

2010

**God Laughs & 42 More Surprising Facts about God That Will
Change Your Life**

Elmer L. Towns

Charles Billingsley

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DID YOU KNOW . . .

. . . that God sings? That He winks? Or that He cries? God does many things that you may not have thought about before—but the more you know, the better you can respond to Him and the closer you will come to Him. In *God Laughs*, you'll discover that God sees, hears, waits and runs . . . and that's just for starters!

God gets jealous and angry. He smiles, frowns and yes, laughs! *God Laughs* is your invitation to consider God's character and qualities more deeply than you ever have before. As you glimpse God for who He is, you will worship Him in Spirit and truth. And as you encounter Him at a deeper level, His Spirit will empower you to become more like Him.



ELMER TOWNS is the cofounder of Liberty University and the Church Growth Institute in Lynchburg, Virginia. He is an authority on Sunday School and church growth, and is the author of more than 50 books. Towns holds degrees from Northwestern College, Southern Methodist University, Dallas Theological Seminary, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and Fuller Theological Seminary.



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GOD LAUGHS

& 42 MORE SURPRISING FACTS ABOUT GOD THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE

TOWNS & BILLINGSLEY



GOD

LAUGHS

& 42 MORE

SURPRISING FACTS

ABOUT GOD

THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Bestselling Author of *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*

ELMER L. TOWNS
& CHARLES BILLINGSLEY

SECTION ONE

The Surprising Facts About God

There are many things about God in this book that surprise people, because many people have the same view of god that heathen religions have of their God. Then think God is a force of influence, or God is mean or angry, or God is mysterious or unknowable. *Lord, teach me yourself.*

But *God Laughs* tells some of the good things about God that people don't expect. The Bible teaches we are made in the image of God, so when God looks in our face, it's like God is looking in a mirror, because He sees Himself in us. Because God laughs, we can enjoy many things in life. Because God thinks, we are rational. Because God gets angry – at sin – we get mad and irritable. The more we learn about God, the more we learn about ourselves, and *vice versa*. *Lord, teach me Yourself.*

Our understanding of God is extremely limited. We are finite – limited – and God is infinite – unlimited. So we can never understand all there is to know about God, but we can know what God has chosen to reveal of Himself. And what of God we learn about God in the Bible – His revelation of Himself – will transform our lives. Therefore, we wrote this book “surprising things about God” to change your life into the image of God. *Lord, teach me Yourself.*

The second part of this book is the opposite of “surprising,” it's about the things of God we should already know. We should know the expected and “unexpected” things about God. Why? Because God told us, “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).

GOD LAUGHS
& Other Surprising Things
You Never Knew About Him

By

Charles Billingsley
and
Elmer L. Towns

Presented to

Regal Books

Winter 2010

GOD LAUGHS & Other Surprising Things You Never Knew About Him

INTRODUCTION

“YES,” I (Charles) smiled eagerly when I was told, that *God Laughs*. I have always enjoyed laughing, but I didn’t always think laughing was something I could do in a spiritual way.

I remember being in churches that taught quietness and sobriety were spirited. These are the churches that taught laughing, or cutting up had no place in the sanctuary. Now I agree that horsing around, or what may be called “cutting up” shouldn’t be done in the sanctuary.

But laughing in church can be therapeutic for chronic pessimists. A good laugh will help some forget their problems, and laughing will help some who are in chronic physical pain.

So now you’ll see me smile broadly when I’m on the platform, and I also laugh a lot. For two reasons, first because I’m a happy fellow, and second; because God laughs.

Did you know that God sings? Yes, God sings and when you understand why, you’ll understand Him better. Singing stirs our feelings. Singing the blues make us reflective and singing “God Bless America” stirs up patriotism in us. Some music moves your feet, other songs make you clap your hands. Does music makes you laugh? God sings and God laughs. In this book we’ll reflect on God’s singing so you’ll know more about Him. When you learn that God sings over us—like a mother singing to her baby—then you’ll bow in reverential worship.

