to reflect the very heart of God, we all would more quickly agree that spiritual transformation is in process. And conversely, if our hearts are not becoming "*jealous for*" that which God is "*jealous for*", then we are not being spiritually transformed. And if God is the Jealous Lover of our souls and Jesus is the Jealous Bridegroom at work to present us "to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish" (Ephesians 5:27), then it is safe to conclude that who or what we are "*jealous for*" and "*jealous of*" matters to God. This play of jealousy is a marvelous work of the Spirit of God within us drawing us into the heart of God.

If we relate to God as a distant Creator or as the Master or Teacher or even as a loving Being, we can fail to grasp the full nature of the relationship to which God has restored us. As the bride of Christ, we are privileged to relate to God Who is our Lover, our Husband (see Isaiah 54:4).

Practically, how lovers nourish and protect their jealous love becomes a driving question to reflect and act upon. Instead of prescribing formulas to address this crucial question, we must approach this issue in “face-to-face” relationship. The first “step” in aligning our jealousies with God’s jealous heart is to authentically walk in His presence. God calls us to come boldly before His throne of grace, to call upon Him, to enjoy His presence that is everywhere, to acknowledge His delight in us. We must let ourselves out of the “box” before Him. Expose ourselves honestly before God Who already see us fully. Tell Him what we see about ourselves, what we really desire. And look upon the Triune God —the revelation of Himself in Scripture, in nature, and in humanity created in His image yet marred but not beyond recognition of a divine image shadow. By doing so, we begin to deeply receive His mercies, His promises, His provisions, His beautiful holiness, and His glory that is revealed in His jealous heart for us. These are tremendous steps that form and transform our intimacy with God into a measure of Jesus’ love for the Father.

This understanding of God’s jealousy will impact our spiritual transformation journeys – our souls, our behaviors, our relationships with others and nature, our lifestyles, and our 24/7 worship. A. W. Tozer made a profound statement regarding our knowledge of God.

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.²³

At every level and in all arenas of our lives, noble thoughts of God’s jealous heart can positively impact us, our worship and ethics, if we choose to bask in His jealous love. However, neglecting His jealousy can be perilous to us all. We then essentially give ourselves the freedom to “construct” God to be Who we want Him to be rather than Who He has revealed Himself to be in Scripture. By aligning what we are “*jealous for*” with His jealousy, thereby cleansing the “*jealous of*” portions of our hearts, we align our relationships with God, people and nature in ways that honors God for Who He is. This delights His very heart.

The Apostle John ends his first epistle by saying “My children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). This conclusion to a book that focuses on walking in the light, in God, may seem somewhat strange. However, it is a call that is moored in the jealousy of God as first expressed within the Ten Commandments. Understanding the ways of God’s jealousy will help make our hearts clean and good and keep our hearts from the idols of materialism, sexual addiction, worship of Satan, career prestige, and any other idol our culture or Satan offers.

Our view of the Trinity is greatly impacted by our understanding of godly jealousy. Jesus made a fascinating statement the night before His crucifixion. He proclaimed, “... the world must learn that I love the Father ...”²⁴ Most American Christians grew up learning “Jesus loves me this I know.” Jesus also wanted the world to know “Jesus loves the Father.” Such a declaration of tender love within a Godhead Whose Name is Jealous staggers the mind and the heart. The Father is jealous for the Son and the Spirit; the Son for the Father and the Spirit; the Spirit for the Father and Jesus. Our understanding of the God’s jealousy within the Godhead is extremely limited. But the willingness of the Father to send the Son Who loves the Father to jealously reclaim humanity – such is a scenario that requires the human heart to bow with awe, humility, bewilderment and utter thankfulness. This is a scenario that requires humanity to admit that the jealous love it desires it also does not deserve.

²³ Aiden W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1961), 2.

²⁴ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. (Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 1996, c1984), John 14:31.

As we look back in history, we find others who have used the language of jealousy that indicate profound spiritual transformation. Here are some reflections from Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881).

Not because you are religious, but because I myself have experienced and felt it keenly, I will tell you that in such moments [times of suffering and solitude] one thirsts like “parched grass” for faith and finds it precisely because truth shines in misfortune. I will tell you regarding myself that I am a child of the age, a child of nonbelief and doubt up till now and even (I know it) until my coffin closes. What terrible torments this thirst to believe has cost me and still costs me, becoming stronger in my soul, the more there is in me of contrary reasonings.

And yet, sometimes God sends me moments in which I am utterly at peace. In those moments I have constructed for myself a creed in which everything is clear and holy for me. Here it is: to believe that there is nothing more beautiful, more profound, more sympathetic, more reasonable, more courageous, and more perfect than Christ; and not only is there nothing but I tell myself in *jealous love*²⁵ that never could there be.²⁶

Thus in his sufferings, in his times of peace, in his imaginations of beauty, in his holy moments, Dostoevsky’s experiential reality with Jesus Christ was enshrined with a jealous love. This represents a journey of spiritual transformation for all of us to pay close attention to. A step into this direction would be to examine our jealousies (especially when we are suffering), confront our blatant and subtle spiritual adulteries and repent of them, and align our hearts with God’s jealousy heart as we delight in His presence and our mutual ownership—we are His people and He is our God.

Conclusion

Many questions remain. How can we nourish godly jealousy, of being “*jealous for*”, in a world that exploits sensuality and materialism? How can we keep our hearts from the attractions of ungodly jealousy, of being “*jealous of*”, that is deeply envious of others? As we journey forward as missional communities of believers in our cultural contexts, we would do well to reflect on this important aspect of the nature of God’s love. His Name really is Jealous. And aligning our hearts with His jealous heart will profoundly impact our spiritual transformation journeys.

Written 2009

²⁵ Italics mine.

²⁶ Konstantin Mochulsky, *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work*, translated by Michael A. Minihan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 151-152.



Dear God,
We need to talk about pain and suffering!

preface

When asked *“How would you spend 24 hours alone with God?”* participants of a research project responded they wanted to ask God for an explanation of the problem of suffering in their own lives and in the world. This writing, in the form of a first-person diary, is an attempt to address the question of pain and suffering.

journal entry: day one

Bitterness is not good. It rots the bones.

If bitterness is unresolved anger over an extended time, then I'm bitter. I'm angry about some things that You have allowed to happen in my life, or You chose to inflict on me.

I can be angry that my life just doesn't work the way I want it to. Little things irritate me. Why don't cars work right? Why is the traffic backed up when I'm in a hurry? Why does the neighbor's dog bark when I need to sleep? Little pains gets to me sometimes.

And then there's the other stuff. I regularly see images of disasters—shootings, weather storms, family breakups, global diseases, and terrorism. Why God do people have to suffer?

Suffering touches us all. We all seem to have at least one friend who died on the road or was disabled by an errant driver. Others tried foolish risks and died or are suffering for a lifetime for their own mistakes. And then there are the friends who couldn't take it any more. Suicide is a brutal fact. Why God, do some take their own lives?

I can be angry at family systems. Absent fathers, drunken parents, verbal and physical abuse—the mess goes on and on.

I can get very angry over stories of rape and sexual abuse. It's in our papers everyday. Why can't humanity get their sexual act together? Did You create us flawed?

I can be angry at racism and ethnic judgmentalism. Why can't we just live with such differences that stamp humanity as multifaceted and complex?

I can be angry that we all must die. But really angry that some go through prolonged illnesses that ravage the body just to get to that grim end.

