

Discovering the God Who Is

During an interview with the wife of the acclaimed physicist, Albert Einstein, a reporter asked her a predictable question, “Mrs. Einstein, do you understand your husband’s theory of relativity?”

With little hesitation Mrs. Einstein answered, “No, I understand very little about it.”

The reporter pressed her further, “Well, then, does it ever concern you that the theory might be inaccurate? Are you confident of its validity?”

After thinking for a moment, Mrs. Einstein responded, “Sir, I may not understand Albert’s theory, but I know Albert, and he can be trusted. If he said thus and so, it’s right, and I believe it.”

Mrs. Einstein’s confidence was not in a scientific theory about which she knew very little. Her confidence was in her physicist-husband who had developed it. She believed in HIM. “I know Albert, and he can be trusted.”

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could have that same kind of confidence in God? Is it even possible considering the environment in which we live? ...

...a secular humanistic society where God and belief in Him have been marginalized (in fact, University of Southern California professor of philosophy, Dr. Dallas Willard, humorously, but poignantly, pointed this out when he wrote, “We live in a culture that has cultivated the idea that the *skeptical* person is always smarter than one who believes. You can be almost as stupid as a cabbage, as long as you *doubt*.” 1)

... a postmodern worldview that tells us there are no transcendent absolutes,

...an egocentric society where people are demanding, “Make me feel better; make life work for me; I want it now and I’m entitled to have it now!”

Is it possible for us - living in this basically God-denying, self-obsessed environment - to maintain an unshakeable confidence in unseen God?

The Old Testament prophet, Daniel, living as a captive under a pagan government, thought it was possible and wrote in chapter 11 verse 32 - “...the people who **know** their God shall be strong and do exploits.”

“Know” in this verse and in Mrs. Einstein’s statement are virtually the same in meaning. In Daniel 11:32 it’s the Hebrew verb *yadah*² which simply describes a relationship that has developed because of intimacy, vulnerability, frank exchanges, respectful engagement - the kind of relationship that gradually generates an unshakeable confidence in a person because of an understanding of and respect for that person. “I don’t understand the theory of relativity, but I **know** Albert, and he can be trusted.” “I don’t have all of the answers to life, but I **know** God, and He can be trusted.”

So, who is this God that we are to *yadah*, to intimately know? That question may sound too simplistic. Everyone knows who God is, don’t they? Dr. Patrick Morley addresses this with the following quote:

There is a **God people want**, and there is a **God who is**. They are not always the same God. The turning of lives is when people stop seeking the God they want and start seeking the God who is.³

This morning let’s consider two questions: (1) Who is this God people want? and (2)

Who is the God Who Is?

I. **THE GOD PEOPLE WANT**

It’s not difficult for people to describe the God they want - if they are honest.

The

God many people want is ...

...a God who meets their expectations - a Santa Claus God who gives them

whatever they want, who refuses to take away the candy jar from

them even if the candy is making them sick;

...a God who is undemanding and allows them to make their own rules;
...a God who is syncretic so they don't have to make value judgments;
...a God whom they can control and even manipulate at times (Let's make
a deal, God. If You'll do this for me, I'll do this for You.
If You'll answer my prayer in this way, I'll _____)
...a God about whom they don't have to think too deeply. As a result, con-
temporary New Age spirituality, or our media-driven
culture, or even Oprah Winfrey and her guests has defined
their God;
...a God who fits their disposition;
...a God like THEM.

Author Sarah Young has written, "Whatever occupies our minds becomes our god."⁴
THE GOD PEOPLE WANT !

II. **THE GOD WHO IS**

Once people are totally honest, they can unmask these convoluted images of God and begin to search for the God Who Is. As they do, they discover that He is the God who chose to define Himself in the Scriptures and interpret Himself through Jesus Christ.

When the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent His Son, born among us of a woman. [This] Christ is the exact likeness of the unseen God, [and] in Him there is all of God in a human body ...
(Galatians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; 2:9 - Living Bible)

Amazingly, according to these Scriptures, the God Who Is revealed Himself in a form which human beings could see, hear, touch, relate to, communicate with. Jesus Christ became the visible manifestation of the invisible God - deity wrapped up in layers and layers of skin. "God with hair, toenails, knuckles, molars, kneecaps," as author Max Lucado, has described Him.

Just think, the God of the universe so loved us and so wanted us to understand His character that He chose to compact Himself to the dimensions and limitations of a human being.

This means that all the awesome events and truths surrounding the life of Jesus Christ are, actually, God's revelation of Himself to us and the expression of His love for us. So, do you want to know the GOD WHO IS so that you can have unshakeable confidence in Him? Then, I encourage you to read the New Testament again and rediscover Jesus, for He is the GOD WHO IS - God showing you and me how He desires to interact with us.

Watch Jesus ...

