

2-2018

## God is a Person

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### Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "God is a Person" (2018). *The Three-in-One File*. 32.  
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## GOD IS A PERSON

*“Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3).*

- One of the greatest books ever written on the Person of God is entitled *The Pursuit of God*, by the late A. W. Tozer. In this book, Dr. Tozer wrote the following:

In this hour of all but universal darkness, one cheering gleam appears. Within the fold of conservative Christianity, there are to be found increasing numbers of persons whose religious lives are marked by a growing hunger after God Himself. They are eager for spiritual realities, and will not be put off with words, nor will they be content with correct “interpretations” of truth. They are athirst for God, and they will not be satisfied until they have drunk deep at the fountain of living water.

The modern scientist has lost God amid the wonders of His world. We Christians are in real danger of losing God amid the wonders of His Word. We have almost forgotten that God is a person; and, as such, can be cultivated as any person can. It is inherent in personality to be able to know other personalities, but full knowledge of one personality by another cannot be achieved in one encounter. It is only after long and loving mental communication that the full possibilities both can be explored. (*The Pursuit of God*, pp. 7, 13)

- I first became acquainted with A. W. Tozer’s books while a student at the Moody Bible Institute in the early 1950s. Today, over a half century later, upon again reading the above material the following sentences suddenly struck me:

*“We have almost forgotten that God is a person; and as such, can be cultivated as any person. It is inherent in personality to be able to know other personalities, but full knowledge of one personality by another cannot be achieved in one encounter.”*

- Soul searching, indeed, soul rebuking work, especially the last three, “in one encounter.”

To explain:

Since joining Liberty University faculty in 1972 to serve as dean of our Bible Institute, it has been my great honor to both meet and shake hands with any number of famous individuals, a few of which were:

- A. President Ronald Reagan
- B. President George Bush and wife Barbara
- C. Senator Ted Kennedy
- D. Francis Schaeffer
- E. Jesse Helms

F. Clarence Thomas  
G. Colonel Sanders  
H. Chuck Swindoll  
I. James Dobson  
J. Billy Graham  
K. Bill Bright  
L. Newt Gingrich

Then, there were the following I met at the NRB (National Religious Broadcast) sessions:

M. Jim Bakker  
N. Jimmy Swaggart  
O. Norman Vincent Peale

- WOW! Heady stuff indeed! But then came the cold reality that probably none of these could have picked me out in a police lineup 24 hours after we had met! How painfully true Tozer's observation: one or even a few encounters won't do the job! One passing thought: I will in the near future (God willing) observe my fortieth anniversary here at Liberty University.

During these nearly four decades I believe it can be said my knowledge in regard to the *Word of God* has increased ten-fold! But, a disturbing question: Can the same be said in regard to the *God of the Word*?

And the bottom line of all the above? Simply this: God is a Person and we can only know what He desires to reveal about Himself through repeated encounters!

- The scriptures constantly challenge us to .....*know God!*

As seen in the Psalms:

*"Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand" (Psa. 20:6).*

*"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" (Psa. 46:10).*

*"Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture" (Psa. 100:3).*

*"Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praises to His name, for it is pleasant" (Psa. 135:3).*

As seen in the book of Isaiah:

*"That they may see and know, and consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it" (Isa. 41:20).*

As seen in Paul's writings:

*"But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him" (1 Cor. 8:3).*

*“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power” (Eph. 1:15-19).*

*“For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Tim. 1:12).*

Daniel Whittle’s great hymn brings this out in glorious musical fashion. The careful reader will note the song contains five *“I know nots”*; but only one *“I know.”* However, that one *know* is more than enough to offset the five *I know nots*. Here is his song:

*I know not why God’s wondrous grace  
To me He hath made known,  
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love  
Redeemed me for His own.*

Refrain:

*But “I know Whom I have believed,  
And am persuaded that He is able  
To keep that which I’ve committed  
Unto Him against that day.”*

*I know not how this saving faith  
To me He did impart,  
Nor how believing in His Word  
Wrought peace within my heart.*

*I know not how the Spirit moves,  
Convincing men of sin,  
Revealing Jesus through the Word,  
Creating faith in Him.*

*I know not what of good or ill  
May be reserved for me,  
Of weary ways or golden days,  
Before His face I see.*

*I know not when my Lord may come,  
At night or noonday fair,  
Nor if I walk the vale with Him,  
Or meet Him in the air.*

- Dr. Robert Lightner has written the following about the personality of God:

Personality involves existence with the power of self-consciousness and self-determination. To be self-conscious means to be able to be aware of one's own self among others. It is more than mere consciousness. Even animals possess something which makes them aware of things around them. The brute, however, is not able to objectify himself. Man, in contrast to the brute, possesses both consciousness and self-consciousness. Self-determination has to do with the ability to look to the future and prepare an intelligent course of action. It also involves the power of choice. The brute also has determination, but he does not have self-determination – the power to act from his own free will and to thus determine his acts. It is usually admitted that there are three elements of personality – intellect, emotion and will. (*The God of the Bible*, p. 65)

- Thus, as a Person, God exhibits all those elements involved in personality. Let us now look at some of the things God does which prove that He is indeed not some mystical principle, but an actual Person.