I can be angry that floods, tornados, hurricanes and other natural disasters cause such suffering. You should control such things!

I can be enraged at wars and genocide. Their impact leaves a legacy to generation after generation. Why such horrific suffering?

Each daily news report is almost too much to bear. Each day the personal stories and images of pain are vividly portrayed. So I tune it out—go somewhat numb—silently bitter. That's not a good plan, but it seems my only strategy—apart from constant rage.

I can be angry that You say all this is for good and thereby expect me not to be mad at You. Your definition of good and mine are not the same!

I can be bitter that I have not resolved the few pains in my life within a world that suffers so deeply.

Lord, I need Your help to resolve these issues. I can no longer carry this weight. My bitterness is rotting my bones—and my soul.

journal entry: third month, day five

Lord, my bitterness calls into question Your character. What are Your answers?

I question **Your justice!** How can it be just and right for You to allow these things?

I question **Your love!** How can You say You love me and not protect me?

I question **Your power!** Were You unable to stop these pains?

I question **Your wisdom!** Is there no better way?

I question **Your goodness!** Is all this suffering really good?

I question **Your delight** in my joy! Is my joy of no consequence to You?

Somehow I know deep within my soul that You are just, loving, all powerful, wise and good. But I need some deeper answers right now. At least I long for deeper answers. I can appear pretty happy most of the time, but there is so little true joy deep within my soul. I give You my bitterness and ask for forgiveness and for healing with or without understanding. I long not to be bitter—not to flare with anger when little inconveniences of life rub salt into my open wounds of bitterness. But are You out to get me along with all of humanity?

journal entry: fifth month, day three

I can understand Your justice some. You created a perfect system—without blemish or evil. The introduction of evil into humankind thoroughly polluted Your holy creation. If I had created a perfect system and someone else polluted it, I would rip the pollution out in a most complete manner so as to stop its diffusing effects, and I would neutralize or destroy the polluter. And if simple surgery were not enough, I would destroy the whole batch and begin again. My sense of justice implies that You destroy the human race and so my non-existence would be a much greater blessing than this toll of human pain.

If for extended punishment, You have allowed successive generations to be born in order to exact the greatest possible punishment on the human race, I can understand that this vengeance is adequate justice spread out over the millennia. My state of utter sinfulness is deserving of eternal torment in the eyes of a holy and just God. But where then is this love You say You have?

journal entry: 2nd year, first month, day twelve

I can now understand Your love a little. Love is a choice of the will. Love is an emotion with great power. Love is a commitment with longevity. Love is a jealousy that both possesses and frees. Love is mysterious. I may choose to love something or someone even though another may see no beauty or value in my choice.

Out of pity You may have chosen to continue to love that which You created with great beauty and value. Though now in our polluted state, our value and beauty to You is a matter of preference. You have obviously chosen to value me. You paid such a high price for my soul—the death, resurrection and ascension of Your Son Jesus. You have obviously decided to transform the rottenness of sin with the power, grace and beauty of Your Spirit within me.

But why do these pains continue? Are You a strict schoolmaster determined that I will learn my lesson regardless the extent of pain? I remember a psychology experiment where a person thought he had the power to punish a person with electrical shock if the person did not make the correct choice. Fortunately, it was only an experiment because most participants choose levels of electrical current that would have tormented the subject. Are You like that? Will You torment me into obedience? *Do You not feel my pain and suffer with me? Have You no empathy, no sympathy?*

For years I have questioned Your ability to feel my pain. Maybe it's because I have suppressed so much of it myself. Recently, I came across a verse in Isaiah 63 that says, "In all their distress He too was distressed..." I want You to know this is of great comfort to me. I'm glad I am not the only one crying. Thanks for that simple verse, "Jesus wept." I need the company many nights and days.

Why did it take me so long to recognize You were there with me and felt my pain? Maybe because I could not bear the thought that You felt it and still did not act. Were You too weak? Are You a compassionate Teacher Who is powerless?

Sure, You used pain to draw me to Yourself. I am here now! Are You too weak to change this system and eliminate my pain? Has Satan acquired significant strength that, though he cannot defeat You, You cannot stop all his efforts? Are You in guerrilla warfare with him? You the final Victor, but will he exact many casualties beyond Your power?

journal entry: 3rd year, six month, day twenty-one

I can understand Your power somewhat for I am a parent. There are many times when I can overpower or rescue one of my children, but I choose not to for their good. Since You created all the universe, I can see that You can resolve this issue of pain in an instance. So why don't You?!

I call into question Your wisdom. It doesn't seem or feel good to me. How can You call such restraint of Your power wise? While we're at it, there are a few other events in my life that don't make sense.

Why didn't You just allow that car to run over and kill me when I was three years old?

Thanks, but I don't understand.

Why did You allow a nine-year-old boy to rescue my daughter out of a swimming pool?

Thanks, but I don't understand.

Why have You given me such wonderful friends?

Thanks, but I don't understand.

Why do You allow such pain one moment and such pleasure another? Why do You rescue one time and allow calamity the next? And how can You say You mean it all for good to those who love You? What good is it really? *If You can convince me it is really good, then I'll trust You.* Otherwise, I guess I'll live out my life flinching and distrusting at every little pain in my life while dreading the big pains. I know I have grieved Your Holy Spirit by not receiving His loving embrace. I'm sorry. But I just can't trust yet.

journal entry: 4th year, seventh month, day fifteen

I guess some of us are slower than others. Now I see why You quizzed Job for so long. You asked him many questions to see if he could understand things about the creation. You asked him to give account of his wisdom regarding time, the stars, light, the sea, death, dimensions of the earth, snow, the laws of the heavens, mountain goats and about many other aspects of nature. He could not answer. I think You wanted him to see that Your wisdom was good in regard to creation, and therefore could be trusted—though not entirely understood in the face of Job's sufferings.

Now I think I have a little better understanding of what Paul meant in Ephesians 3 when he said, "... His (God's) intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places..." Your revealed wisdom is amazing.

A lot more is going on than meets my eye. You have chosen to reveal Your justice, love, power, wisdom and goodness through people who have put their trust in You and Your Son. But in so doing this, Your display of wisdom is ultimately understood by heavenly beings. Maybe in time I too will understand it.

For now I can be content with Your wisdom, which I can thoroughly appreciate—the vastness of creation, the beauty of spiritual-sexuality, the boundaries of time on human existence and imagination, the marvels of jealousy, the smell of sweat on a tennis court and the sight of leaves changing colors in the fall, the taste of an apple, the sound of baby crying to be fed. Truly "As the

heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:9.

And regarding pain, I appreciate that You use it to keep me in touch with my utter dependence and in touch with reality. I thank You that You have used pain to draw me to Yourself. I thank You that You have used pain to humble me and keep me from the trap of arrogance and pride, forever lost from You.

Thanks that You give me Your Spirit of power so that I "might have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father..."

Thanks that You are using pain to mold my character, expose Your glory, teach me obedience, and deepen my intimacy with You.

Thanks that I can suffer somewhat as Your Son suffered and so understand His pain and love for me.

Thanks that I can be of comfort to others who have been through similar pains.

Thanks that You are re-opening my feelings and helping me trust more—trusting You and others.

Thanks that You reveal Your glory to others through my pain.

Thanks that I will never completely analyze pain. Thanks that there are many things I cannot understand. It would be a very heavy load to understand all things.