As you shop, do you touch various garments? Can you tell something about a garment from just touching it? God touches and He likes to be touched by His people. Do you know the difference between touching a cotton towel and touching a handful of cotton freshly picked from the bush? Each touch is different and each touch does something different to you . . . touch ice to feel cold . . . touch your shiny smooth new car to feel the pride of ownership . . . touch a woman’s face to arouse your emotions. We wouldn’t be human if touch didn’t stimulate us, and

God couldn't relate to us if He couldn't be touched, or touch us. Learn something about God from this marvelous sensation. What do you think God feels when He touches? Read on to find out.

When you smell the aroma of hot donuts are you tempted to buy some? The smell of sizzling hamburgers on a grill makes you hungry. A nauseating smell protects you from eating rotten meat. God enjoys the aroma of good things. What do you think smell does to God? Read on to learn what God likes to smell.

The ice cream shop uses a taster spoon to entice you to buy a cone. Have you ever tasted three or four flavors just because you like to taste ice cream? What does God like to taste? You don't know? Then read on.

There are a lot of things God does and the more you know, the better you can find his heart. God sees . . . God winks . . . God hears and God cries! God waits and God runs! God is jealous and God gets angry. God smiles, God frowns and God whistles. So, is your curiosity tweaked?

Keep reading to find out more about the God you obey and worship. Why? The more you reflect on God, the more you'll enjoy your service and the more you'll enjoy worship. You'll become a fulfilled Christian as you reflect on the heart of God.

We have written this book to help you reflect on the heart of God. Because when you know Him better, you can worship Him better and you can serve Him better.

Written from our homes

at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains

Charles Billingsley

and
Elmer Towns

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40 GOD IS EVERYWHERE PRESENT
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41 GOD IS SPIRIT
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42 GOD DOES NOT CHANGE
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43

THE TRINITY – THREE IN ONE

God is one God, eternally existing in three separate persons, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; equal in nature, but submissive to one another in duties.

EPILOGUE

Chapter 1

FINDING GOD'S HEART

If you would find God's heart, you must seek Him wholeheartedly.

Heart

"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will 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 surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."

Ephesians 1:18-19 (NASB)

CHAPTER ONE
FINDING GOD'S HEART

“And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma. Then the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake” (Gen. 8:21). “The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14).

I (Charles) love to sing with all my heart. It’s probably my favorite way to praise the Lord. Certain songs allow me to really belt out some big notes. Yet, other songs are more intimate and subdued. Either way, in singing I really feel the pleasure of worshipping God. And, when I have the right attitude combined with the right song, I am able to sing with all my heart to the Lord.

I’m sure you have experienced this same feeling. Whether we are alone in our closet of prayer or standing with thousands in a huge conference somewhere, it is a powerful moment to sing from the bottom of the heart beyond even our own limited abilities and touch the heart of God with our praise.

Did you know God has a heart?

Not a physical organ like ours, but just as our hearts are filled with love for our mother, or a special uncle or aunt, or our first sweetheart; so God has a heart that reaches out to those He loves. God has a heart that directs all He does. Just as our hearts overflowed with love on the day of our wedding, so God’s heart overflows to us on special days such as the day of our conversion.

I’m overwhelmed when I think of the sacrificial love a mother has for her baby. She goes through excruciating pain for her baby and sacrifices her time, and sometimes her occupation for her baby. God has that same love, He sacrifices for us. Jesus gave up His magnificent home

because of His sacrificial love, add all His pain and suffering on the cross; then you begin to comprehend His unselfish love. *Lord, I bow to You from a passionate heart.*

I (Charles) have two children that I love with all my heart. There's nothing I wouldn't do for them and if you watch us walking through a Toys R Us store, you'd think there's nothing I wouldn't buy for them. I want them to have everything they need and want (within boundaries). Then I read that my heavenly Father wants to give me everything I need and want (within His will). It's written in Scripture, "Your Father knows what you have need of before you ask" (Matt. 6:8).

