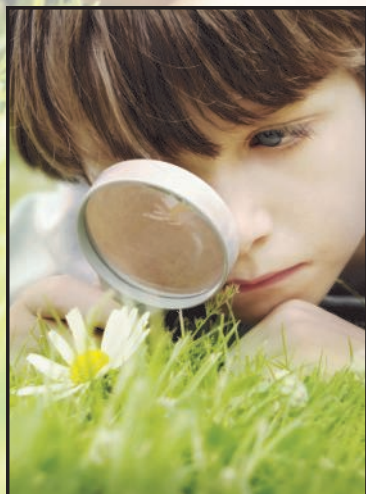


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a closer look at God

fundamental focus

a closer look at God

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"I am the way and the truth and the life." —Jn 14:6



In the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus confronted the Pharisees about the human tendency to turn God into an object: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life...yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (Jn 5:39-40). This

is more of a common tendency than we would like to admit. God wants to have a relationship with us, but it is much easier to reduce our experience with God to a list of dos and don'ts—something manageable, a checklist that can be controlled. But Jesus was clear about the fact that life is found *in Him*, not the Scriptures we

WHAT THIS MAGAZINE IS ABOUT

are studying. If the Scriptures don't lead us to Him, all our study is meaningless. As Christians, we sometimes encounter the same tendency when it comes to our fundamental beliefs. It's easy for us to focus on "what we believe" in a way that misses the God who stands behind what we believe, longing to have a relationship with us. That's what this magazine is about. It's an attempt to glimpse the character of God in some of our important and special beliefs. It's an attempt to help us remember that God is not an object to be grasped hold of, but a Person to have a relationship with. At the very least, it's important to remember that what we believe ultimately says something about the kind of person we think He is. We are pleased to share with you what *we* think about God in the pages of this magazine. May we continue to come to Him for life!



"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. —Is 1:18



God created us in His image, with the power to think and reason. We are intelligent beings, and God wants us to use our reasoning

1 God encourages the use of our reason.

abilities in our lives and in our relationship with Him. One of the ways we see this most clearly is in the fact that God gave us the Bible as one of His primary methods of communicating with us. The

Bible, as a method of communication, has several unique advantages. It minimizes defensiveness, for who can feel threatened by a book? It is not a dominating force or an all-consuming medium; we have the power to decide when we will pick it up and put it down. And it is designed to appeal to our intelligence, for in order to understand its message, we must interact with the evidence it contains and then form conclusions. God intended it to be this way, because He is most interested in forming a meaningful relationship with us—and a meaningful relationship requires intelligent interaction between two people. So, as we learn about God through His Word, He invites our participation in the learning process. He loves questions and observations, even disagreements. Just as He reveals His true self to us, He wants us to be real and honest with Him. God could easily have revealed Himself in a way that would have overwhelmed our senses; instead, He wants us to decide about Him based on the evidence.

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” —1 Jn 4:8

When most people say that God is love, what they often mean is that God acts lovingly toward His creation. And God’s love is certainly manifested in loving acts. However, it is something entirely different to say that God *is* love, and the belief about the Trinity gives us a little glimpse into what love is and how it works. At its heart, love is other-centered, which means that it puts its primary focus and energies into *others* and not *self*. The amazing thing is that God *embodies* this other-centeredness in the Trinity. For instance, the Father doesn’t exalt Himself. Rather, Paul says that He has exalted Jesus, the Son, to the highest place, giving Him the “name above every name” (Phil 2:9). Elsewhere, the Father attributes His power not to might, but to the Holy Spirit (Zec 4:6). In the same way, Jesus uplifts and glorifies the Father (Jn 10:29) and the Spirit (Jn 14:26), and the Spirit glorifies the Father (Gal 4:6) and the Son (Jn 15:26). God—in all three Persons—also embodies this other-centeredness in the way He sacrifices self for the benefit of His creatures. Acting in this way comes naturally to Him, because other-centeredness is hardwired into His very nature.