Please forgive my bitterness – my unresolved anger wrapped in deep fears. Please heal these scars of bitterness. Thanks for Your kindness that leads to repentance. Your mercy is truly beyond my understanding and wisdom. Thanks for listening to my rumblings and for feeling my pain.

I know You love me too much to allow no pain to come into my life. You value my soul too much. You see beauty in my soul. Please give me Your strength to accept pain as from Your loving hand and to "Consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trails of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (James 1:2,3).

In the future I hope to "...not let the sun go down while you are still angry." (Eph. 4:26) It has been quite a mess to deal with anger that has festered into bitterness for decades. Help me be quick to identify anger and deal with it without sinning and especially without repressing it.

Thanks that You promise that in heaven "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be *no more death or mourning or crying or pain*, for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev. 21:4). Thanks, I long for that! Please don't let me down. I guess I still have a way to go in trusting You. Sigh.

journal entry: 6th year, eleventh month, day eighteen

I can understand true joy a little now. For within my sinews I am beginning to experience the degree to which You removed my shame. You removed it completely and wrapped me with beauty—the beauty of Jesus!

It has always been difficult for me to fully receive the joy of being Your child and of You delighting in me. You have completely removed my guilt of sin, but I had not perceived that You had also dealt with my shame. I am free from sin. I am free from the consequences of sin: guilt, shame, and spiritual death. Though my body must still endure physical death (and the journey toward it), I can rejoice that my resurrected body will have no obligation to sin!

So I rejoice—I am learning to rejoice. Lord, help me to truly experience the joy of utter dependence on You! Help me enjoy You delighting in me. Help me joy in Your glory, in Your beauty!

I believe the journey into Your jealous love for me is a journey that reconciles my pains into joy, an inexpressible joy. Please lead me in this adventure of experiencing You deeply beyond my wildest imagination!

And dear God ... thanks for listening!

First written in 2001; edited various times

Toward a Biblical View of Suffering

Western culture is designed to anesthetize us from pain. Audio-visual entertainment, drug addiction, amusement parks, get rich quick schemes, even the health and wealth gospel—these call us to numb ourselves to pain and not learn the lessons of suffering.

The Good News is for the afflicted (Isaiah 61:1-3). From beginning to end the Scriptures deal with the problem of pain and suffering. But what good is pain? Pain entered the world through sin (Gen. 3:16-19) and will be absent in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:4). For the present, pain is a reality for every person. But what good is it?

What would our world be like with sin and no pain? Would we not remain in our sin with no motivation to come to God? Then when judgment came, all would be lost. God has given us pain as a reminder of our deep dependency on Him. Adam and Eve had two reminders of their dependency on God. These were the needs to sleep and eat. Both of these should have helped them resist the temptation of Satan to "be like God"—to be independent. Having fallen into sin, the first couple were given a new reminder of their utter dependency. Pain (first in the form of a conscience of guilt and shame) became a part of their lives and the lives of their offspring forever. Later, God gave Moses the Law as a further schoolmaster to serve as an unwavering standard (for our consciences which we often sear) to help bring people to God—to expose their utter dependence on Him for life and godliness. When we break this Law, a conscience of guilt pricks us. We now have sleep, food, conscience, the Law, and pain in various forms as constant reminders to us of our need for God. These the Holy Spirit uses along with the unity and love of believers and godly husband-wife relationships (which imperfectly exemplify Christ's relationship with His bride the Church), and creation to draw us to Jesus. Our pains and sufferings can be wonderful gifts from God. Without them we might never embrace our desperate need for Jesus Christ or His wonderful love for us.

Pain exposes our basic needs for security, significance, and strength. Pain focuses these needs and draws us to intimacy with the only One who can meet them. Our need for strength is met by *faith* in His promises and power. Our need for significance is met in *hope* of His judgment and mercy. Our need for security is met in His *love*. "And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love." (I Corinthians 13:13)

The result of these fulfilled needs is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The emotions and character of love, joy, and peace bring forth the actions of patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22,23).

However for most of us, we do not immediately go to God with our pain. James 1:2-4 is often not a reality in our lives. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Instead of joy, we grapple with emotions of shame, guilt, anger, sadness, fear, pride, and righteous anger and mercy. Here are some possible scenarios of how we handle our pain from the point of view of the predominate emotion we may have.

SHAME (which can progress to self-contempt and depression).

"I'm worthless and detestable. God shouldn't be involved with me or love me. I'm unworthy of love. I'm shameful. However, I must be in control. I must SEAR/DENY my shame. That way I'll reduce this pain and increase my pleasure." A key Biblical characters to study are Adam and Eve (also see Ezekiel 16).

GUILT (which can progress to self-contempt and depression).

"I've done morally wrong things. God will reject me. However, I must be in control. I must SEAR/DENY my guilt. That way I'll reduce this pain and increase my pleasure." A key Biblical character to study is Judas.

ANGER (which can progress to contempt, hatred, bitterness, rage, and depression).

"God is involved with me, but He isn't good to me. He isn't just. I don't like Him! I must TAKE CHARGE of my own life. I can reduce my pain and increase my pleasure by myself." A key Biblical character to study is Job.

SADNESS (which can progress to anguish, and depression).

"God isn't involved. He doesn't care about my pain. He doesn't feel my pain. Why have You abandoned me God? I must be in control of my own life. I must ABANDON all hope of relief. That way I'll reduce my pain and increase my pleasure." A key Biblical character to study is Martha in John 11.

FEAR (which can progress to anxiety, terror, and depression).

"God is involved, but He isn't powerful enough to help me in this situation. I can't trust Him. I must be in control. I must MANIPULATE to get my own way, to reduce my pain and increase my pleasure." A key Biblical characters to study are Job and Peter.

All the above emotions can lead to depression. At its extreme, depression is ambivalence (apathy) toward life—"It doesn't really matter what happens" and embracing death—"I'm better off dead, non-existent." A key Biblical character to study is Joseph in Genesis 37-50. Be sure to note his conclusion in Gen. 50:20.

PRIDE (which can progress to total self deception).

"God is wrong. I am right. I can become like God. I have the potential. My pain is totally undeserved. I will blame God for it. He is at fault. I'm in control of my destiny. I will conquer these pain in my life." A key Biblical character to study is King Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel.

RIGHTEOUS ANGER AND MERCY (which can lead to good acts of force).

"God is on my side. I need to resist this evil which causes pain with force and mercy." A key Bible characters to study are Ezra and Nehemiah. (See Ezra 9,10 and Nehemiah 13.) We must be careful to not quickly conclude that our anger is righteous. James 1:19,20 says, "My dear brothers take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life God desires."

LEVELS OF PAIN

In order to understand pain and suffering, we need to understand various levels of awareness of pain. Just as we can sear our consciences to be numb to evil, we can also sear our emotions to the awareness of pain. Here are some typical levels of awareness.

LEVEL ONE Living through the pain.....No Denial

"I'm fully aware of the pain and living through it. "

LEVEL TWO Justifying the pain.....Some Denial

"They didn't mean it that way. He must have had some good reason to do this to me."

LEVEL THREE Normalizing the pain.....Lots of Denial

"It really wasn't that bad. Everybody has these pains. This is no big deal."

LEVEL FOUR Isolating myself with my pain..... Mostly Denial

"No one else I know has pain like this. Something must be wrong with me. I'm abnormal. I need to hide my pain from others."

LEVEL FIVE Traumatized by pain.....Total Denial

"I don't remember anything. It didn't happen. I'm not sure it's even real."

PASSIVE ACCEPTANCE OF SUFFERING OR OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD?