...living in a society that was filled with taboos, and yet, crossing over those societal lines in order to reach out to all people - embracing up-and-outers, down-and-outers, outcasts, undesirables, "ragamuffins"⁵
...healing the diseased
...befriending the oppressed
...dignifying women who were considered chattel
...delivering people who were unable to extricate themselves from all kinds of bondages

He was a loving, caring, feeling, hands-on Jesus! But don't stop there. Don't overlook the other side of Jesus, too. Watch Him ...

...reprimanding people who were bigoted
...scolding the arrogant
...denouncing the self-righteous and hypocritical
...humorously exposing those who took themselves too seriously

Watch Jesus! He is God with a face. God with skin. I like this kind of God, don't you? He's real!...

...dancing a traditional *horah* at a wedding; belly-laughing with His friends;
crying at a funeral

...holding children, bouncing them on His knee, talking to them at age-appropriate levels, blessing them

Mark 9:36 says,

Jesus placed a child in the middle of them. Then, cradling the child in His arms, He [began to teach]...

Please picture the scene with me. Jesus is sitting on a boulder in an open field. There's quite a large crowd sitting around Him. He's teaching. But suddenly, in the middle of His teaching, He stops and motions one child to come to Him.

But wait! Look closely, for you're that child. You're probably three - maybe four-years-old. So, you're shy, but Jesus is encouraging you to come forward. As you do, He smiles at you, reaches out, picks you up, puts you on His knee, and holds you close to Himself. As you're sitting on His lap, He begins once again to teach.

How do you think you, a wiggly three-year-old, would have felt as you were sitting on Jesus' lap - as He was holding you close to Himself? Give your feelings a name. Would you have felt wanted, secure, protected, peaceful, embraced, loved - perhaps you would have felt extremely special because you, among all of the children, were chosen?

Those are the feelings the GOD WHO IS wants you to maintain in your relationship with Him. That's how He wants you to *yadah* Him. "I admit. I don't understand everything, but I know God, and He can be trusted."

We call this kind of confidence "faith." It seems that it would be easy to maintain confidence in God, doesn't it? Why isn't it? Because our faith is constantly being challenged by the realities of the world in which we are living - a fractured world with broken lives, broken hearts, and broken dreams where life doesn't always make sense and suffering is real:

You've heard of Chiippie, the parakeet, haven't you? One second Chippie was peacefully perched in his cage, and the next, he was sucked in, washed up, and blown over. It happened like this.

Chippie's owner decided to clean his cage, so she removed the attachment from her vacuum cleaner and stuck the end of the hose in Chippie's cage. The telephone rang so she left to answer it when suddenly she heard, "SSSSOOP." Hippie had gotten sucked in.

Gasping, the owner turned off the vacuum, removed the bag, and there was Chippie - still alive, but stunned - totally covered with dust and soot.

She grabbed Chippie, ran to the bathroom, turned on the water and held Chippie under the running water.

Realizing Chippie was soaked and shivering, she grabbed the hair dryer and blasted the parakeet with hot air. Poor Chippie never knew what hit him.

A few days later a friend telephoned to inquire about Chippie. "Well," Chippie's owner replied, "Chippie doesn't sing much anymore - he just sits and stares."

Do you ever feel sucked in, washed up, and blown over 6 - overwhelmed with hurtful challenges?

...positive biopsies that shatter dreams

...unfaithful spouses that rip families apart

...deaths of loved ones

...financial disasters

...battles with self-hatred that make every mention of the

Heavenly Father's love sound like mockery

...challenges of aging

...toxic relationships

...consuming depression/loneliness/fears that cover like a shroud

If these were not enough to weaken our faith, it is also true that we are involved in a spiritual battle against a very real, insidious spiritual enemy who knows all of the weaknesses of our personalities - knows which of our buttons to push (and which people to use to push those buttons) - and whose one purpose, according to John 10:10, is to crush our faith, turn our focus away from God and His promises, and rivet our attention on ourselves and our misery.

Suffering is real. Satanic harassment is real. Therefore, if we base our concept of God solely on life's experiences or on this God we want - this God who is supposed to meet our expectations - we'll be gravely disappointed and end up frustrated, fatalistic, fear-filled people.

Faith in God requires that we become so intimately acquainted with Him that we can rely on His character and believe what He promises us in His Word - regardless of circumstances.

You see, faith is not a feeling (although it will most certainly affect our feelings BIG TIME). Faith is a choice, our choice, to take God at His Word because we know that His Word is backed by His character.

God's Word (what He promised in the Scriptures) is truer than anything I'm feeling, anything I'm experiencing, any circumstance I'm facing now or ever will face.

And so, we honestly cry out to God , sharing our heart secrets:

Father, I feel lousy. I feel as though I've been run over by a Mack truck. My world is falling apart. Nothing seems to fit together. But You have promised in Your Word that You would be "close to those whose hearts are breaking ... You help them in each and every trouble."