2 God is love.



“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty.” —Zec 4:6

God is the Source. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe. Isaiah 40 says that God holds the oceans in His hands, measures the heavens with His fingers, and can pick up the Earth as if it were a grain of sand. He is over all and above all, and He holds the fabric of the universe together. Given the Biblical evidence, it would be difficult to deny that God has immense power. However, what makes Him *most*

3 God is all-powerful

powerful is not the enormity of His physical might, but the graciousness of His character, for it is His character that guides the use of His power. We may not often think about this, but how would things be different if our



all-powerful God had a character akin to Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin? There would be no such thing as love and happiness. We would live in constant fear of God and what He might choose to do to us. Instead, God—who is not limited in physical power—*also* possesses the power of servanthood. By living to serve and bless others, He wins the love, admiration, and respect of His creation. And this kind of power, gained through freely-given

homage, is more potent than any power that can be commanded through force or coercion. This is truly why our God is *all*-powerful!

“But in these last days, [God] has spoken to us by His Son.” —Hb 1:2

The Bible calls Jesus the “one mediator between God and men” (1 Tm 2:5). Often, we think of a mediator as one who moderates a dispute. However, *mediator* can also simply mean a person who communicates or conveys a message.



This is why the word *mediator* has, at its root, the word *media*. This means that Christ is like the divine media department. He is

4

God communicates by taking on the characteristics of His creation.

the vehicle through which information about God is communicated to God’s creatures. And He gives, literally, *all* of Himself in this communication effort. When it came to providing the ultimate truth about God to the human race, for instance, Jesus actually *became a human being* in order to communicate most effectively with us. Instead of sending messages from afar, aloof and distant, He made it personal. He took on our flesh and blood and came in such a way that we could get close to Him, get to know Him, and learn about Him. In the Upper Room, when Jesus said, “This is my body given for you” (Lk 22:19), He meant it quite literally. His body, His blood, His life, and His death were all part of the message about God that Jesus came to convey.

"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" —Ps 139:7

There is one thing God longs for and has been working toward throughout history: to be close to His children. For Him, the work on restoring our relationship began in the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they got scared, and when they heard God walking through the garden, they hid from Him. God knew that they were afraid, so instead of sneaking up on them and scaring them, He gently called out, "Where are you?" Hasn't this been the stance of God throughout history with the human race? We're afraid of Him, and He has—in so many different ways—been calling out, "Where are you? There's no reason to be afraid." God longs to soothe and comfort us. That's why the Holy Spirit, the member of the Trinity that actually dwells within us, is called the Comforter. As we invite Him into our lives, the Spirit lives in us, comforts us, encourages us, heals our hearts from sin, and

5 God is deeply intimate.

empowers us in God's way of life by giving us spiritual gifts. This is how we know that God is the original Lover. He wants to be closer to us than anything or anyone else. With Him, we

can experience a closeness we will never find with anyone else. God knows us intimately, He loves us intimately, and He wants to get up close and personal with us!



“Dominion and awe belong to God; He establishes order in the heights.” —Jb 25:2

Throughout the Bible, one of the biggest lessons we learn about God is that His presence introduces order into chaos. Paul acknowledged this in his letter to the

C o r i n t h i a n s

when he said, regarding their worship, that

“e v e r y t h i n g

should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor 14:40). A great example of this quality of orderliness in God is seen in how He immediately set about numbering, organizing, and establishing the Israelites after He brought them out of Egypt. But perhaps the most potent example of God’s

bringing order from chaos is seen right from the very beginning, in the story of Creation. In six days, God created our world and everything in it. And He did it in an orderly way, with three days of forming and three days of filling. First, He started by forming empty shapes: Day One was light; Day Two was the oceans and the sky; and Day Three was dry ground and plants. Then, after He had created these beautiful templates of space, God began to fill the empty shapes with His creative masterpieces: on Day Four, God filled the light with the sun, moon, and stars; on Day Five, He filled the oceans and sky with marine life and birds; and on Day Six, He filled the ground with animals and—as His crowning act—intelligent people created in His image. God always works in this orderly, deliberate way. He always thinks ahead, plans ahead, and prepares us for what He’s doing. And, just as He brought order from chaos in the creation of the world, so He can bring order from chaos in the re-creation of our hearts and minds.