One might conclude that suffering is good and should not be resisted but rather be embraced as the great purifier of the soul. Suffering can lead to good. But that doesn't mean that the cause of suffering is good.

For instance, Hitler's racism policies produced horrific suffering. Those policies were evil. They violated universal moral absolute truths of justice based in the dignity of all humanity before the Creator God. Such evil must be overcome. Romans 12:21 says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

The question is what good will overcome an evil. Will it be the good of force (Romans 13:1-5) or the good of kindness (Romans 2:4)? That is a prayerful consideration for every believer. There is no formula answer. God may lead one believer to one conclusion and another to the alternative. Both may be right. The combination of force and kindness may be what is required to overcome a particular evil. (See Ezra 9,10 and Nehemiah 13.)

Pain is neither good or evil. It can be caused by good or evil depending on the intent and rightness of its origin. It can lead to either good or evil according to our response.

We must remember that the evil which must be overcome may lie within us or be outside of us. Often God is in the process of confronting evil on both fronts with the good of force or kindness or both simultaneously.

WHY WE CAN "CONSIDER IT PURE JOY" AND "OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD"?

Below are thought processes that can help us work through our pain and suffering in order to "consider it pure joy" and "overcome evil with good". (Peter 3:8-13, Revelation)

As a sinner before a holy God, I am worthy of total and immediate destruction and torment (hell) apart from Christ's work in my life. I deserve nothing better than these present pains and continuous sufferings—in fact I deserve far worse. This is a confirmation of all my shame—I deserve not to be loved. I should be unlovable before a holy God. (Rom. 3:23, 6:23)

By God's mercy I receive much better. Life on earth and a promise of eternal life with Him and without pain. His mercy is extended to me out of His genuine deep love for me. This love is incomprehensible—irrational from a fallen human reasoning point of view. (John 3:16)

God is in the process of transforming me into His image. He uses pain in this process. (II Cor. 3:18, James 1:2-4, Heb. 12:1-13)

This may seem sadistic, but I know God is good and caring because He sent His Son to suffer and die for my sins. (Romans 5:8, 8:32)

Often God delivers my body and soul from evil. But sometimes He may allow my body to undergo immense pain. During these times He never forsakes my soul. He protects my soul. (Heb. 11:32-40, Heb. 13:5-6, Psalm 121:7-8, I Peter 4:19)

God is just and in the end of time His will right all wrongs. (Revelation)

God was good in creating a world where evil could come into existence because He gave me and all humankind the immeasurable gift of His image—including a will to choose. This gift cost Him His Son. (II Cor. 9:15)

God feels my every pain and mourns with me. He is a compassionate God. (II Cor. 1:3-4)

God is not incapable of overcoming evil with the good of force. He may first be overcoming evil with the good of kindness, and then He will overcome evil with power in the final victory. (Rom 2:4, 12:21, II

God wants me to overcome evil with good. I need to determine before Him if the evil is in me or someone else or both. And before God I must discern the best course of action—repentance, kindness, force or all three.

Though others may have meant to harm me, God has used even this for my good and the good of others. And so I can forgive my offenders and show them kindness. (Gen. 50:15-21)

I too have often offended others and caused them pain. I can ask forgiveness from God and receive it. And I can ask forgiveness from others and they may or may not forgive me. (I John 1:9, Matt. 5:23-26)

I need not be in control of my life for God is good, powerful, just and loving. In fact, I do harm to myself when I seek to control (save) my life. My clinging for control is sin (unbelief, arrogance, terror). (Luke 9:23-24)

I now surrender myself to God. I trust Him to care for my soul even though my body is in a constant process of deterioration through aging and afflictions. (Rom. 12:1-2, II Cor. 4:16)

I look forward to a new incorruptible body, eternal rewards, being like Jesus, and a pain free heaven. Most of all I look forward to clearly beholding the Triune God and being embraced by Him. (I Cor. 15:35-58, II Tim. 4:7-8, I John 3:2, Rev. 21:1-4, I Cor. 13:12, Rev. 5:9-14)

I no longer need to fear people and what they can do to me for my soul is safe with my Creator. (Psalm 112:7, Psalm 56:3-4, I Peter 4:19)

I can face my pains and not deny them for God is the protector of my soul. I can feel without going numb in order to survive because I am more than a conqueror of evil. (Rom. 8:37)

I can suffer wrongfully knowing that God sees and rewards everyone without partiality. (I Peter 2:18-25)

I choose to resist sin for I recognize the natural consequences of sin is pain. (I Peter 2:18-25)

I can like God for His is good, powerful, just, loving and beautiful. (Psalm 136:1-3)

I can like God Who has made me and positioned me in the process of transforming into the image of Jesus. (Isaiah 45:9-10, II Cor. 3:18)

I can consider all trials pure joy, not because I deny the pain and suffering, but because I embrace the joy of the heavenly reward and the joy of God protecting my soul now. (James 1:2-4, Heb. 12:2, I Peter 4:19)

I can now show kindness and compassion to others who suffer. (II Cor. 1:3-4)

PASSAGES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Genesis 3, 37-50	Job
Psalms	Lamentations
I Peter	Revelation

APPLICATION QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

List the main painful events you have had in life from childhood to present. Then list the primary emotions you had at the time of these pains. Evaluate each event in light of the levels of denying pain.

How do you feel toward God in light of your pains? Do you like the way He has dealt with you?

Is there any anger in your life? If so, what should you do?

Is there any sorrow in your life? If so, what should you do?

Is there any guilt in your life? If so, what should you do?

Is there any shame in your life? If so, what should you do?

Is there any fear in your life? If so, what should you do?

Is there any pride in your life? If so, what should you do?

Is there any righteous anger in your life? If so, what should you do?

Do you like yourself? Explain.

Do you like God? Explain.

Examine your relationship with the primary people in your childhood—parents, grandparents, siblings, teachers, relatives, peers, abusers, etc. Are there unresolved issues in any of these relationships? If so, what steps of actions will you take?

How would you answer a person (Christian or non-Christian) who asks you why God has allowed so much suffering to occur in his/her country and his/her life?

Written 1996

God's Joy and Sorrow: A Journal Entry

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." John 15:11

"And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." Luke 22: 44

Dear Lord, Your joy is complete. Your sorrow is complete. I know so little of either.

You saw the world was "good" and Adam and Eve as "very good." Goodness thrills You. Then You saw the depletion of Your image in humanity reduced to a gross distortion of Your reflection. And You wept silently, revealing little of Your grief. Only millennia later did You more fully reveal Your sorrow at humanity's condition—when You turned Your face from Your Son.

Why Lord were You so silent so long? Was it You weren't grieving but rather seething with hate that we screwed things up for You and now You would have to come fix them? Or was the pain of an Almighty God too incomprehensible for humanity to grasp without the embodied Man of Sorrows, Jesus?

Lord, You are eternal and transcendent. The mind You gave humanity only dimly perceives Your infinitude and Your embedded infinity within and through Your Son. Goodness permeates throughout Your Triune non-created existence. And goodness is the basis of Your joy. You Lord, define joy by Your goodness. You Lord, are eternally joyful for You are eternally good. And I worship You, Lord.