Because my heavenly Father loves me wholeheartedly, He's given me the privilege of prayer and he invites me, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7).

Wholehearted love is wonderful. I sing wholeheartedly to God because He first loved me wholeheartedly. *Lord, I revel in my relationship with You.*

Now, God wants our wholehearted dedication to Him. Just as an Old Testament believer had to sacrifice a whole lamb to God in worship, so God wants us to sacrifice our whole heart, body and soul to Him. Paul says, "I beg you to sacrifice your whole self to God because He has been so merciful to you" (Rom. 12:1, *Expanded*).

Next God wants us to serve Him wholeheartedly with our time, talents and treasures. Paul preached, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men" (Col. 3:23).

Finally, we must praise and worship God wholeheartedly. When we bow in worship, there must be nothing between our soul and the Savior.

MY TIME TO PRAY

*Lord, I come into Your presence to worship You wholeheartedly;
I give You everything I have—everything;
I give all my money (treasure) to Your control,
I will spend it only as You direct me.
I give You all of my time,
I will spend my time only as You direct me.
I give You all of my talents to accomplish Your will;
I will use my gifts as You direct me.
Take my praise and be glorified in the worship I bring.
Amen*

Chapter 2

HAVE YOU SEEN GOD'S FACE?

God tells us to seek His face and we have found it when we become more like Him.

Face

A woman knows the face of the man she loves like a sailor knows the open sea.

-Honore de Balzac

Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness.

-Mother Theresa

CHAPTER TWO

HAVE YOU SEEN GOD'S FACE?

“When You said, ‘Seek My face,’ my heart said to You, ‘Your face, LORD, I will seek.’ Do not hide Your face from me” (Psalm 27:8, 9).

There is a story told about the old stone face on Cannon Mountain that overlooks Profile Lake in New Hampshire. When the Native American Indians moved out of the valley, they left a tale that a man would come to the valley with much good for its inhabitants. At first the Indians thought the white face of the settlers brought them good. But no, the settlers drove them out.

A young boy sat for hours studying every feature of the stone face in the rock, he wanted to be the first to recognize the one bringing good to the valley. The longer the boy memorized the features, the surer he became that he'd be the first to recognize the stone face when he arrived.

One day a peddler came selling his wares with his specialty, a certain oil to heal many diseases. The boy went running down the one street yelling to everyone the stone face was coming. The peddler sold his “healing oil,” but the boy, along with everyone else in the town, became disillusioned because the “snake oil” didn't cure anything.

Another man came through town selling shares to a promised railroad that was coming. Again, the boy ran up the road yelling, “stone face” was coming. The man left town with his money, but the railroad never came. The boy became disillusioned over the man in the stone face. “It's just a myth” he told himself.

The boy went off to college, and in the early colonial days, only the churches began colleges. There was a great revival in the college and the boy became a Christian. Then God called him to ministry. The boy went back to his hometown to tell them the good news of Jesus Christ.

As the boy, now grown into a young man, greeted the blacksmith, the blacksmith didn't return his greetings, he only stared. The same thing happened when he greeted a lady hanging her wash on a line. Repeatedly, people didn't speak, but stared at him, seemingly in unbelief.

At first the young man thought they were against him because he had written to tell his family that he would preach the gospel in his home town.

But no – his face has grown into the likeness of the great stone face. And the boy, now the man in the stone face, had come to bring goodness to the valley; he had come to preach Jesus unto them.

The deeper truth: *we become like the person we spend our life gazing upon.*

God has a face and God has told us to, "Seek ye My face."

Because God is holy, when we meditate on God, we will slowly become holy like God. God has a heart – a good heart – and the more we contemplate God, the more our heart becomes like His heart. So God wants us to spend time reflecting on Him so we will become like Him.