6 God is orderly.



"I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." —Is 49:15-16

God created us perfect. He gave us freedom and power to think and act. He gave us the opportunity to make

7 God values His creation.

choices. As a human race, we made bad choices—choices that ruined our perfection and set us on the road toward death. But God

has not left us alone in our predicament. In Christ, He personally took on the human condition. He entered our disordered world and became as we are so we could see Him as He is. This was not without immense cost. Our sin has undoubtedly brought pain to God's heart—as He sees us hurting, He hurts. But when God became a man in Jesus, He emptied Himself completely, sacrificing all He could in order to restore us. During that restoration process, He rebuilds our freedom and repairs our power to think and to do. You see, sin actually erodes and ultimately removes freedom. That's why God hates it so much—not because it "offends His holy nature," but because it destroys our freedom. If we persist in sin, we eventually get to the place where we *can't* choose anything else. We end up totally enslaved to sin. But we are worth so much to God that He hasn't spared anything—including His own life—in an effort to save us. We should never doubt that God highly values us. At the cross, we hear His ultimate statement of love: "Restoring you is worth everything to Me. I would rather die than live forever without you."



Freedom is a reality in God’s universe. Because of this, He acts in ways that appeal to our reason. Instead of “telling” us how it is, He “shows” us. Instead of making claims, He provides evidence. He encourages us to ask questions and to speak freely with Him, whether we’re angry (Jonah) or trying to get Him to “see things more reasonably” (Abraham). In order to have this kind of relationship, God opens Himself up to scrutiny. He allows His creatures to question His way of governing, His authority, and even His character. Instead of squelching such questions, He welcomes them. Then, He graciously and patiently answers the questions raised by providing evidence. This quality in God is unheard of among Earth’s dictators. Who—among Stalin, Hussein, or Hitler—would tolerate rebellion or allow open opposition to their governments? Who would respond with kindness and patience? But God is like that. He does not place Himself above the scrutiny of His creation. On the contrary, He *longs* to be scrutinized closely so He can be known intimately. Throughout the course of history, not only has God *not* squashed those who have questioned Him, but He has also placed Himself squarely in the teeth of suffering in order to provide the answers.

8 God subjects Himself to intense scrutiny.



“God presented [Jesus] as a sacrifice...to demonstrate His justice.” —Rom 3:25



God never asks us to believe anything based only on a claim. (That’s what the story in 1 Kings 13 is all about!) Therefore, He always provides evidence for us

9 God is a demonstrator.

to consider as a basis for making up our minds about Him and the important issues we face in this life.

So when God said, “In the day you eat of it, you’ll die” (see Gn 2:17), He determined that He would show us what He meant instead of expecting us to believe His claim. In God’s perfect universe, nobody had ever seen death. And even when Adam and Eve sinned and, one by one, they and all their descendents stopped breathing and returned to dust, the universe *still* hadn’t seen true *death*. In the whole course of human history to date, only one person has ever truly died the death which is caused by sin: Jesus. In His Son, God demonstrated what He meant when He said that sin would lead to death. In order to prove that this death comes as a natural result of separation from God and is not an execution, God performed the separation on Himself. Persisting in sin ultimately cuts us off from the Source of life, and when Christ “became sin for us” (see 2 Cor 5:21), He experienced that total separation from God. He did this because God always answers questions with *evidence*, not *claims*. In the life of Christ, we see the true character of God. In the death of Christ, we see the true character of sin. And this truth is what will set the universe free forever.

