

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."

- A. W. Tozer

Behold your God

Rethinking God Biblically

JOHN SNYDER

Daily Devotional Workbook

The Twelve-Week Devotional Companion to Behold Your God



Behold your God

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this workbook, I have intentionally avoided personal references. I think, however, that this introduction might be more helpful if the reader had some idea of the author's own experiences. In 1996 my family and I got on a plane headed to the little country of Wales. I had recently resigned my pastorate and finished my Master of Divinity degree. I was spiritually tired and disillusioned with "church." I thought that a PhD and a teaching post in a seminary might be the answer. The next three years in Wales were a spiritual oasis for me. It was not primarily the reading in Puritan and revival histories that helped me; it was three years devoted to reacquainting myself with the God of the Bible, while sitting under the beneficial ministry of the Rev. Vernon Higham (then pastor of the Heath Evangelical Church, Cardiff, Wales). I gained a real sense of what a church might be when God is the great and only attraction.

After Wales, we returned to the States and eventually moved to north Mississippi to be part of starting a new church work. The Lord gave me favor with that patient little group, and I was able to apply the very truths you are about to study in this book. The young work was often "risked" in our attempt to live upon the reality that the God we meet in Scripture is more than sufficient for all our needs and desires. He has proven Himself to be abundantly faithful and merciful, despite our many shortcomings. So, for my family and the families in Christ Church, New Albany*, these truths are not merely theoretical or historical observations. They have been our lives' foundation as individuals and as a church.

WHY THIS STUDY NOW?

Two things were apparent when I returned to the States in 1999: The American evangelical scene was worsening, and too much time was being wasted attacking the fruit sins rather than the root issues. During my first effort at pastoring a church, I had already tried fixing people by attacking the external problems. My efforts proved unsuccessful and left both my congregation and me worn out. I did not want to waste any more time preaching against the wrong behavior of struggling church members without first dealing with the underlying causes.

* www.christchurchnewalbany.org

Now, in 2012, I have observed new church plants and seen new books that promise to give us all that we need as professing Christians. While good books and God-honoring church plants are beneficial, even they are not the answer. Unfortunately, many books and church plants are neither good nor God-honoring. I meet more pastors who are also tired and disillusioned because they have consistently hoped in the next new idea. In a way, it is a good day. It is just this kind of day that makes Christians stop running on their religious hamster-wheels and ask “Why are we doing these programs?” and “Why doesn’t God ever seem to show up and effectively work in our churches?” Hard questions often lead to right answers. This study is written with the conviction that our fundamental need in Western Christianity is to repent of our low and unworthy views of God, to return to the biblical descriptions of the true God, and to risk it all in order to live upon *Who He is*. Nothing in these pages is new truth. The devotions and exercises are meant only to help the reader to take the biblical descriptions of God seriously and to see how they form the foundation of Christian living.

This study attempts to answer two questions:

1. Who is the God I profess to know?
2. How must I live if I am to live faithfully unto this God?

There is a progression in the themes of the twelve weeks. Week 1 introduces this need to rethink God biblically, to refuse to settle for anything but a revitalized knowledge of Him as He really is. Week 2 points out some hindrances to repentance in this area and explains how to avoid getting stuck in religious good intentions that never amount to anything. Weeks 3–5 deal with the major tools God has provided for our knowing Him: the Bible, the person of His Son, and the work of His Son. Weeks 6–9 attempt to show how a biblical rethinking of God might affect the major areas of church life: personal holiness, worship, evangelism, and service. Weeks 10 and 11 are warnings. These chapters are difficult because they reveal two popular ways that we say “Yes, Lord” but never really change: allowing our idolatrous ideas of God to remain in place and choosing pragmatism (being willing to do only what appears to “work”). The study ends with week 12, a look at the great delight of the Christian: the God of the Bible drawing near in seasons of true revival. Such a breadth of topics requires that *Behold Your God* only introduce these themes, opening the door for your further study. You must choose whether or not you walk through that door and live a Godward life.

HOW DOES THIS STUDY WORK?

Behold Your God is set up like many other studies of its type, with a few additions that we hope will be beneficial. The study is centered around the

twelve-week workbook and is designed to be used in conjunction with the DVD series. Each week the student will work through the workbook (five days per week) in preparation for watching the DVD. *Behold Your God* can be used as an individual or group study. If you are part of a group, watch the DVD at the end of the week and allow time to discuss the issues raised in the workbook and DVD lessons.