How do we get a heart like God's? Solomon told us in Proverbs, "As in water, face reflects face" (27:19). That means when you look into water, you see an image of your face looking back at you. But when you look into the face of God, do you see God looking back at you? Then you make corrections in your attitudes or actions according to what you see in God's face, that process makes you become like God. *O Lord, help me see You so I can become like You.*

There's one man in Scripture who saw God's face. The Bible discloses, "So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face" (Ex. 33:11). How did that happen? No man had ever done that before.

As Moses was praying, he asked, “Please, show me Your glory” (Ex. 33:18). God answered Moses with what we’ve all heard in our churches, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live” (Ex. 33:20). That’s a predicament, how can God say in Psalm, “Seek My face,” yet He previously said, “No man shall see Me, and live?”

Let’s see what happened to Moses. Because of his integrity and ability to interceded, part of Moses’ request was answered. God took Moses to the top of Mt. Sinai, put Moses into a split rock, and the glory of God passed in front of Moses. Then to save Moses life, God put His hand to cover Moses. As the glory of God passed away from Moses, God removed His hand and Moses saw the backside of God.

Moses saw who no human had ever seen.

When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai, the people were terrified of him. “Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses’ hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked” (Ex. 34:29). Moses had been in the presence of God and seen the glory of God. *He became like the person he passionately desired to gaze upon.*

For 40 days, Moses had to put a veil over his face when he talked to people. “They were afraid to come near him” (Ex. 34:30).

For Moses it was a physical thing. He went to the top of Mt. Sinai that was covered with the Shekinah cloud of glory. God was actually there. Moses talked with God audibly; he heard the actual words of God.

But we’re different. We come to God spiritually, we can’t see the physical features of God’s face, for “God is Spirit” (John 4:23). But we can talk to God in prayer, and our inner spirit can feel God’s presence and we can know what He is saying to us.

We have something Moses didn't have; we have the words of God written in Scripture. When we read the words of God in the Bible, He is speaking to us. When we reflect on the heart of the Lord, we experience His presence in prayer.

There is a thing called the *atmospheric presence of God*. I (Charles) often feel it when leading praise and worship songs. The Bible says, "The Father wants this kind of worship from us" (John 4:24, *LB*). There was a famous line from a movie, "If you build it, they will come." I'd like to paraphrase it into my own expression. "If you worship the Father, He will come to receive it." When the Father comes, I call it *atmospheric worship*.

I (Elmer) have felt the same presence of God when preaching. God comes to a preaching service and He seems to be walking among the pews. Lives are being touched. It's the atmospheric presence of God. *Lord as I read the pages of this book, may I feel Your presence and may You transform my life.*

We need to feel God's presence when we worship Him, even in a small way. We know we are sinners, and none of us are perfect. None of us have perfect understanding of all things. *Lord, only You perfectly know all things. Lord, I try to understand you and I want to please You.* "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then (in heaven) face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). *Lord, show me your face.*

So my prayer today is, "Hide Your face from my sins" (Ps. 51:9). *If You Lord were to judge me for my sin, I could not stand before You. Lord, forgive all my rebellious sins and my innocent sins.*

My next prayer, "Do not hide Your face from me" (Ps. 102:2, 13:1). *Lord, I want to experience Your atmospheric presence and to learn Your ways. Lord, open my eyes that I may learn from Scripture.*

Then I want to be holy like the Lord. I want to know God and get close to Him. I want to walk with God and enjoy fellowship with Him. *Lord when You tell me to seek Your face, I will seek Your presence.*

My next prayer is to have God's full blessing on my life, family and service. My prayer, "Make Your face shine upon Your servant" (Ps. 119:135).

MY TIME TO PRAY

*Lord, I'm looking forward to seeing something in heaven
I can't see while here on earth.*

*Lord, I'm looking forward to seeing something
You promised me in Your Word.*

*Lord, You have promised in Scripture,
"His servants shall worship Him.*

They shall see His face . . ." (Rev. 22:3-4, Expanded)

Amen

CHAPTER THREE

WHY DOES GOD SING?