But Your sorrow arrests me. I experience sorrow often. Things just don't work here on this earth as I would wish for them to. My imagined outcomes are often realized as moderately undesired outcomes. My vision for the future is so blinded by the fog of limited perception. I perceive so little of my world and precious little of Yours—in fact, only that which You reveal to me. I also perceive little of true goodness. Where can I look? Certainly not to me or to humanity. And when I look to You, I see through the fog of my undesired outcomes blocking my pleasure. Pleasure sometimes arouses me to think I am experiencing true joy. True goodness is very illusive. My sorrow is mostly based in the pain of unrealized pleasure. Your sorrow is based in the pain of unrealized goodness that is still redeemable as You offer this choice. We are worlds apart. And yet I sorrow and You sorrow.

Lord, if I could sorrow the way You sorrow, would I then joy the way You joy? Your joy is complete. It is as continuous as Your goodness. Your sorrow is part of Your goodness—not the antithesis of joy. You sorrow in joy. You joy in sorrow. My life is impoverished. It knows so little of Your depth of joy and sorrow. I sorrow or joy. I weep or laugh. Seldom do I weep laughing or laugh weeping. I'm in pain or pleasure and sometimes pain is pleasurable but most often pleasure is not immediately painful—that usually takes the work of longer-term consequences. [However, some physical pains can be interpreted as immediate pleasure such as those that occur in sports.]

Is that the secret of Your joy-sorrow? Your ability to perceive the beginning from the end and the end from the beginning. Your ability to transcend time. Can I too gaze at the end, if only dimly? You Lord are the Sovereign King of the Kingdom, Father of the family of God. It is into eternity with You that we go. This world is grievous. It requires a Man of Sorrows. And You, Jesus, were sent by Your

Father to redeem that for which You are jealous for in order that we might know that You love the Father.

Such mysteries excite my mind and overwhelm my soul. It is into these mysteries I plunge and begin to sorrow and joy with You. Dear Lord, bend my soul to sorrow and joy with You!

Sometimes I find myself weeping for humanity—not in depression or despair, but in sorrow. I think this is a positive sign of You transforming me. Sometimes I feel more depressed, with or without despair, than sorrowful. May despair not wrangle my heart—I'm sure it doesn't wrangle Yours. I think this despair is a true lack of faith in Your Sovereign Joy as Redeemer—the Transformer of evil and Restorer of goodness.

Lord, You are the Lover of my soul. Only You can pierce my soul with true healing sorrow and joy. If only this change were complete, my transformation would be also. Slowly Lord, continue Your work, but only slowly for I find myself cowardly placing pleasure before goodness all the time.

And today, while it is still called today, before You resolve the issue of presence (time in personal space) with Your omnipresence that transcends time—enjoy Your joy and grieve Your sorrow! And Lord show Your joy and sorrow quietly to humanity for we run scared of Your power and goodness that contrasts our dependency and depravity. And show Yourself with noisily joy and sorrow in the heavenlies for they stand in Your awesome full presence robed in goodness—Your goodness that overlays and springs forth true joy and sorrow.

“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” Colossians 2: 15.

Dear Lord, thanks that You don't stop. Thanks that You do not merge joy and sorrow to form ambivalence—numbness—toward Your creation. We would and do anesthetize our pain with numbing strategies that also severely limit our sensitivity to joy and can obliterate our thirst for goodness. The sharpness of Your sorrow at Adam and Eve's descent remains fresh to You for time does not diminish Your Presence. The joy of You disarming evil at the cross cascades with the Man of Sorrow's descent into hell and ascension into heaven after a brief stop that shattered the grief and joy paradigms of Your disciples.

The story of the Prodigal Father (Lavishing in Joy-Sorrow and Goodness) and His Prodigal Son (Lavishing in Pleasure and Repentance and Receiving Mercy) and His Other Prodigal Son (Lavishing in Self-Righteousness and Distain of Goodness) goes like this:

"So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded

with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'" Luke 15:20-32.

Lord, it is Your heart I seek. Not because I am worthy, but because I am weak and unworthy. This weak unworthiness isn't a worthy motive to pursue Your joyful, sorrowing face. Only the motive of pure worship honors the glory You deserve. And to worship You with pure motives, even that requires Your permission and power. Yet still You allow me to come close to Your face. You run toward me and bring a robe to cover my shame, a ring establish my identity and authority, and sandals to dignify my goes! (Imagine my difficulty in putting these back on the morning after the feast.)

My words are the words of a contoured mind that ponders the march of ants across the ceiling in the early morning hours. The beauty of Your joy-sorrow reality is perceived more clearly by those who love being loved by You and love the way You love and love to love and love to love the way You like to be loved by prodigal sons and daughters.

Written in 2007

Giving Motives and Spiritual Transformation

INTRODUCTION

The American dream is substantially about gaining material wealth in the pursuit of happiness. Within that context, those in ministry ask and receive donations to serve Christ in their area of calling. However, it is easy to slide into cultural motives without examining the Scriptures. This essay briefly explores various motives often associated with asking, giving and receiving and links these motives to our spiritual transformation journey.

ASKING

Asking out of our need. We often ask out of need. The story of the persistent widow asking the judge for help is an example of the validity of this motive (Luke 18:1-8). God knows we have needs and He wants us to ask Him as opposed to simply doing it on our own.

Asking for the sake of mission in the Kingdom. Consider the story of the seventy-two disciple sent out two by two. They were instructed to stay at one house “for the worker deserves his wages” (Luke 10:1-7). Being paid as a minister of the Gospel is a good and right thing—and often requires asking.

Asking out of greed. Greed is a powerful force in the human heart. We want more. Judas wanted money from the sale of perfume (John 12:4-6). Our lusts drive us to ask for that which is not good for us (James 4:3-6). And God’s answer is often no. But sometimes He does allow our greedy requests—and the consequences to the soul that follow.

Asking by begging. Lazarus begged at the gate of the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). And we can beg directly or indirectly around people of means. When in dire need, begging is an acceptable way of requesting. But our begging must really be before God.

Asking as a “spiritual whore.” Similar to begging, we can become as whores. Ezekiel 16 and 23 refers to the nation of Israel in this manner. We can cease our worship of the Most High God and run to others of wealth for our security. We can slink up to them and compromise our values for their money.

Asking out of authority/right to do so. Some can ask because they have a right to ask. The Apostle Paul had this authority as a minister of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:11-18).

Asking as a ministry to the givers. Paul encouraged the church at Philippi to give for their benefit (Philippians 4:10-20). It is good to instruct others regarding giving—for their own good. The good of giving includes the mitigation of greed within our hearts.

Asking for others in need, especially the poor. Often we ask for ourselves. Sometimes it is appropriate to ask for others (see Galatians 2:10 and Acts 5:34-35). The poor need our help. We can ask others to engage with us to help them.

Not asking in order not to be a burden. Though one may have the right to ask for support, they must discern whether or not it is better to not ask (see 2 Corinthians 11:7-12 and 2 Corinthians 12:14-18).

GIVING

Giving as a tax obligation. The Israelites offered blemished sheep to God to fulfill their obligation in Malachi 1:6-14. Such a gift was not received well.

Giving a tithe in respectful citizen. Giving to God is not a required taxation of citizenship, but rather a privilege of a heart that recognizes the greatness and goodness of our God. We can honor God with our gifts as respectful citizens in His kingdom (see Malachi 1:6-14 and Malachi 3:8-18).

Giving as a steward investing. We are stewards in the Kingdom of God. God is the owner. As He allows us to steward possessions, we are called to invest these in appropriate ways (Luke 19:11-27).

Giving as an undeserving servant. The Roman Centurion who built a synagogue understood his place. He was an undeserving servant giving to the One Who is deserving of all honor (Luke 7:1-10).