Each week's DVD is made up of three segments: the historical introduction, the sermon, and highlights taken from interviews with various contemporary religious leaders. The historical introduction is a short biographical sketch of the life of a significant servant of Christ whose ministry illustrates the truths that you have been studying that week. These were all filmed on site in Wales, England, Scotland, and North America. They include A. W. Tozer (Chicago, IL), Timothy Dwight (Yale University), George Müller (Bristol, England), Samuel Rutherford (Anwoth, Scotland), George Whitefield (Newburyport, MA), Robert Murray M'Cheyne (Dundee, Scotland), Charles Spurgeon (London, England), Daniel Rowland (Llangeitho, Wales), Amy Carmichael (Keswick, England), Charles Finney (Anytown, USA), D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (London, England), and Jonathan Edwards (New Haven, CT). These introductions have given the film crew an opportunity to add a visually rich and historically informative aspect which is not normally included in this type of study. After the introduction, a sermon follows that reinforces what you have been studying in the Bible that week. Finally, you will be able to listen to highlights from interviews with contemporary ministers whose lives and labors reflect these same truths. These include Paul Washer, Richard Owen Roberts, Jordan Thomas, Anthony Mathenia, Dr. Eifion Evans, Andrew Davies, and Conrad Mbewe. I hope you will feel, as I do, that it is a real privilege to be able to hear from these men whose gospel labors range from Peru, Ethiopia, Virginia, and Memphis to New Zealand, England, Wales, Ireland, and Zambia.

A WORD TO ENCOURAGE THE STUDENT

There is no way to adequately deal with the problems in our own lives and our churches without a deep and thorough rethinking of God. This cannot be done safely apart from returning to the Bible. Therefore, the real purpose of this book is to guide you back into those passages which are most significant for this theme. Avoid the temptation to merely get through the exercises without wrestling honestly with these matters. We all know it is too easy to check a box, fill in the blank with the correct word, and move on unaffected. Also, guard yourself against a merely emotional response. You may be angered by what you read here and in the Bible, or you may feel your heart warmed. Whatever your response, it must not be allowed to remain merely emotional—it must move you to act upon what the Scriptures reveal if it is to be of any lasting value. Bring your mind and heart, together, and bow before God in real worship as you study each

day. Plead with Him to be your teacher and give Him your generous cooperation. You will not be disappointed with the Living God.

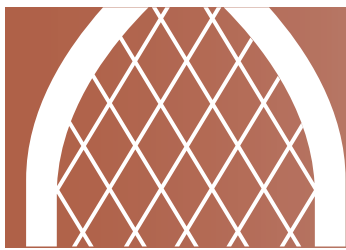
The New King James Version of the Bible has been used throughout the DVD sermons and this workbook, unless otherwise noted. The exercises will be much easier if you can use this version for the study.

A WORD OF THANKS

Behold Your God is the product of the collaborative effort of many like-minded believers. Thanks are due to Media Gratiae for all of its technical skill and funding. Also, I am grateful to those in Christ Church, New Albany, who served as test groups and editorial advisors. I appreciate the men who, in the midst of busy ministries, gave their time and thought to the interviews which conclude each DVD session. Special thanks are due to a dear friend and spiritual mentor, Richard Owen Roberts, who helped in the early planning stages of this project. Much of the content in the following chapters has become a part of my thinking through twenty years of benefitting from his friendship and ministry. The pages would be sprinkled with footnotes if I were to cite each truth that I first heard from him. Week 2, in particular, is heavily influenced by his careful thought on the topic of returning to God. I am very grateful to all of those who sacrificially worked so that *Behold Your God* would be more than a nice idea.

That God would be pleased, and His people helped, is my prayer.