“For the Lord your God has arrived to live among you. He is a mighty Savior. He will rejoice over you in great gladness; he will love you and not accuse you. Is that a joyous choir I hear? No, it is the Lord himself exulting (rejoicing) over you in happy song”
(Zephaniah 3:17, *Living Bible*).

I (Charles) was nervous and was sure I wouldn't be able to sing a note, especially considering the situation. Shae and I were sitting in the front seat of my dad's new Lexus sedan - overlooking the Salt Lake City valley. It was a perfect setting after a perfect meal on top of Snowbird Lodge in Little Cottonwood Canyon.

I had planned this event for a long time, and the time had come for me to ask her hand in marriage. I planned to begin by singing a song I had written just for her. But, my throat got dry. The doctors say dry throat is caused by nervousness. The more nervous I got, the drier my throat became. I was wishing with all my heart that my mouth was as wet as my armpits! It's funny. I sing almost every day of my life for crowds of every size and I don't get nervous. But on this night . . . I was terrified!

So, I did what every brave and fearless man would do. I turned the tape over and played the demo! I clasped her by both hands and said, “Can I play you a song I wrote?” So I hit the button and together we watched the sun set to this song:

Forever in Love

Vs. 1

Stepped down off the plane from Salt Lake City
 What had only been a week felt like eternity
Since I'd seen your smiling face, or felt your warm embrace
 Or heard the tender words that said 'You'd missed me.'
I looked into your eyes and they were teary
 Then it stirred within my soul and I knew that we would be
In this living fairy tale...our hearts would never fail
 For God had made this love our destiny

Chorus

So I will stand by your side forever
 And I will lift up your life as long as we're together
I will put trust in you and everything you do
 Cause I'm forever in love with you

By this time we were both crying and I was beginning to gain confidence. The song was working!! I was watching her melt before my eyes. Here's the second verse:

Ten years down the road I plan to be
 Settled in with children, living my life long dream
And in every circumstance, whenever I have the chance
 I'll spend my moments with you . . . faithfully

It was a wonderful, tender moment for us. By the way...she said yes! Six months later I would sing that song to her for our wedding. This time, my throat wasn't dry, but neither were my eyes. I believed and felt every note. Now I look back at those lyrics and realize I am living every word. Wow! God is good.

I am asked all the time if I sing to my wife. Truth is...I don't. She hears me enough at church and in concerts. But when our two boys were little, I would sing to them every night. It seemed to bring them comfort and help them relax. Then I realized, the Lord loves to sing over us just as I love to sing over my children.

Can you imagine, God sings? Is He a tenor, bass or baritone? What kind of song does He sing? When does He sing? What motivates God to sing? I laugh when I look at these questions. If ever there would be a perfect voice, it would be God's. When I think of all the reasons why I sing, it helps me realize why God sings, and maybe even how God sings.

Sometimes, I sing when I'm happy. Children on the way to camp sing their "camp songs" because they anticipate a week of fun, adventure and getting away from home. So they sing with laughter, and anticipation. Does God sing with laughter and anticipation over what He's going to do for us?

Some sing because they're in love. Picture a young girl with her first boyfriend. She feels as though she's running through a flowery meadow on a bright sunny day. Her feet barely touch the ground. She's singing on perfect pitch. Her songs represent pure joy, anticipation of marriage, or the happiness she will have with the man of her dreams. Do you think that God sings a love song in anticipation of His love-relationship with us?

Then again other people sing because of their sad condition or their music is a wail that expresses the sorrows and trials of life. Think of the old spiritual composed in slavery, "Nobody Knows de Trouble I See." While bound in chains and slavery, they sang out of hope for better days to come. The slaves sang about their troubles and the anticipation of meeting their Lord in death. Do you think the Lord sings a sad song because of our bondage to sin and our slavery to Satan?