Giving as a needy person. We are always needy people and sometimes we give as needy people. The widow offered gifts out of her poverty—all she had (Luke 21:1-4). This kind of giving Jesus praised for it requires such reliance on the God of Heaven in the face of such despair poverty.

Giving for praise before people. Self-righteous givers receive their reward in full from people's praise. Such is the assessment by Jesus of those who give for praise (Matthew 6:1-4).

Giving as a repentant sinner. Zacchaeus, the tax collector, gave half of his goods to the poor and paid back four times those he had cheated (Luke 19:1-10). Sometimes we give as an extension of confession.

Giving as a fearful unfaithful servant. The parable of the shrewd manager who gave financial favors to win friends in times of need seems like a bad motive to give (Luke 16:1-15). However, it is motivated out of fear of the Master Who will judge. Such fear and giving can be an acknowledgement of sin and an act of repentance.

Giving a faithful servant. Jesus rejects the idea that we can serve two masters—God and money (Matthew 6:24). Our giving is a reflection of our love. We are called to love God and called not to be lovers of money.

Giving as a liar. Ananias and Sapphira were punished for lying about their gift (Acts 5:1-11). God wants truth in our hearts and actions.

Giving as a business investment. Sometimes gifting is framed as a business investment. This is not a gift. To give implies to relinquish control, just as Jesus gave himself for us. The children of Israel were called to give from their hearts (Exodus 25:1-9). Giving within the Kingdom of God as a business investment is contrary to the ways of the Kingdom.

Giving as a sower. Paul encouraged the Corinthian church to give as a sower who will later reap generously (2 Corinthians 9:6-15). The motive of giving to get, however, can be a slippery slope. We sow in giving; but to assume our reaping will be financial is not always the case. God may give us something far more precious—character of contentment.

Giving as an expression of a spiritual gift. Some in the Body of Christ have the gift of giving. They are encouraged to exercise that spiritual gift (Romans 12:8).

Giving an extravagant gift as worshipper. The story of the woman pouring very expensive perfume on Jesus' feet prior to His death illustrates giving as an act of worship (Matthew 26:6-13). Worship giving should be our primary motive in giving. We may start with other motives, but eventually our hearts should move toward giving as an act of worship.

RECEIVING

Both askers and givers are receivers from God. Both are called to be thankful and content (Philippians 4:10-20). The essence of Christian faith is receiving from the One Who has given. It is blessed for us to give; it is humbling to receive. God calls us to this blessed humility of giving and receiving as we grow in the likeness of His Son.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The spiritual ministry of asking, giving, and receiving calls both the asker and the giver.

- To a deeper trust in God as Provider—a true act of worship
- To consider the meaning of life from an eternal perspective rather than a materialistic viewpoint
- To actions of love by meeting spiritual and physical needs of people
- Into the jealous heart of God, Who calls us to love Him, not the idol of money
- To the way of the cross, of sacrifice
- Into a character of humility and generosity and away from self-righteousness and greed
- To embrace our identity in Jesus as his disciples, friends and bride
- To pray for God's guidance and grace
- To partner in building the Kingdom of God within a specific arena of ministry

This is a spiritually transformative journey for askers, givers, and receivers. In our culture where materialism is an idol, God is calling us into this transformation. To ignore this issue of the heart is to slide into the ways of our culture. As we embrace God as Provider, we are content with asking, receiving and giving for He is our life and sustainer in this world and the next.

Evidences for the Existence of God

1. Ontological Argument – Thought of God Apologetic
 - a. The idea of God implies there is a God
2. Cosmological Argument – First Cause Apologetic
 - a. Everything begun owes its existence to some producing cause ... God is the first cause
3. Teleological Argument – Intelligent Design Apologetic
 - a. A design infers a designer
4. Anthropological Argument
 - a. Man's constituent nature demands a higher being whose nature exceeds and transcends man.
5. Moral Argument
 - a. Man's intellectual and moral nature must have had for its author an intellectual being.
6. Dialectic of desire – Need-of-God Apologetic
 - a. Man desires a God, therefore there is a God.
7. Biblical Apologetic
 - a. Statements of God's existence (Genesis 1:1)
 - b. Continuity of Scripture
 - i. Diversity of issues with agreement over time and authors
 - ii. Preservation of Scripture
 - c. Prophecies – Historical Apologetic
 - i. Israel
 - ii. Jesus
 - iii. Second Coming
 - iv. Miracles
 - d. Life and Work of Christ
 - i. John 6:46
 - ii. John 14:7
 - e. Pre-existence of Christ
 - i. John 8:14
 - f. Biblical Answers for Life
 - i. Issues and sufficiency
 - g. Archeology
 - i. Dead Sea Scrolls
8. Personal Experiences
 - a. Deliverance Apologetic
 - i. Deliverance from evil
 - ii. Fox hole mentality
 - b. Relational and Holiness Apologetic
 - i. Love and truth in community
9. Others' Experiences
 - a. Historical ... Apostles
 - b. Present ... believers and non-believers

10. Preservation of Christianity and Israel
11. Beauty Apologetic
 - a. Beauty in nature, relationships and sexuality
12. Paradox Apologetic
 - a. I believe though I see apparent paradoxes
13. Symbolic Apologetic
 - a. The Miracle of language
 - b. Meaningful symbols for objects
 - c. Silent language points toward God (Ps 19:1-6)
14. Symbolic Superstructure Apologetic
 - a. Triune embedded infinities superstructures
15. Beyondness Apologetic
 - a. Eternity and “Beyondness” Planted in Our Hearts and Minds
16. Inability to Prove God Doesn't Exist

Note: First six arguments from So You Don't Believe in God, Russell V. DeLong, Baker Book House, 1976

Apologetics for the Head and Heart

<i>Apologetics That Moderns May Respond Well To</i>	<i>PROJECTED POSTMODERN RESPONSES</i>
<p>Biblical Apologetic <i>(Internal consistency of Divine Revelation)</i></p> <p>Intelligent Design Apologetic <i>(Order over chaos – both physically & psychologically)</i></p> <p>First Cause Apologetic <i>(God is before all and caused all.)</i></p> <p>Thought-of-God Apologetic <i>(Since humankind thinks about God, He exist.)</i></p>	<p>Reject absolute truth claims – regardless of consistency.</p> <p>Open to design but believe quantum chaos is fundamental.</p> <p>Can believe God first caused all and possibly left it all alone.</p> <p>Imagination is not viewed as certain reality, rather it is viewed as individual & culturally constructed reality.</p>
<p>Historical Apologetic <i>(Prophetic fulfillments regarding Jesus & Israel)</i></p> <p>Need-of-God Apologetic <i>(Since humankind needs/desires God, He exist.)</i></p> <p>Cause & Effect Apologetic <i>(There are consequences for what I do. God must ultimately controls these consequences.)</i></p> <p>Deliverance Apologetic <i>(God help me now! “Fox Hole Apologetic”)</i></p> <p>Relational & Holiness Apologetic <i>(Love & truth in community)</i></p> <p>Beauty Apologetic <i>(Beauty in Nature, Relationships, Sexuality)</i></p> <p>God-Presence Apologetic <i>(I experience the Presence of God)</i></p>	<p>Intrigued that historical occurrences, especially the fulfillment of prophecies, might be evidence of God.</p> <p>Need, without some deliverance from need, is not compelling. The idea that we can impact the heart of God and that He will affirm us is compelling.</p> <p>Cause and effect is suspect. Probabilistic cause and effect within a chaos field don't require a God.</p> <p>Always a powerful apologetics. Sometimes God doesn't respond the way we plead. Can go either way – acceptance or rejection of God.</p> <p>Acceptance with heart but uncertain with head; open to loving friends and marriages but limited commitment; open to wholeness</p> <p>Acceptance with heart but uncertain with head; limited commitment</p> <p>Acceptance of experience but commitment is uncertain as experience varies.</p>
<p>Paradox Apologetic <i>(I believe though I see apparent contradictions.)</i></p> <p>Symbolic Apologetic <i>(Language point toward God – Psalm 19:1-6; miracle of language: meaningful symbols for objects)</i></p> <p>Symbolic Superstructure Apologetic <i>(Triune embedded infinities superstructures)</i></p> <p>Beyondness Apologetics <i>(Thoughts of transcendence beyond self leads ultimately to God)</i></p>	<p>Paradox is the language of postmodern thought; the paradox of a God is acceptable but non-committal</p> <p>Open to such metaphorical reasoning, but believe chaos is central; marriage & the ordinary can be powerful symbol</p> <p>Might believe in a Triune God and thus defragment life or rebel yet still believe the evidence points toward a Triune God</p> <p>Can perceive a rationality for other faiths and that the Triune God is the God of all gods</p>