JOHN SNYDER



Behold your God

— Week 1 —

BEHOLDING GOD: THE GREAT ATTRACTION! WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

In Psalm 113, the psalmist calls us to a duty:

*Praise the LORD!
Praise, O servants of the LORD,
Praise the name of the LORD!
Blessed be the name of the LORD
From this time forth and forevermore!
From the rising of the sun to its going down
The LORD's name is to be praised.
The LORD is high above all nations,
His glory above the heavens.*

Then the psalmist asks a question:

*Who is like the LORD our God, Who dwells on high,
Who humbles Himself to behold
The things that are in the heavens and in the earth?*

We are setting out today on a twelve-week journey. Before we open the gate and take our first step, we must make sure we are headed down the right path. In a race, running fast is a bad idea if you're headed in the wrong direction. Not all religious effort is headed in the right direction. The Psalm above can be a spiritual compass to help us set the course. Our journey and our destination will be God Himself. We will give our time and effort to seeking a clearer understanding of the God of the Bible. His name or character is worthy to be praised from east to west, "from this time forth and forevermore." In this glory He is solitary; none are like Him. He is elevated above all else, yet He humbles Himself to take notice of the things of heaven and earth. This is the God who has called us to Himself, to be reconciled through His Son, and to walk with Him by His Spirit. It is almost too much to take in!

In light of these truths, we need to be clear about two things:

1. This study will be about Him, not us.

Throughout these weeks, we will have to examine ourselves and our responses to what we are learning about God, but He will be the ultimate object of our attention.

*What comes into our minds
when we think about God
is the most important thing
about us.*

— A. W. Tozer

The end of all learning is to know God, and out of that knowledge to love and imitate Him.

—John Milton

2. This study is not ultimately aimed at our good.

We will find ourselves benefitted by the time we devote to the pursuit of knowing God and the transformation which that knowledge brings. However, we are not hoping to use this knowledge of our Lord for some greater end. The goal of the study is not to relieve us of our emptiness, fix our families, grow our churches, or even to find our significance and sense of purpose in Him. The goal of this study is to see God's name lifted high above all else. Therefore our desire is not to use God for our advancement but rather to forget ourselves as we worship Him.

In truth, we cannot give ourselves to a more thrilling, worthwhile, or practical pursuit. If you are tempted to think that He might not be worth knowing, recall these words written by John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*:

God is the only desirable good; nothing without him is worthy of our hearts. . . . The life, the glory, the blessedness, the soul-satisfying goodness that is in God are beyond all expression.

When Bunyan penned these words over three hundred years ago, he was not exaggerating—he was understating the matter!

This week you will be considering the significance of what you think of God—not your official beliefs about this Being, but your actual ideas of Him. The true knowledge of God, provided through the mighty labors of His Son, is the great treasure of Christianity. It has a beginning but will never end, enduring through the most desperate of times. However, even a believer can take this treasure for granted. We need a revolution in how we think of God. In seeking to know Him, we must guard against settling for a counterfeit Christianity that looks like the real thing but is of no value.

In the eleventh century, St. Anselm gave advice that is relevant to us today:

Up now, slight man! Flee for a little while your occupations; hide yourself for a time from your disturbing thoughts. Cast aside now your burdensome cares, and put away your toilsome business. Yield room for some little time to God, and rest for a little time in Him. Enter the inner chamber of your mind; shut out all thoughts save that of God and such as can aid you in seeking Him. Speak now, my whole heart! Speak now to God, saying, I seek Your Face; Your face, Lord, will I seek.

MEMORY VERSE FOR MEDITATION

Psalm 27:8

*When You said, “Seek My face,”**My heart said to You, “Your face, LORD, I will seek.”*DAY 1: KNOWING GOD,
THE TREASURE OF CHRISTIANITY

*Are you willing to adjust your life to whatever God reveals
of Himself in the coming days?*

What is the one thing about you that you feel sets you apart? What is it about you that you feel is worth bragging about? It may sound like a strange question for believers because we certainly do not consider bragging as one of the gifts of the Spirit. In fact, a braggadocious person is ordinarily not the kind of person with whom we enjoy spending time. Yet the prophet Jeremiah tells us that there is something about which we should boast. In Jeremiah 9:23–24 we read:

Thus says the LORD: “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD. (NASB)

This command comes in the middle of a long indictment against Israel’s outwardly wicked behavior and inwardly idolatrous heart. It is not a passage that aims to promote arrogance in Israel. Far from it!

READ it over again and write below what you think is the purpose of these verses.

Wisdom (the ability to apply knowledge skillfully) and strength (the ability to accomplish tasks) are prized in every culture. In themselves they are beneficial. An unwise and incompetent person is not one you would choose as an

employee, a spouse, or a close friend. But these qualities pale in comparison to another: a true understanding and knowledge of this living God.

The knowledge of God is not merely a generic idea that He exists “up there.”