Some sing a song that expresses a story or drama, such as Broadway musicals or the classic operas. Some sing a song of daily works such as Dolly Parton's "9 to 5," while others sing a song of relaxation and sports like "Macarena" or "Take Me Out to the Ballgame." In each

of these songs, we tell what we've been doing, or the things we want to do. Do you think God sings over us to carry out His work of salvation in our lives?

Sometimes we sing patriotic songs to stir our devotion to our country or cause. We sing "God Bless America" to invoke the Almighty's blessing on our nation, or we "Pledge our Allegiance" with singing. Sometimes our song declares that we will fight for our country. Patriotic music stirs our allegiance, and it makes our feet want to march. Do you think God sings to get us to pledge our allegiance to the Kingdom of Heaven?

And there are times when we sing a lullaby to put a baby to sleep. Our singing puts everything out of his mind, so he will rest and drift into sleep. Therefore we sing softly and melodically to sooth a baby's irritation or crying. Do you think God sings a lullaby over us to sooth away our hurts and fears?

Sometimes we sing because we are full of joy, i.e., we are happy. At a birthday party we join in to sing "Happy Birthday." At other times, people sing to communicate a message. Perhaps you remember the hippies of the 60's who sang anti-war songs because they hated the Vietnam War; or more recently the Dixie Chicks who penned their songs against the Iraqi War.

Christians sing evangelistic songs to motivate people to get saved or they sing missionary songs to challenge people to carry out the Great Commission. Do you think God sings because He has a message He wants us to give out?

Notice what the Bible says about God singing, "The Lord himself exulting over you in happy song" (Zeph. 3:17, *LB*). This verse tells us that God rejoices over us, so God sings because we have done something to make Him rejoice. *Lord, I want to make You happy.*

Have you ever thought that you could make God happy? God rejoices when we keep His commandments wholeheartedly. *Lord, make me obedient.*

Most of the verses in the Bible tell us to rejoice in the Lord, but in a few occasions God rejoices (Ps. 60:6). The Lord rejoices when we are married to Him in salvation, just as a bride rejoices in her coming marriage (Is. 62:5). Also, the Lord gets pleasure out of the worlds he created, “The LORD rejoices in His works” (Ps. 104:31).

Deuteronomy 30 tells of the curses God puts upon His people for disobeying Him. But God rejoices if they will “again obey the voice of the LORD and do all His commandments” (Deut. 30:8). God will restore His blessings, their farms will prosper, and they will enjoy the fruit of their labor. But most of all, “The LORD will again rejoice over you for good” (Deut. 30:9). God gets happy when His children repent and come back to Him.

When someone praises the Lord, does God rejoice with that person? When they “sing praises to him” (Ps. 149:3), what happens? “For the Lord takes pleasure in His people” (Ps. 149:4). So when people sing and rejoice, God takes pleasure in them, and in return, He sings over them. *Lord, I sing to You, and I want You to sing over me.*

There is a relationship between God’s joy and our joy. God always rejoices; it’s a constant attitude with Him. God cannot be sad or unhappy; it’s His nature to rejoice (although He is unhappy with our rebellion). Jesus said, “These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). God gives us His joy when we obey His Word. When that happens, we have the joy of God filling our hearts.

So don’t think your happiness originates in you. Don’t think, “I’m the one who makes me happy.” No, you must remember you’re made in the image of God and you get everything from God. Your only real joy or happiness comes from Him. It’s only natural for God to be happy, so when you rejoice, you are expressing the joy that the Lord has given to you. So sing joyfully to God. He is singing over you.

MY TIME TO PRAY

*Lord, it thrills me to know You rejoice over me,
And You rejoice over me in singing.
May I always obey Your commandments
And seek Your presence in worship.
May I give you many reasons to sing over me.
Lord, I know You are the source of rejoicing and happiness,
I live in You because I have Your nature.
I will sing because joy comes from Your presence.
Amen*

Chapter 3

WHY DOES GOD SING?