“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” —Mt 19:26

There is no end to God’s patience. None. It goes on forever. His work in our lives knows no haste and no delay; He delights in taking whatever time is necessary to refine and transform us. In this process, God submits Himself to *our* learning curve. No matter our absorption rate, the work is His to complete, and He does it with flourish. Paul calls God “the Author and Finisher of our faith” (Hb 12:2), reminding us that “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” (Phil 1:6). In the experience of salvation, we can relax and let God work, trusting Him to shape a new life in us—from the inside out. We often mistakenly assume that we have a work to do in this process. But salvation is all God’s idea and all His work. Our only responsibility is to *allow* Him to work. This willingness is the *only* component in the salvation process that God can’t provide. He won’t force us to cooperate with Him. But when we trust God to work in us, our faith is credited as righteousness (see Rom 4). The only power on Earth that can keep God from making us perfect is our

unwillingness to let Him work in our lives. But when we have



10 God is patient.

faith in Him, we *are* perfect, because there is nothing He can’t accomplish in us, and His work is perfect! When we combine our willingness with His patience, all things are possible.

“Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’” —Lk 23:34



God is an immediate forgiver. In the story of the prodigal son, He described Himself as the loving father who had already forgiven the son

before he came home. On the cross, Jesus spoke forgiveness to those who were abusing Him—even though they never asked for forgiveness. God forgives because He is a forgiving person, not because we ask Him to

11 God is forgiving.

forgive. But, even though God forgives immediately, this forgiveness can't affect us unless we receive it. Had

the prodigal son never gone home, he never would have realized that he was *already* forgiven. He might have died—fully forgiven—in the pig sty. That would have been a senseless tragedy. So God wants us to realize that He *is* forgiving and to receive that forgiveness from Him. This was one of the main purposes of the Old Testament sanctuary system. God designed a way to take forgiveness—an abstract concept—and make it tangible: the Israelites *knew* that when they brought their sin to the Lord, He would accept their sacrifices, and then they would have the assurance that everything was right between them and God. This helped them *internalize* the truth that God is forgiving, and He wants us to realize the same thing. When God can speak forgiveness even to those who are torturing and killing Him, we should never doubt that, *right now*, we are fully forgiven!

“Every city or household divided against itself will not stand.” —Mt 12:25

God is love. His very nature is love. He exists in a harmonious community of three Persons. It is no wonder, then, that He extends this love of harmonious relationships to His creation. And God designed the church to promote harmony and unity among His followers on Earth. God wants us

12 God promotes community.

to live in community, because living in community provides opportunities to practice love. This is important, because the universe runs on the law of

love. It depends on God and His creatures being *other*-centered, not *self*-centered. And there’s no better way to practice this than when we are surrounded by people who are different from us in a variety of ways. This is when we need to practice love and humility the most. And let’s face it: we often fail at this. The church is *notorious* for conflict and discord. We tend to mistake uniformity for unity, wanting others in the church to conform to what *we* think is best. But God wants us to practice the art of harmonious relationships, of unity in diversity. This comes when we focus on what *others* need instead of what *we* want, and it is this other-centered quality, embodied

by God, that makes up the fabric of community, both in the church of Christ on Earth and in the universe for the rest of eternity.



"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." —Mt 24:35



The one constant in Earth's history has been God. From the very beginning, He has remained with us, no matter what. Even in the rough

13 God remains no matter what.

times, God remains with us, and He asks us to remain in Him. Jesus said, "Remain in me and I will remain in you" (Jn 15:4). This is what it means to be part of a "remnant" (those who remain), and as we stay with God, we experience His love in our lives. In 1 Corinthians 13:7, Paul says that love "bears all things" and "endures all things" (NASB). Staying with God, then, enables us to bear and endure all things we encounter in this life; what's more, being part of this "remnant" helps us not only to survive, but also to thrive. Jesus explained this to His disciples: "I have told you this so that...your joy may be complete" (Jn 15:11). Being part of the "remnant" who stick closely with Christ is the only way we can find true joy in life. And, even more surprising, this joy comes right along with all the things that God's love is helping us to "bear" and "endure." This is the miracle of God's remaining with us. He doesn't supernaturally keep a hedge around us and stop "bad" things from happening to us. He doesn't have to. Instead, by His presence, He transforms the "bad" things into experiences that make our joy complete. No matter what life brings, we can be assured that God will never leave us. We can face anything, because He remains with us through everything.

"Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered." —Lk 12:7

You don't have to look very far in nature to discover that God loves wild, outrageous variety. His love expresses itself in a created world where very little is the same. Billions of snowflakes fall across this planet every year, yet no two are the same. Prints lay on the surface of billions of fingers, yet no two are an exact copy.

Every person is a unique and special creation, with a genetic code unlike any other. In the whole course of human history,

no other person has ever before had your DNA, and in the whole course of human history to come, your specific genetic code will never occur again.

God loves originals. He doesn't make copies. So, as we come closer to God, our individuality should express itself *more*, not *less*. Therefore, we shouldn't be concerned with erasing differences among ourselves in the church. Rather, we should be concerned with serving and bringing honor and recognition to those around us. We should celebrate, not change, the differences of our brothers and sisters.

God has created each one of us with unique qualities, and we honor Him when we unite our differences in the common goal of love. God Himself embodies this principle. The Father, Son, and Spirit are united in their love for each other and their creatures. And each member spends His time serving and exalting the other two. Thus, we see that love works to *unite* individuality, not to *erase* it.

God loves individuality. 14



“There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents.” —Lk 15:7

God accepts us right now. Just as we are. We don’t have to clean ourselves up before we come to Him. We can come to

15 God is accepting.

Him, and He says *Yes!* In fact, when we say *yes* to God, we discover that our *yes* was actually preceded by His *Yes!* When we accept Him, we find that He has already accepted us! Paul put it this way: “We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us” (Rom 5:2, *Message*). When we find ourselves on

the road toward home, as the prodigal son did, we discover that God is already out and running toward us, shouting, arms open wide. Whenever we “go home” to God, we can be assured of His acceptance, no matter what we’ve done, no matter how “bad” we’ve been. The thief hanging on the cross next to Jesus discovered this—all it takes is one response to the Spirit, and we find the open arms of God’s wide embrace. You see, the danger with sin is not that God eventually refuses to take us back, but that we may get to the place where we will *never* go home. God’s *Yes!* never changes to a *No!* He will always take us back. This goes for *anyone*. If Satan was capable of responding to the Spirit, God would still welcome him back home. This means, then, that God has absolutely no problem with us! The obstacles in our relationship with Him are all of our own making. God *never* rejects us; He *always* accepts us!



“But [Jesus] made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.” —Phil 2:7

One of the most important things God wants us to remember and celebrate about Him is that He is a servant. The essence of Godhood is servanthood. This isn't something we often think about (or maybe it's we just wouldn't choose to celebrate it). But this truth about God was clearly revealed in the Upper Room, as He demonstrated His willingness to break down His own body to be used by others for their benefit. By offering Himself in such a way, God invites us to be willing participants in an intimate relationship with Him—not mere bystanders. For when we receive communion, we must take Jesus into ourselves. We must absorb Him—body and blood—and as we do, we once again symbolize our commitment to give God access to every part of us. So, just as God gave us access to every part of Himself through His sacrifice, we can choose to allow Him access to every part of us. This is perfect love—giving the whole self to others—and it is all initiated through total servanthood. Because God approaches us as a servant, we can be fully at ease, even in our guilt. For who is afraid of a servant? A

16 God is a servant.



servant is totally vulnerable. A servant's focus is on meeting the needs of the served. This is how power and greatness are expressed in the kingdom of God. The more you serve, the greater you are. This means that, for all time, nobody will ever out-serve our awesome God! He is the greatest!

“And [the Spirit]...gives to each one, just as he determines.” —1 Cor 12:11

Since God lives to serve, and since He wants us to be like Him, He also wants us to serve. Thus, God enables service. In the church, He does this in two ways. First, He enables service by giving each of us different spiritual



gifts which we can use to bless and benefit others. In this way, God provides the opportunity to experience what it's like to be

17 God is an enabler.

Him—generous and giving. Just as God has blessed us through His giving, we find ourselves in a position to bless others with the spiritual gifts we've received. And in giving to others, we find ourselves blessed and taken care of, just as each of our body parts serves all the other parts and, in turn, finds itself cared for within the body. This is the second way God enables service—by providing a variety of spiritual gifts. This variety keeps us all from looking alike, and it gives us the opportunity to celebrate differences by focusing on others instead of ourselves. Instead of trying to change others into our image, we see God's creative work in action by observing how all the gifts, which look so wild in their variety, function together as one, healthy body. By giving us this opportunity to serve each other, God enables love. As we focus on those around us—both by blessing them with *our* spiritual gifts and by recognizing and celebrating *their* spiritual gifts—we strengthen the bonds of love that connect us to each other and to God.