It involves an intimate acquaintance with His character and actions. Below, list the things that God tells us about Himself in these verses.

*I've found the Pearl
of Greatest Price
My heart doth sing for joy;
And sing I must for Christ is mine,
Christ shall my song employ.*

—John Mason

- Is that the God you know?
- Is that the God you meet when you open your Bible, read, and pray?
- Is that what comes to your mind when you think of Him throughout the day?

This is the treasure of Christianity—God has done all that is necessary for you to know Him forever! You have been brought near by His Son’s life, death, and resurrection. He has placed His Spirit within His adopted children, giving them a heart to love Him, a mind to know Him, and a will to obey Him. Nothing can compare with this. In fact, how you respond to this reality is a real test of your profession of faith. When Peter wrote his first Epistle, he divided all humanity into two camps.

READ 1 PETER 2:6–7. According to this passage, what does the true believer think of Christ?

Delighting in God. Treasuring the real knowledge of God through His Son. Walking with God. These have always been the birthmarks of God’s people. Whether you read the life of Abraham (the Friend of God), or Moses (the man who met with God, as it were “face to face”), or David (a man after God’s own heart), or Asaph (the psalmist who wrote that God’s nearness was his “good”), you will find that religion’s great attraction for the believer is God Himself.

This happy fellowship with the Living God, this knowledge of His character, is not limited to biblical saints. Listen to what Paul wrote to people in an unhealthy church:

1 Corinthians 1:9

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Do we see what God, the faithful One, has called us to? To enter into the “fellowship of His Son” is to enjoy communion with the Father as the Son does. Every believer can have that kind of friendship with the Triune God.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

It is time to ask ourselves some questions in light of these passages. These are easy questions to answer “correctly,” but it would be good if you could slow down and ask God what is true of you.

Do you think that the most noticeable, the most distinguishing thing about your life is that you know the Living God?

Do you think that Jesus is the most precious thing about Christianity, or do you find that the idea of what He can *do for you* is more enticing than who He is?

Do you find those passages of the Bible which describe God most interesting, or would you prefer to read a description of how He can benefit you?

Do you substitute a one-time experience of salvation for an ongoing understanding and knowledge of the Divine Person?

Do you mistakenly think it a mark of ingratitude to want more than forgiveness of sin, to ask God to let you know Him better each day?

Take some time to consider what comes to your own mind when you think of the character of God. Of course, no library could hold the books that would be required to describe the infinite qualities of God; yet if you could write one paragraph, what are the things that you know to be true of Him? Below, write that paragraph as honestly as possible. Avoid merely writing what you think is a correct answer.

Only after a painful ordeal of self-probing are we likely to discover what we actually think about God.

— A. W. Tozer

DAY 2: GOD—INCOMPREHENSIBLE AND KNOWABLE

What is an attribute of God? We do not use that word very often, but it is an important word. A. W. Tozer wrote in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, "An attribute of God is whatever God has in any way revealed as being true of Himself."

1. **An attribute is something that God has revealed to be true about Himself. This is not a truth that we discover on our own.**
2. **An attribute is something that is essentially true of God.**

It is *who* He is, not merely *how* He acts; therefore, He never needs to maintain it. This is a crucial truth that we often misunderstand because we think of these descriptions of God in the same way that we think of descriptions of people.

Think of it this way: We are human. Good days and bad days . . . we wake up as humans. We live all day as humans. We do not have to try to be human or to maintain our humanity. *Human* is *what* we essentially are, not merely *how* we act. We may act as a kind human or an impatient human. We may be a thoughtful human or a cruel human. But none of that changes the reality that *human* is a description of something that is unchangeable and essential about us. If we stopped being human, we would have to stop existing. It would no longer be us anymore. It would be something different, something non-human.

God is *who* He is. Whatever is true of God's character is part of who He is. For example, think about His omnipotence (the possession of all-power). He never has to start the day by trying to make Himself all-powerful. He does not have to work at remaining all-powerful even after the passing of ten thousand years. It is *who* He is. He is God Almighty. This is one of His attributes. It is one aspect essential to His deity. If He were not all-powerful, He would not be *who* He is—He would not be the person that the Bible reveals to us as God.

One of the most wonderful things about knowing God is that there is always so much more to know. Just when we least expect it, He intrudes into our neat and tidy notions about who He is and how He works.