#### A. He creates

One of the most debated questions in human history is just how and when did the universe come into being? There are three main views:

##### 1. The steady state view:

This says it has always existed and had no beginning. This view has now been completely discredited.

##### 2. The gravity view:

a. World-famous physicist Stephen Hawking believes that gravity created it.

##### b. The nature view:

In essence this holds that when gravity had done its work, nature took over, and through the forces of evolution, created all living organisms, from the lowly amoeba to man!

##### 3. The Genesis, chapter one, verse one view:

*"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"* (Gen. 1:1).

Which of the three positions is the correct one? This can be answered by asking one pointed question: How did these two non-existent, non-living, non-thinking, non-caring, non-goal setting entities (gravity and nature) create all existing, living, thinking, caring, goal-setting things? How indeed!

Let us now briefly examine the *what* and *why* in regard to God's creative acts:

##### 1. What did God create?

a. The original earth

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).*

*“I have made the earth, and created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded” (Isa. 45:12).*

*“Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’ For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water” (2 Peter 3:3-6).*

b. The present earth

*“But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7).*

c. The future earth

*“Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).*

*“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Isa. 65:17).*

*“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea” (Rev. 21:1).*

d. All life in general

e. Human life in particular

*“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:26, 27).*

*“Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it” (Isa. 42:5).*

*“I have made the earth, and created man on it. I—My hands—stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded” (Isa. 45:12).*

f. A new nature for all believers

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17).*

## 2. Why did God create?

*"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psa. 19:1).*

*"Everyone who is called by My name, Whom I have created for My glory" (Col. 1:16).*

*"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (Rev. 4:11).*

## B. He destroys

*"And the LORD said, "Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grave" (Gen. 18:20).*

*"Then the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground" (Gen. 19:24, 25).*

## C. He provides

*"These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good. You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth" (Psa. 104:27-30).*

*"Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?" (Lk. 12:24).*

Untold millions could readily give testimony to the fact that where God guides He also provides; where He leads He also feeds; and where He directs He also protects.

## D. He promotes

*"For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another" (Psa. 75:6, 7).*

Some 20 centuries ago, the Apostle Paul counseled the Church at Philippi to select the second one:

*"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:4-7).*

Frank Graeff's probing hymn overviews all this by asking four painful questions, and closes with one glorious and reassuring answer:

*Does Jesus care when my heart is pained  
Too deeply for mirth or song,*

*As the burdens press, and the cares distress,  
And the way grows weary and long?*

Refrain:

*Oh, yes, He cares, I know He cares,  
His heart is touched with my grief;  
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,  
I know my Savior cares.*

*Does Jesus care when my way is dark  
With a nameless dread and fear?  
As the daylight fades into deep night shades,  
Does He care enough to be near?*

*Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed  
To resist some temptation strong;  
When for my deep grief there is no relief,  
Though my tears flow all the night long?*

*Does Jesus care when I've said "goodbye"  
To the dearest on earth to me,  
And my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks—  
Is it aught to Him? Does He see?*

Perhaps the story of Joseph in the Old Testament would surely rank as one of the greatest examples of this in all of human history. Just think of being suddenly promoted from a prison to a palace! From being a lowly prisoner to a powerful statesman!

*"Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in the prison" (Gen. 39:20).*

*"And Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?' Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.' And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.' Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, 'Bow the knee!' So he set him over all the land of Egypt. Pharaoh also said to Joseph, 'I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt'" (Gen. 41:38-44).*

#### E. He cares

*"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6, 7).*

*"Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward" (Heb. 10:35).*



No principle can care. Only a person can care for another person or another object. Poet Thomas Baird wrote these thrilling words concerning these verses in 1 Peter and Hebrews:

*It is His will that I should cast my cares on him each day,  
He also bids me not to cast my confidence away;  
But oh! how foolishly I act when taken unaware,  
I cast away my confidence and carry all my care.*

There is a story concerning a very rich man but in spite of his wealth, was a perpetual worry wart! In fact there was so much to worry about, that he became hopelessly behind in spending the necessary time to worry about each issue and that in itself greatly worried him! So then, deciding to solve this problem, he sat down and made a long list of those worries and then hired someone to do his worrying for him. Thus:

1. The rich man: "Here's what your job is all about. I want you to take this list and spend at least 30 minutes worrying over each worry. Any questions?"
2. The employee: "Yes, we've talked about what you want me to do, why you want me to do it, and the hours involved, but here's my question: When do I get paid?"
3. The rich man: "That's your first worry!"