"If I go up to the heavens...if I make my bed in the depths, you are there." —Ps 139:8

Throughout history, prophecy has been one of God's greatest gifts to mankind. But when it comes to prophecy, sometimes we get wrapped up in our charts, graphs, and timelines. We tend to focus on deciphering future events and miss the "big picture" message of prophecy. Jesus said that God gives prophecy so "when it does happen, you will believe" (Jn 14:29). This means, then, that prophecy is primarily designed to enhance our relationship with God. The way prophecy accomplishes this is by revealing clearly that God is involved, both in our world and in our lives. Prophecy provides points of reference that help us see God's working in our world in the past, present, and future. When God gives a prophecy, we see clearly that He is working and speaking in the present. By announcing the events to come, we know God fully intends to be working in the future. And it has been God's habit to refer back to prophecies at the time of their fulfillment, so we are then reminded that He was working in the past. Thus, God's involvement in our lives surrounds us on all sides.

Throughout the ages, God used His prophets in this way—to give us a road map that will lead us to Him, the One who is speaking. He wants us to know

that He hasn't left us alone to deal with our problems. He is intimately involved in every aspect of Earth's history and our lives.

18 God is intimately involved.



“The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.” —Ps 19:8

Everything God says and does has a purpose, and there is one, great purpose in the law: to help us arrive at something that can never be legislated. This is why God gave the Ten Commandments—not as a list of rules designed in eternity and given on Mount Sinai, but as a tool to lead us to love. The law, as it was given on Sinai, was a temporary measure. In fact, Paul says “we were held prisoners by the law, locked up” (Gal 3:23) until Christ could come to show us the flesh-and-blood picture of true love. However, with the spiritual infants of old Israel, God had to begin with the “tangibles.” So, the Israelites learned that it was wrong to have sex with someone other than a spouse. But when Jesus was here, He expressed a need to move from the “tangibles” to the “intangibles.” Now, it was no longer enough to refrain from the sexual act. Even fantasizing about such an act was outside the boundaries of true love. The law shows us just how purposeful God is. He meets us where and helps us move along, step by step, into an understanding of the Law of Love—the Law on which the whole universe runs. The Ten Commandments don’t restrict freedom;

they establish the only boundaries in which true freedom can exist.



19 God is purposeful.

We can’t “break” the Law of Love, but if we ignore it, *we will get broken*. And God doesn’t want that to happen. That’s why He gave us the Ten Commandments in the first place: to lead us to the Law of Love.

"I have called you friends." —Jn 15:15

As Creation unfolded, God filled the Earth with incredible and beautiful things. On the sixth day, He first created animals, and then, in His crowning act of creation, He made human beings. From the Creation account, we know that the days were being measured from evening to



evening. This means that God created human beings, most likely, at the end of the sixth day—and the first thing He did was say, “Let’s spend some time

together.” This reveals that God’s primary motivation in creation is love, and the quality of our relationship is

20 God wants friendship.

very important to Him. Jesus made sure we were clear on that when He said, “I have called you friends” (Jn 15:15). What a thought!—that the God who is over all, above all, and outside the realms of Time, willingly enters our time and space to fellowship with us. The Sabbath provides a special opportunity for that. As we spend time in God’s presence, we come to know Him, and we discover that He loves us just as we are. We remember that He is the Creator and that we are created. And as we remember that God is our Provider, we are able to rest, relax, and enjoy His blessings to the fullest, because it frees us from striving to provide for ourselves. This is why God made the Sabbath—think of it as a special “date” with Him once a week. God loves great friendships. He creates them, and the Sabbath is one of His best tools for maintaining them.