—Joni Eareckson Tada

3. An attribute is something that is in perfect harmony with all other attributes.

God, unlike us, is not divided. He is perfect unity. There can be no division or conflict within God. Every attribute is in perfect harmony with every other attribute. His love is never at odds with His wrath. His justice and His mercy walk together. Furthermore, every attribute of God influences all other attributes. If He is all-powerful, then His wrath is all-powerful. We are faced with a dazzling reality while studying God's attributes: They converge and form a multifaceted divine diamond. No matter how we turn these truths in front of our mind's eye, there is always more splendor to behold.

Being infinite, God is inexhaustibly interesting. It is therefore impossible that God be boring.

—John Piper

Let's apply what we have considered above to one of God's attributes. God has revealed that He is essentially *incomprehensible*. He is beyond our understanding. In short, this teaches us that though God can be known in a personal way, He can never be *figured out*. In fact, no angel, no saint in heaven, and no seminary professor on earth can ever fully grasp the boundlessness of God. Being incomprehensible is just part of *who* He is. He knows Himself perfectly, but He is the only one who possesses this ability.

This has a great deal to do with our getting to know Him better, so let's slow down and think about it.

WHY IS GOD INCOMPREHENSIBLE?

The answer lies in another attribute: He is infinite. He has no limits upon His Person. He cannot be measured. Another way to think of it is that He is overflowing with all fullness in every aspect of His character. Every attribute is infinitely, immeasurably, limitlessly full. However you try to use your mind to capture the vastness of God's character, He will pour over the edges of your imagination.

LOOK UP the following passages and fill in the blanks. Consider the way in which the Bible speaks about this incomprehensible fullness of our God.

1. God overflows the bounds of creation with His Person.

Psalm 145:3

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; _____

Jeremiah 23:23–24

“Am I a God near at hand,” says the LORD, “And not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?” says the LORD; “_____?” says the LORD.

2. His thoughts toward creation are beyond numbering.

Psalm 139:17–18

How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! _____

_____ ; when I awake I am still with you.

3. His deeds are beyond measure.

Job 5:8–9

But as for me, I would seek God, And to God I would commit my cause—

Job 9:10

_____, yes, wonders without number.

Job speaks about God transcending our understanding. He asks us a very searching question:

Job 11:7–9

Can you search out the deep things of God? _____

_____. They are higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.

Job 36:26

Behold, God is great, and we do not know Him; _____

_____.

Job uses two simple word pictures to show us the incomprehensibility of God.

Job 26:14

Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand?

Below, fill in the blanks with Job's descriptions of the incomprehensibility of God.

Our knowledge of His actions is only the _____ of His _____. We know as much of God as a person who hears a small _____ of a great voice.

God. How much this title implies no tongue, human or angelic, can express. It is a volume of an infinite number of leaves and every leaf full of meaning. It will be read by saints and angels, through the ages of eternity, but they will never reach the last leaf, nor fully comprehend the meaning of a single page.

— Edward Payson

FURTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

Imagine an infant. He cannot understand much of his father. He cannot understand how he is related to his father, how much his father does for him, or even what his father does in his occupation. But the baby knows this: When his father walks by and he sees those familiar shoes and the hem of his pants . . . that's Dad!

Imagine the *Mayflower's* initial approach to the American coastline. Only a fraction of that expansive land would have been visible from the ship. What could be seen was only the edge of a continent that stretched for thousands of miles.

Imagine you are sitting at a restaurant. At the table next to you, two men are talking about the latest happenings in the news. You are very interested, but they are talking quietly. For all your discreet straining, you hear only a phrase or two of the conversation.

These are ways we describe our limited understanding of God's character. True, He reveals Himself in the Bible, but do we think that we will study these twelve weeks and at the end have Him figured out? Not at all. There will always be more of Him to know. He is infinite. At the end of a lifetime of getting to know Him, all we will know is what a baby can know of his father by the edge of his trousers, what a traveler can know of North America by seeing the New England coastline, or what a person can understand of a conversation from whispered fragments.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

One of the evidences that we are growing in the knowledge God is that we are more aware of how little we know Him! The great Christians of the past spoke more of the mystery of God than we commonly do today. Read what the hymn writer Isaac Watts wrote of our knowledge of the incomprehensible God.