You said it. I choose to believe it. (Psalm 34:18,19 - Living Bible)

Heavenly Father, I feel so angry, but at the same time, I am sad and disappointed. My adult child is acting crazy, and I'd like to spank his bottom, but I can't. You told me years ago through the Scriptures that "children are [Your] best gift." I believed that, and I trained him how to live right. And so, now I'm going to believe Your promise that "[You] who began the good work within [him] would keep right on working [in him] ... [and] would complete [what You began] ..."

You said it. I choose to believe it.

(Adapted. Psalm 127:3; Philippians 1:6 - Message; Living Bible and NKJV)

Perhaps the most faith-filled words in the entire Bible were spoken by an Old Testament man named Job, spoken when he was sitting smack-dab in the middle of the worst mess anyone could experience:

...His children had been tragically killed.

...His wife had called him an "idiot" and had walked out of his life.

...He had lost his entire financial security.

...He was sick. His body was covered with putrefying, oozing, itchy sores.

...His best friends had told him his problems were his own fault. He was a sinner, and all that was happening to him was God's judgment against that sin.

There couldn't have been a more desperate picture! And yet, in the middle of this unresolved mess in which there were no answers, no clarity, no possible resolution, this Old Testament man cried out in his angst, "Though God slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). Job was saying, in essence, "I don't understand what's happening in my life. I couldn't feel more alone, destitute, abandoned, and self-loathing. I hate the mess I'm in, but I know the God Who Is, and He can be trusted. I am choosing to put my confidence in Him."

Christian psychologist, Dr. Larry Crabb, has written:

Finding God is developing, through Christ, an unshakeable confidence in the Father's absolute goodness and perfect love no matter what we may experience in life.⁷

Life often hurts; sometimes it downright stinks, and it is very often unfair. That's why we need to know (*yadah*) the GOD WHO IS - the Designer, Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, Sovereign Liege of the Universe. Oh, fall prostrate before Him and acknowledge His Lordship. Worship Him in complete reverence and obey Him in total submission.

But please don't stop there. Look at Jesus. See Him motioning to you. See Him choosing you, embracing you, loving you unconditionally - not because of your performance, your prestige, or your personality- loving you unfailingly - not because you earned His love, deserve it, or did anything to merit it. No, His love is not contingent on YOU, but on HIM.

Isn't it odd
That a being like God
Would love this clod
Made out of sod?
Now isn't that odd?

God's love for you is generated from His own magnanimous heart, so He does not love you more or even less because of what you do or don't do. He simply loves you because it's His nature to love. God IS love! "God so loved that He gave His Son so that any who believe in Him might have life."

I don't understand everything, but I know God, and He can be trusted. Do you think I could hear a dignified Presbyterian, "Amen"?

This morning ...

Are the GOD YOU WANT and the GOD WHO IS synonymous in your life? Or is there still a dichotomy between the two?

Do you believe the GOD WHO IS loves you unconditionally, or is it difficult for you to envision Jesus choosing you, motioning you to come forward, and embracing you?

Have you asked this Jesus to be your Savior from sin and the Master of your life?

Are you sitting, as Job was, in the middle of a mess, and are you disappointed with God's answers and the way He's been treating you? Can you own those feelings of frustration/confusion/anger/hurt? And can you, by faith, respond, "God, I don't understand, and I hate the mess I'm in, but I'm choosing - from this moment on - to trust You"?

In the next few minutes, let's quietly, honestly, and individually talk about any of the concerns we have with this GOD WHO IS. You don't have to use fancy words or liturgical language. He would prefer you didn't. Just talk to Him.

And after you've talked to Him, would you be quiet and expectantly listen. He may have something He'd like to tell you deep in your spirit.

Heavenly Father, thank You for listening to our heart secrets.

Throughout this week please continue to clarify issues for us.

But, even more importantly, simply embrace us with Your

unconditional love until it becomes real, personal, and healing

*in our lives. In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

- 1 Dallas Willard, Ph.D. *Hearing God* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999)
- 2 James Strong, LL.D., S.T.D. *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990)
- 3 Patrick Morley, Ph.D. *Seven Seasons of the Man in the Mirror* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002)
- 4 Sarah Young. *Jesus Calling* (Tennessee: Integrity Publishers, 2004)
- 5 Brennan Manning. *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1990)
- 6 Max Lucado. *In the Eye of the Storm* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991)
- 7 Larry Crabb, Ph.D. *Finding God* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993)

Scripture quotations are taken from:

The Living Bible (Illinois: Tyndall House Publishers, 1971)

The Message. Eugene H. Peterson (Colorado: NAVPRESS, 1993)

The New King James Bible (Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1979)

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