“God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good.” —Mt 5:45

God is an outrageous giver. Because of this, we can live throughout eternity in expectant anticipation. We can always expect *more* from God, and in His universe, *taking* is just as important as *giving*. That’s because life



exists in a great cycle of give and take. Jesus demonstrated how this taking and giving worked, as He said that everything He had, He had taken directly from the Father. Yet, everything He took from the Father, He gave to others. There’s the key. God wants to give us more than we can

21 God is a giver.

ever take, but when we *do* take, it should be for the purpose of giving. The more we take to give, the more God can give to us. This is why God wants us to be stewards. He doesn’t ask us to give because He is unable to provide for someone. He has all the resources of the universe at His disposal! He asks us to be stewards because He wants to *give us more*. And if we live with an “earning” mentality, God is limited in what He can give us. He can’t give us all He wants if we’re out to earn it for ourselves. There is no way we could ever work hard enough or long enough to earn the abundance that God wants to give. God owns everything, and He gives everything He has to His creation. He wants us to relax and open our clenched fists so we can be free to receive His abundant blessings and gain firsthand knowledge of what an outrageous giver He is.

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.” —Phil 1:6



Since God is into originals, He is a master of restoration. He is like those who love to find and restore old, junked-up antiques. With God, this restoration is total. That is one of the parts of the

22 God is a restorer.

Christian life that can be so difficult—God wants unrestricted access to every part of us. He wants to restore us completely,

not partially. The wonderful part of this is that God is easily able to transform even the most rotten character. There is no damage done by sin that He can't heal—as long as we are willing. Willingness is the only component of salvation that God can't provide, because He won't force us to cooperate with Him. But when we *do* cooperate, all things are possible. Saul's conversion to the great Apostle Paul is a wonderful example of this. Because of Paul's willingness, God was able to transform him from a zealous extremist who executed those who disagreed with him to a gracious gentleman who believed that every person should be convinced in his own mind. Paul's conversion moved him from beliefs he was willing to *kill* for to a Friend he was willing to *die* for. When we are willing, God's Spirit is powerful enough to transform the dirtiest of dispositions. With God, it's not how good we *have* to be, but how good we *get* to be, for the One who began a good work in us is certainly able and willing to finish it!

"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me." —Mt 11:29

Master teachers help their students learn through a process of experience, so in order to help us understand Him better, God designed marriage and the family. In these two wonderful gifts, God has created a microcosm that provides us with a tiny glimpse into what it means *to be God*. Can you believe that?! God wants so badly to be known that He has given us a special way to see into His heart. To begin with, marriage is designed to help us understand the intimacy and love that exists in the

23 God is a master teacher.

Trinity. When it's done right, a husband and wife experience true oneness and unity—the "two" really do become "one"—and they can begin to grasp in a tiny way how the "three" members of the Trinity are "one." Marital love expresses itself in the creation of little people in our own image, just as God created us in His image. This teaches us that God's motivation



for creating us was love. God is an absolute genius in designing ways to educate us! Through the family, we get a glimpse into His very heart. With such a Master Teacher at hand, what will we not be able to learn?

“In his Son, [God] personally took on the human condition.” —Rom 8:3 (Message)

One of the most important messages of the Old Testament sanctuary system is that, though He is not to blame, God takes responsibility for sin. The sanctuary was an invitation for the Israelites to bring their sin to God, knowing that when they approached Him, they



would be forgiven. This has always been God’s objective in dealing with the sin problem. You see, choosing to sin *immediately* injected a fear of God into the hearts of Adam and Eve. But God doesn’t want there to be separation between us. Thus,

in all things, God has been working to reconcile us to Himself. Through the life and death of Christ, God devoted Himself to that reconciliation

for all time. In order to provide the opportunity for reconciliation, God sacrificed all of Himself—not holding anything back. He took the full weight of our suffering and depravity upon Himself. So, though He was in no way to blame for sin, God took the responsibility of providing a solution. Now we know that we have a helper in God, not an obstacle. We know that we have a friend in God, not an enemy. Instead of leaving us alone in the darkness of our sin, God entered our disordered world and sacrificed Himself to present us with the gift of salvation.