*Earth from afar has heard Thy Fame.
And worms have learned to lisp Thy Name.*

Our greatest theology must include a humility born out of the awareness that we know only the edges of His ways. The spiritual smugness of evangelical, conservative churches is proof of our ignorance, not our knowledge.

It is the believer's joy that there can be no end to knowing the Infinite Being. He is not only perfect; His perfections go on forever. After one hundred thousand years in heaven, the Christian will still be growing in the knowledge of God.

*How should finite
comprehend Infinite? We
shall apprehend Him, but
not comprehend Him.*

— Richard Sibbes

*How completely satisfying
to turn from our limitations
to a God who has none.*

— A. W. Tozer

At the end of twelve weeks, you can test your progress, not merely by the words or doctrines you will have learned or the outward changes in your behavior—but by your humility.

Have you responded in humility to the truths revealed to you this week?

DAY 3: TO WHOM WILL GOD REVEAL HIMSELF?

It may come as a shock to us at first, but knowing God is not an easy thing. In fact, it is an impossibility if we are left to ourselves. It requires the almighty intervention of God, yet it is the one absolute necessity.

This does not mean that the only alternative to a true knowledge of God is a life without any god at all. Ancient history and today's news both reveal the drive in humanity to find some type of god. When the apostle Paul arrived at the city of Athens, he was astonished. It was not the fabulous architecture nor the Athenians' famed intellects that amazed Paul. It was the fact that such sophisticated people would fill their city with altars dedicated to a variety of idols. But the most telling of them was the altar dedicated "to the unknown god." Sadly, the cult of the unknown god has endured until today. It is found in small towns and urban centers, from East to West. It is the basic religion of humanity apart from a miraculous intervention by the one Living God. It is the grace of God that He does not leave humanity to sit in its ignorance and darkness. He has sent His Son to illuminate our dark hearts. Jesus is the "Dayspring from on high" (Luke 1:78) that has brought the truth of God into our confused world.

*But on this one will I look;
On him who is poor and of
a contrite spirit,
And who trembles at My
word.*

— Isaiah 66:2

The Christian life begins with seeing God revealed in His Son and responding to Him in faith and repentance. The life that follows is one of daily learning more of God. Yet **God is very specific about the kind of Christian who receives this continual and deepening understanding.**

Today we consider the people to whom God will reveal Himself. This may be a novel topic for you, so be very careful to see what God has said about it in the Scriptures.

FILL IN THE BLANKS in the following passages and consider the person to whom God will continue to reveal Himself.

1. The Reverent – Psalm 25:14
The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, _____
_____.

Are you going forward in the fear of the Lord? Are you more aware of His majesty, purity, and undeserved kindness than you were a year ago?

2. The Pure in Heart – Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart, _____.

God delights to reveal Himself to the person whose heart is pure. The idea behind this word “pure” is undivided, unpolluted, unmixed. A pure heart is united. In other words, it speaks of a single-minded person whose desires have been united around one great object—God. Are you single-minded or fragmented and pulled in a hundred directions?

3. The Childlike – Matthew 11:25-28a

At that time Jesus answered and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and _____. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me . . .

Has God been hiding Himself from you?

4. The Obedient – John 14:21

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father and _____.

Will God continue to reveal Himself to a person who does not respond in obedience to a previously revealed truth?

EXERCISE

CHECK those which are true:

According to these four passages, your ability to hear what God is saying today will be largely based upon:

- ___ your intellectual ability
- ___ your spiritual single-mindedness
- ___ your ability to have more free time for study
- ___ your childlike awareness of your need for God
- ___ your understanding of Greek and Hebrew words
- ___ your obedience to what God has previously shown you
- ___ your fear of God

But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”

— Mark 10:14–15

SELF-EXAMINATION

*For thus says the High and
Lofty One
Who inhabits eternity;
whose name is Holy:
“I dwell in the high and
holy place,
With him who has a
contrite and humble
spirit.”*

— Isaiah 57:15a

Is God revealing Himself to you more and more, or have you plateaued and grown stale? You will find the answer to that question is directly related to the answer to other questions: Are you growing in the fear of God, in single-mindedness, in a childlike awareness of your need, and in a love-motivated obedience?

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Do you see the significance of these verses for your life and for your efforts in this study to know God better? No amount of personal study, no study guide, no book or sermon will ever unveil God to you if you are not the kind of person God has described as one to whom He delights to reveal Himself.