Ralph C. Ennis, June 2005

Many Ways to Jesus— One Way to the Father

There is one way to the Father—Jesus, Who is God (John 14:6). But there are many ways to Jesus.

In 1976 I shared Christ with a young college student who had moved to the USA from Taiwan at age 10. After studying the Scriptures for four weeks, I asked him if he would like to trust Christ. His reply changed me! He said it sounded like I was asking him to trust Christ out of fear. Immediately the Holy Spirit gave me words—“Do it out of respect”. He thought for about 10 seconds and said yes. Today he is still walking with God!

I realized then that people come to Christ through different reasoning processes. The Gospel in the face of fear would never appeal to this student. But to appeal to his sense of respecting God and Christ was something well within the reasoning processes of his mind and heart.

In this essay I outline various ways, i.e. reasoning processes, to Jesus. This is not meant to be exhaustive but rather to suggest that many approaches to Jesus exist and only one approach to the Father exist. But note that Jesus did not proclaim that He is the only way to God. He proclaimed something far more radical. He proclaimed that He *is* God and that He is the only way to the *Father!*

1. Accuracy: Jesus is truth

- a. “Evidence That Demands a Verdict” type of reasoning.

2. Intuitive: Jesus seems to be plausible

- a. Matthew 2:1, 2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.
- b. It seemed to be plausible to the Magi that the star referred to the baby King.

3. Power: Jesus can bless me

- a. John 4:12-15 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who *gave us the well and drank* from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

4. Powerlessness: Jesus will heal me

- a. Luke 8:43-48 And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, but *no one could heal her*. She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched

him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

5. Good: Jesus is good

- a. Mark 10:17-18 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "*Good teacher,*" he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good--except God alone.

6. Evil: Jesus will overcome evil

- a. Luke 9:42, 43a Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But *Jesus rebuked the evil spirit*, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.

7. Space: In time and place, God is involved everywhere

- a. Acts 17:26-28 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and *he determined the times set for them and the exact places* where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

8. Freedom: Jesus can free me from slavery to sin

- a. John 8:33-36 32 They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if *the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*

9. Bonding: Jesus will be with me and met my need for intimacy—He will be my friend

- a. Luke 10:39-42 She had a sister called Mary, *who sat at the Lord's feet listening* to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

10. Shame: Jesus will take away my shame

- a. Mark 7:26-29 The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. "First let the children eat all they want," he told her, "for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." "Yes, Lord," she replied, "but *even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.*" Then he told her, "For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter."
 - b. Guilt (of behavior): Jesus forgives my sin
 - c. John 16:8a When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin ...

11. Guilt: Jesus will forgive my sins

- a. John 8:10,11 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

12. Honor: Jesus is worthy of honor as One Who has authority and He can honor me

- a. Matthew 8:9, 10 For *I myself am a man under authority*, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.
- b. Mark 10:35-37 Then James and John, the sons of, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. They replied, "*Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.*"

13. Trust: Jesus is trustworthy

- a. 1 Timothy 1: 15 Here is a *trustworthy saying* that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst.

14. Fear: To reject Jesus is eternally dangerous

- a. Luke 23:40-43 But the other criminal rebuked him. "*Don't you fear God,*" he said, "*since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.*" Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

15. Jealousy: The core affection of my life is Jesus (not money, wife, parents, etc.)

- a. Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or *he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.* You cannot serve both God and Money.

16. Desired Identity: I will be a new creation in Jesus, a child of God, a citizen of heaven, etc.

- a. 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *he is a new creation*; the old has gone, the new has come!

17. Undesired Identity: I can avoid being who I am if I trust in Jesus

- a. 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; *the old has gone*, the new has come!

18. Meaningful: In God, life is meaningful

- a. The appeal of Ecclesiastes
- b. Eccl. 12:13,14

19. Meaningless: Life is meaningless without God

- a. The appeal of Ecclesiastes

20. Thriving: In Jesus, I can succeed in life

- a. Romans 8:37 No, in all these things we are *more than conquerors* through him who loved us

21. Surviving: In Jesus, I have hope of surviving

- a. 2 Cor 4:16-17 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

22. Creative Harmony: In Jesus, one can begin to live a harmonious life

- a. 1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you, *live in harmony with one another*; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

Since people reason with different decision preferences as described above, we who bring the good news of Jesus, should increasingly learn to appeal to those varied preferences even as Jesus did in His earthly ministry. [For more on decision preferences see Wharf and Bearing VII.]

Note: All above italics are mine.

Written January 2005; edited 2013

Sacred Mysteries

A Glimpse of the Triune God and His Ways

INTRODUCTION

This work is only in outline form. It is a brief guide to a lifetime of experiencing the sacred mysteries of the Triune God.

How to read this work

We often don't have the time to read longer works or outlines of works because so much information is available and comes our way. But can we make time to *read and pray through a work* that helps us to better understand and experience the mysteries of our Triune God?

About a glimpse ...

It is not a detail picture, but rather an unfolding glimpse for a lifetime of exploration. It's not about a full theology of God, but rather a few dazzling aspects of the wisdom and beauty of the glorious God and His kingdom.

What are "sacred mysteries" about?

Sacred mysteries are about exploring the glory God has concealed for us to find. Proverbs 25:2 "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings."

What "sacred mysteries" are NOT about?

Sacred mysteries are not a pathway to Gnosticism—a special knowledge of enlightenment that doesn't bring us to worship the Triune God in spirit and in truth.

Why are sacred mysteries important?

Am I living out of a formula or a mystery within a relationship with the Author of Creation? What if we had NO mystery in life? What impact would that have on our souls? Mysteries nourish awe, wonder and beauty within us and help moderate our drive for power and our pride in knowledge as we submit to the Author of those mysteries. As leaders in the kingdom, we need to continually explore sacred mysteries or else we may become flat, boring and dehumanized with stunted imagination—in the clutches of fast paced agendas for utilitarian ends.

My hope is that you will be enthralled with the Living Triune God for a lifetime.