24 God takes responsibility for sin.

"[Nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God." —Rom 8:39

If we want to be connected to God, there is absolutely nothing that can keep us separated from Him, because God is always working to overcome separation. He is the one who keeps coming to us. He is the constant initiator in our relationship. We can never wander so far away that He won't come for us. We can never push Him away so hard that He will stop loving us. We can never hide so long that He'll stop looking for us. God hates separation and is always working to conquer it. And He will keep



pursuing us until we either decide to come home or until we have placed ourselves beyond His reach. Yes, the only separation God can't overcome is the separation we *insist* on keeping between Him and us. God will always

25 God overcomes separation.

love us—in fact, He still loves Satan with an infinite love. But if we ultimately refuse to have a relationship with God, we place Him in a position

where He is *unable* to do anything, because He won't override our freedom by *forcing* us to choose Him. We are the only ones who can place such an obstacle in the way. Otherwise, nothing—not even death—can keep God from us. Outside of our will, nothing is stronger than His love. He can overcome the very deepest, darkest separation.

“See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.” —Dt 30:15

From God’s perspective, Life and Death are not measured by whether we are breathing or not, but by whether or not we’re connected to Him. When we truly understand that, we see that the death we will experience on this planet is not the Death (the “wages of sin”) that God wants to save

26

God is a fierce protector.

us from. The Death God wants to save us from, which we sometimes refer to as “the second death,” is extinction. God can’t resurrect us from Death. But God is a fierce

protector, and He will do absolutely anything He can to keep us from rushing headlong into Death through rebellion. The greatest hedge against that ultimate extinction is the death we will all face on this Earth. God uses this death to protect us from *real* Death. He uses it to teach us that we are dependent on Him for Life, and He also uses it to teach us about what He goes through when His children choose Death over Life. From our

perspective, we have no control over death. It is futile for us to try to escape it. In the same way, God has no control over Death. When one of His children decides to ultimately



disconnect from Him, the Source of Life, there is nothing He can do. That’s why God has done everything He can to keep us from choosing Death. He will do anything to protect us from that.

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” —Jn 8:32

God takes freedom seriously, and nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the final events of the Great Controversy. In the course of the conflict, God has provided ample evidence and time for all His children to make their decisions. And once they’ve been made, God respects our choices and surrenders *Himself* to our decisions. God says, “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong...let him who does right continue to do right” (Rv 22:11). Then, according to Malachi, God treats all His children the same: “All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire...but for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall” (Mal 4:1-2). God doesn’t act as a consuming fire *only* to the wicked. God *is* a consuming fire, period. As

Isaiah once asked, “Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire...with



27 God respects freedom.

everlasting burning? He who walks righteously and speaks what is right” (Is 33:14-15). God treats us all equally, no matter if we accept Him or reject Him. We *really are free* to choose—without fear of retribution from God. He is who He is, and He allows us to be who we are. Think about that: at the end,

God surrenders Himself to the very worst kind of pain—that of a parent who loses a child—because He is totally committed to our freedom.

“The Lord’s...compassions never fail. They are new every morning.” —Lam 3:22-23



God is a God of new beginnings. He has unbelievable power to make crooked places straight, to set things right, and to completely restore what has been destroyed. The Bible makes it clear that He will more than make up for anything difficult we have experienced on

Earth. One day soon, there will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more disease, and no more death. And God will be right where He has longed to be for centuries—living among us, letting us see Him as intimately as He sees us. As we look around our world, as we see the sin, suffering, and death, it’s hard to imagine that God will be able to “make it better.” But our God is

full of new beginnings and creative surprises, and He is able to restore everything—our planet

28 God brings new beginnings.

and our lives. As Solomon put it, “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men” (Eccl 3:11). God has given us the hope of a better place, and one day soon, He will make all things new. Then, we will fully understand just how God makes everything beautiful in its own time. The universe and everything in it will beat with one pulse of love. Every part of God’s creation will be in harmony, and we will never again be separated from Him who is Love and Life and Freedom!



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