I once had a little wooden sign on my desk which read:

*Why pray when you can worry? or Why worry when you can pray?*  
(Choose one of the above)

#### F. He hears

*"He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? He who instructs the nations, shall He not correct, He who teaches man knowledge?" (Psa. 94:9, 10).*

The fact that God hears is mentioned nearly 70 times in the Psalms alone. In almost all cases this fact is connected to hearing our prayers. For example, in Psalm 6:8 God says that He hears in time of sorrow. Then in Psalm 34:6 we are told God hears in time of trouble.

Actually, the prayer passages in the scriptures can be separated into two main categories:

1. When God hears our prayers:

*"Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice" (Psa. 55:17).*

*"Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand" (Psa. 20:6).*

*"I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Psa. 34:4).*

*"In my distress I cried to the LORD, and He heard me" (Psa. 120:1).*

*“He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them” (Psa. 18:14).*

2. When God does not hear our prayers:

Admittedly I was surprised to discover just how many passages fall into this category:

*“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear” (Psa. 66:18).*

*“The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous” (Prov. 15:29).*

*“Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, Because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, when your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. ‘Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD’” (Prov. 1:24-29).*

*“And He said to me, ‘Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. Indeed they put the branch to their nose. Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them’” (Ezek. 8:17, 18).*

*“When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence” (Jer. 14:12).*

*“Therefore thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will surely bring calamity on them which they will not be able to escape; and though they cry out to Me, I will not listen to them’” (Jer. 11:11).*

*“Then they will cry to the LORD, but He will not hear them; He will even hide His face from them at that time, because they have been evil in their deeds” (Micah 3:4).*

One of the saddest accounts in regard to pagans seeking help from their false gods is recorded in the Old Testament book of First Kings. You may remember Elijah the prophet had challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest on Mt. Carmel in Israel. He proposed each build an altar, place an animal sacrifice on it, and call upon the respective deity to answer by sending fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice. He then said, “You guys go first.” Here is what happened next:

*“And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, O Baal, answer us! But there was no voice. And no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made . . . And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them. And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering*

*of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention” (1 Kings 18:26, 28, 29).*

Then it was Elijah’s turn –

*“And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things are your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back. Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench” (1 Kings 18:36-38).*

Some will recall the “God is Dead” movement in the 1960s. At that time I was pastoring a church in Minnesota. Responding to this, a Christian penned a letter to the *Minneapolis Star* newspaper which read:

*“God is dead! How strange, for I just talked to Him this morning!”*

Later that same week, a skeptic wrote to the editor –

*“Allah is dead? How strange, for I just talked to him this morning!”*

The believer then responded –

*“Really, tell us, what did he say?”*

#### G. He hates

*“There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community” (Prov. 6:16-19, NIV)*

In addition to these, God hates:

1. Hypocrisy in offering up feasts (Amos 5:21; Isa. 1:14).
2. Lawlessness (Heb. 1:9)
3. Thanklessness (Rom. 1:21)
4. Those who suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18)
5. Sexual perversions (Rom. 1:24-27)
6. Idolatry (Rom. 1:22, 23)
7. Lying oaths (Zech. 8:19)
8. Tolerating false religious teachers (Rev. 2:20)
9. Those who attempt to lord it over others (Rev. 2:6, 15)
10. Lukewarmness (Rev. 3:15, 16)

Especially does God hate the act of sowing discord among the brethren.

George and Ethel were members of the same local church. He was a low-keyed, quiet, hard-working handyman who could always be seen driving an old battered pickup truck. She was the town gossip with a tongue longer than a Minnesota winter!

One Sunday morning, following the preaching service she confronted him in the parking lot. Pointing an accusing finger at him, she began, "I just want you to know your old disgusting truck has been seen parked in front of the town's most notorious tavern! Shame, shame on you! We all know what goes on in a terrible place like that!"

Without pausing, she continued to run her mouth for another ten minutes, loudly berating him in front of those leaving the church. But through all this, George said not a word and finally, turned and left. That night, around 10:00 p.m. he parked his truck in front of her house and quietly walked home!

#### H. He grieves

*"And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart"*  
(Gen. 6:6).

*"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption"*  
(Eph. 4:30).

Here it should be said the word *grieve* is in reality directly associated with the word *love*. To explain: a person might (hopefully not) *hate* his or her enemies, to be *fond* of their friends, but can only be *grieved* by someone they love dearly, like a wayward son, daughter, etc.

#### I. He loves

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (Jn. 3:16).

Perhaps the greatest song ever written is a song that we sometimes limit the singing of to little children. It is the song that, as small children, we learned in Sunday school:

*Jesus loves me, this I know;  
For the Bible tells me so.  
Little ones to Him belong,  
They are weak, but He is strong.*