If you find that you are not the kind of person to whom God will reveal Himself, go to God with this matter and plead that He would in His mercy do all that is necessary to enable you to have the heart and life described in those passages.

DAY 4: THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY: HE IS!

Christianity is remarkably full and complex, as we would expect of a religion that brings a person into a relationship with the Living God. It is full because it shares in the fullness that belongs to God. It is complex because it brings the reality of an immeasurable God (His character and claims upon us) down into every area of our lives. **If anyone attempts to reduce the Christian life to one emphasis (evangelism, joy, personal growth, etc.), he is sure to become spiritually lopsided.** There is a balance in Christianity. However, that said, certain truths are foundational to other truths. We find this when we read Paul’s letters to the early churches. Paul always lays a strong doctrinal foundation before he explains how a Christian is to live. The first chapter of Colossians serves as a rich example for us today. Paul’s description of the Christian life can be reduced to three statements.

- Christ is . . .
- Christ has . . .
- I must . . .

READ **COLOSSIANS 1:3–23.** Using the passage, make three lists. (You will be taking a long look at these descriptions in a later chapter. Just list them here.)

He is [character of Christ, verses 15–18]:

*Apart from Christ let
nothing dazzle you.*

— St. Ignatius

He has [work of the Father and Son, verses 12–14, 20–22]:

I must [my response to His character and work, verses 9–12, 23]:

These phrases not only sum up the Christian’s life; they do so in the correct order. There is an evident cause-and-effect sequence in these. We cannot reverse them. We may be tempted to think of Christianity primarily as “**I must . . .**,” but that is not the starting place. You cannot make yourself a child of God by doing things that a child of God does, any more than you could make yourself an heir to Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain by walking around in royal clothes and waving kindly at people! The duty of the Christian life—the “**I must . . .**,”—is caused by something else. We may think of the Christian life as primarily about “**He has.**” The work of God for our salvation is certainly a significant part of Christianity and is the reason that we are able to live a life of obedience. But even the “**He has . . .**” is not the foundation of Christianity, for that itself is built upon a larger and deeper foundation. The greatest truth

of Christianity is summed up in the words “**He is.**” Who He is must be understood if we are going to grasp what He has done to save us. Who He is and what He has done form an irresistible argument for obedience in the heart of the Christian. We are all tempted to emphasize one of these to the neglect of the others. Which of the three do you find yourself thinking about most often?

Go back to the three lists you made from Colossians 1.

READ the “**He is**” list and then read a statement from the “**He has**” list. Do you see how the “**He has**” is enlarged and enriched by considering the *who* behind it all?

Continue until you have considered each of the “**He has**” statements in light of the “**He is**” truths.

Read the “**I must**” list with the “**He is**” and “**He has**” truths in mind. Do you see how the “**I must**” is wonderfully affected by *who* it is that commands you and *what* He has done to make it possible for you to obey Him?

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

In light of what you have looked at, the “**He is**” list is the most significant of the three because it affects how you understand the others. Is that the list that gets most of your attention? Do you see the shortsightedness of starting with “**He has**” or “**I must**” in Christianity?

DAY 5: AVOIDING THE COUNTERFEITS

Things that have great value are often counterfeited. There will always be a market for fake diamonds and counterfeit money. It is the same with intangible things—love, friendship, loyalty, and integrity. There will always be people who choose the counterfeit over the real. Sadly, a counterfeit knowledge of God also exists.

When we speak about the knowledge of God, our enemy will not whisper to us in our church pews: “Why bother? Who wants to know God anyway?” Instead, the temptation will come in a more subtle form. Maybe it will sound something like this: “Knowing God . . . that’s a good thing. But remember, there is more than one way to know God. You might want to consider a way that doesn’t require so much of you.” So, like other valuable things, the knowledge of God is counterfeited. It is like shopping at a street market in a large city. You can find knock-offs of name-brand luxury items (maybe a “Rolex” watch for your spouse)

for a fraction of the price that you would pay for the real thing. It looks like the real thing. People will give it the same kind of compliments. But it will never *be* the real thing, and it will not *work* like the real thing. That describes many people's knowledge of God. It is counterfeit. It is inexpensive. It looks similar to the real thing, but it is not genuine. It will never impact their lives like the real thing.