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy ... (1 Peter 1: 8 NIV)

GOD AND ORIGINAL DESIGN

1. Mystery of the Triune God

- a. Three-in-One is a paradoxical spatial thought
- b. God is inscrutable, yet knowable as He has revealed Himself in Spirit, nature, Scripture and consciousness

- c. God's soul – 2 passages
- d. God in and beyond time
- e. Omnipresence of God throughout time that He is not bound to
- f. City of the Living God—True Home/ Place/Space

2. Mystery of physical reality—the present universe

- a. Creation as instantaneous or progressive
 - i. One bang or three-in-one blast?
 - 1. Forming diversity from uniformity in a zero resistant environment
 - 2. Signature footprint of the Triune God as Creator
 - 3. Superstructure apologetics
- b. Energy and matter as interchangeable
- c. Space and time ... are they interchangeable or just intrinsically linked? What are the implications?
- d. Created, linear, non-sequential time wrapped in eternity
- e. Eternity wrapped in linear, non-sequential time
 - i. Beyondness - we can think about eternity
- f. Space as discrete and continuous and overlapping
 - i. Spacelets as 3-D bits with connected and overlapping edges

3. Mystery of biological life

- a. Life from composite chemicals
- b. Seeds die to multiply life
- c. Asexual and sexual reproduction—increased fragility of increased complexity
- d. Dramatic life change: seasons of life and growth cycles

4. Mystery of multiple realities

- a. Eternity before the creation of time
- b. Heaven and physical universe
- c. Physics of other realities including heaven
 - i. Dimensions, place and time
 - ii. Christ walking on water, through door, transfiguration, etc.

5. Mystery of godly jealous love

- a. The Lord His name is Jealous—Exodus 34:14
- b. Two become one—SOS 8:6
- c. A symbolic meaning of sexuality that transcends sexual expressions
- d. All goodness springs from jealous love and jealous love is a goodness of God

6. Mystery of conscious reality and language

- a. Awareness of self, beyond and time wrapped in eternity
- b. Wisdom, within language, was “brought forth/birtherd” before the world began – Proverbs 8:22-24

- c. Human perception of space and images linked to words and analogies
- d. Relational truth vs. modern and postmodern views
 - i. Must trust, abandon, commit, obey and thus experience to know
- e. Linear AND mosaic thinking—both make “sense”
- f. Logic of non-contradiction AND paradoxical thinking
 - i. Apologetics for modern and postmodern minds
 - ii. Superstructure apologetics

7. Mystery of beauty and ugliness vs. diversity in forms and functions

- a. Beauty as a value ... as precious
- b. Beauty as creative harmony of jealous spatial realities and imaginations
- c. Ugliness as distorted harmony of envy spatial realities and imaginations
- d. Beauty and ugliness assigned to diversity in forms and functions

8. Mystery of extreme violence in nature

- a. Violence that evokes a sense of awe and beauty within the human soul (e.g. exploring stars or fireworks)
- b. Violence that evokes horror and ugliness within the human soul (e.g. the horror of war)

9. God’s many love languages

- a. Beauty, diversity, intimacy and redemption

GOD AND THE FALLEN WORLD – IN A PROCESS OF JUDGMENT, REDEMPTION & RESTORATION

10. Mystery of humanity created in the image of God

- a. Infinite imaged within a finite container
- b. Embedded infinities

11. Mystery of will and probabilistic cause and effect

- a. God’s sovereign will and limited free will of humankind
- b. Freewill within container of time and context
- c. Consequential meanings—Eccl 13:14
- d. Probability of occurrence for available options or prior behaviors
- e. Fuzzy math for desirability of outcomes
- f. Thought dynamo decision mapping model
- g. Strong-willed, submitted humanness or submitted and strong-willed vs. rebellious and strong or weak-willed
- h. Sacred mystery of “prayers for change” that God invites us into His plan as a partner not a robot

12. Mystery of God’s ways—redemptive goodness motivated by jealous love

- a. Delayed judgment when death was promised as a consequence of original sin
- b. Justice with severe mercy AND the power of powerlessness

- i. Bringing good from evil
 - ii. Beauty from ashes/ugliness
 - iii. Beauty reframed with dissonance
 - iv. Freedom from bondage
 - v. Honor from shame
- c. The many love languages of God—Psalm 119:64
- d. Partnering with God and others in God’s grand story – Ephesians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 8:23

13. Mystery of redemption and transformation

- a. Christ the ascended slain Lamb of heaven
- b. Life from death
- c. Sacramental symbolism: baptism, Lord’s supper, etc.
- d. Die to self to gain soul

14. Mystery of embedded infinities

- a. Mystery of incarnation
- b. Christ in you AND you in Christ
- c. Christ and His church
- d. Language of mathematics: discrete and continuous

15. Mystery of body, soul and spirit into communities

- a. Image bearers vs. animals
- b. Ownership, Belonging & Oneness – Spirit, self, spouse, union of bodies and souls
 - i. 1 Cor 6:19, 20 – temple of the Holy Spirit ... you are not your own
 - ii. 1 Cor 7:4 – body belongs to self and spouse—oneness
 - iii. 1 Cor 6:16 – one with a prostitute
 - iv. 1 Cor 6:17 – one with the Lord in spirit
 - v. 1 Cor 12:20 – believers belong to one body
- c. Bonding in love between totally depraved individuals and groups of people (e.g. families)
- d. Symbolic sexuality—jealous love

16. Paradox of pain and pleasure

- a. Pleasure through loss of control (highest physical pleasure as sexual climax)
- b. Pain through loss of control (highest physical pain as powerlessness in bondage)
- c. Growth through pains and pleasures
- d. Value of pleasure as joy
- e. Pains as birth pains for future joy and glory

17. Mystery of other spirits

- a. Host of angels as helpers
 - i. Extent of free will
 - ii. Nature of their reward

- b. Dominion of Satan
 - i. Extent of free will
 - ii. Nature of their judgment
- c. Access of spirits to human consciousness
- d. Discerning spirits of true and deceptive light

18. Mystery of religious plurality and fallen human societies

- a. How can humanity believe so differently
 - i. Concept of beyondness to somewhat explain the “reasonableness” of one God, many gods, animism, humanism and atheism, etc.
 - ii. Issue is rebellion vs. education
- b. The One and Only God Most High tolerates religious pluralism and unjust societies
 - i. Implications for Christian politics in the community of nations

GOD AND FUTURE REALITY – GLORIFICATION (TOTAL RESTORATION)

19. Mystery of eternal rewards

- a. What crowns are available
- b. Greatness through serving
- c. Why would we want them
- d. Possessiveness and diversity in heaven without envy
- e. Hell as judgment – permanent, eternal state or elimination of human souls as justice

20. Mystery of unending endings

- a. Sacred mystery of Christ’s return—a certain hope and an uncertain date
- b. Awareness of future possibilities without continuation of current physical realities
 - i. Eternity in our hearts – Ecclesiastes 3: 11
 - ii. Life after death can look very different from current realities
- c. Thought of universal transformation through transition and re-creation vs. destruction (annihilation)
- d. Question of repeatability – can glorified humanity with free will re-fall in eternity?
- e. Heaven as a defined place where God’s throne room exist – Revelation 5
- f. Dwelling in the city of the living God and exploring the universe

THE IMPACT OF MYSTERY UPON OUR SOULS

Mystery fundamentally eschews boredom.

Sacred mystery brings awe to the soul in a manner that we cease to see ourselves as the end point—the most glorious. God, Who is Three-in-One, is most glorious and mysterious!

Written 2012

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

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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:

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