In the video lesson this week, you will hear about three counterfeits of the knowledge of God. We will carefully consider them today before going any further in this study. After all, you don't want to spend twelve weeks pursuing something that you later find out was merely an impressive forgery.

These counterfeits might be described in a number of ways, but various authors have mentioned three:

1. Knowledge by Hearsay

Thomas Carlyle wrote: "What this country needs is a man who knows God other than by hearsay." Knowledge by hearsay is counterfeit knowledge, made up only of things others have told us about God. Such knowledge might come through years of listening to sermons or reading good Christian books. These are beneficial, but they can become a substitute for personally walking with God. We end up only knowing Him by hearsay.

2. Textualism

This is a deadly counterfeit that thrives in conservative churches that still defend the truthfulness of Scripture. A. W. Tozer describes the textualist as a person who assumes that because he affirms the Bible's veracity, he automatically possesses the things of which the Bible speaks.¹ For example, if he agrees with the biblical definition of faith found in Hebrews 11, then he assumes that he already possesses such faith, even if all of his choices in life prove otherwise. If he agrees with the words of Paul, then he is sure he possesses the reality of Paul's words. If he accepts every word of Paul as inspired, then every experience that Paul describes in the Christian life must already be his. In other words, the textualist lives as if affirming the words of the Bible is equivalent to having their reality in his own life.

3. True Truths

Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote: "Truths . . . are often considered as *so true* that they lose all the power of truth, and lie bed-ridden in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with the most despised and exploded errors." This is nowhere more obvious than in the basic truths we have been given in the Bible concerning

The many false and counterfeit appearances which we meet, instead of proving that there is no religion in the world, not only prove that there is, but that it is extremely precious, otherwise it would not be counterfeited.

— Edward Payson

BEHOLD YOUR GOD

If there is one fact, or doctrine, or promise in the Bible, which has produced no practical effect upon your temper or conduct, be assured that you do not truly believe it.

— Edward Payson

God. Reflect on how little God’s omnipresence (dwelling everywhere at once) has affected the way you dressed, ate, drove, spent money, and responded to family members today. You will admit that God is present everywhere; it is a very different thing to live on it. By the way you treat this truth, it may be difficult to distinguish it from things you know to be bold-faced lies. The Easter Bunny myth was exploded long ago for us. Therefore, we do not think about the Easter Bunny, and his nonexistence does not affect our lives. How tragic to allow the glorious truths of God to lie “bed-ridden” in our minds alongside such myths. This is another counterfeit type of knowing God—having a mind crammed full of right words that lie dormant, not affecting your life any more than the things you know to be lies. A. W. Tozer gave this advice: Take them out of the back room of your mind, dust them off, reacquaint yourself with those truths, and live on them.

TEST yourself. What truth about God can you dust off and begin to live upon?

GOOD NEWS!

If there are counterfeits, then there must be something worth counterfeiting. An individual can know the living God. Knowing God is worth any price or effort. See how two seventeenth-century authors defined theology (the study of God):

William Perkins wrote:

Theology is the science [study] of living blessedly forever.

William Ames wrote:

Theology is the study of how to live unto God.

Are these accurate? Can you really take the descriptions of God in the Bible, live on them, glory in them, and find happiness in that kind of life? A more authoritative guide in this matter is found in the Apostle Paul’s writings to the Ephesians. In this letter, Paul includes a great deal of theology and doctrine. Chapters 1–3 are full of doctrine. These form the foundation of the ethical commands (duties) of the Christian life that are found in chapters 4–6. Notice the way Paul keeps doctrine from becoming a collection of dry, dead sayings. At the end of chapters 1 and 3, Paul prays. For what does he plead? He is praying that God will enable the Christians to grasp all that doctrinal truth, internalize it, and live on it. **It is this application of doctrine to our hearts that forms the bridge between right thinking about God and right living with God.**

READ EPHESIANS 1:15–22 and list below the things that Paul asks God to do for the believers in order for the doctrines to become a part of their everyday living.

Everything that men do in their own strength and by means of their own abilities is done for time alone; the quality of eternity is not in it.

— A. W. Tozer

READ EPHESIANS 3:14–21 and list below the things that Paul asks God to do for the believers in order for the doctrines to become a part of their everyday living.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

All three elements—right living, built upon right doctrine, planted deeply in your heart by God—are inseparable. They cannot exist in isolation from one another. If your life lacks one or another, in truth it does not have any of the three.