The Lord sings over you to express His joy in our obedience and worship, shouldn't we sing back to Him.

Sing

He who sings frightens away his ills.

–Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (<http://en.thinkexist.com>)

A bird doesn't sing because it has an answer, it sings because it has a song.

–Maya Angelou (<http://en.thinkexist.com>)

Chapter 4

SEARCHING GOD'S MIND

Only God understands the reasons why He does the things He does?

Mind

One man that has a mind and knows it can always beat ten men who haven't and don't.

–George Bernard Shaw (<http://en.thinkexist.com>)

The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.

–G. K. Chesterton (<http://en.thinkexist.com>)

CHAPTER FOUR

SEARCHING GOD'S MIND?

“Oh, what a wonderful God we have! How great are His wisdom and knowledge and riches! How impossible it is for us to understand His decisions and His methods! For who among us can know the mind of the Lord? Who knows enough to be His counselor and guide” (Romans 11:33, 34, *LB*).

I (Elmer) walked away from the nursing home disillusioned. My good friend and colleague didn't recognize me and couldn't converse with me. I told him a joke we had enjoyed years earlier and he did not recognize the ironic punch line, but he did smile when I laughed at my own joke.

When someone has Alzheimer's it's as though they are locked in a dark room where they seem to recognize no one, and we can't break into their darkness to talk to them. If something or someone has made an indelible impression on their brain; perhaps, a little recognition may seep into their consciousness.

Their mind is like an old prison I visited in Dauphin, Manitoba over 50 years ago. Certain cells that were built on an inner wall didn't get any sunshine all day, but prisoners could look across the hall, out at the window across from them, to see sun shining on outside trees. A prisoner who got sun in his window would angle a mirror so those across the hall could enjoy a little warmth from the sun.

That's what we do when we visit an Alzheimer's victim; we shine a little sunlight of their past life into their consciousness. And doesn't the warm sun feel good anytime we experience the chill of darkness.

What discouraged me most about my friend was his darkened mind. He had a PhD from Harvard and a J. D., a law degree from Princeton. He had perhaps the most brilliant mind I've ever encountered. One time in an earlier faculty meeting, a question came up about the meaning of an English word. Over 20 earned PhD's couldn't define the word, but my friend who now has Alzheimer's not only defined it, he gave us the root in German and quoted a sentence from Goethe the German poet using the word. Brilliant!

Now, darkness and no remembrance.

I was despondent asking, "God couldn't You have prevented this illness?" I even rationalized, "I'd like to have his mind." I prayed wistfully, "Lord why couldn't you give me his mind instead of wasting it?"

We must be careful when we ask "Why God?" Only God understands the reasons why He does the things He does. "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" (Rom. 11:34).

Did you know that God has a mind?

We can lose our memory, but God can't. He will know all things eternally. He will not forget anything.

We can wrongly interpret facts, and our opinion can be wrong, but God can't be wrong. He knows all things perfectly. He even knows all things potentially, i.e. those things that might have happened, but didn't.

We sometimes have difficulty reasoning out things that later seem so simple. Some things we never reason out, but God's mind is perfect. He always knows the consequences of all actions, and the solution to all problems.

We can corrupt our mind by feeding it false doctrine, or propaganda. We can become gullible when we believe the lies people tell us. But God can't believe a lie, because God is truth.

The first and greatest power of the mind is know one's self. The phenomenalist tells us that with the onset of adolescence, a teen asks the question, "Who am I???" But God knows Himself perfectly, so He doesn't have to ask the question.

Self perception is a basic foundation of personality, for we direct our outer life by the way we see ourselves. A negative self perception makes a person cranky, mean-spirited, and negative. A weak self-perception makes a person timid and reluctant. A neurotic self-image produces phobias, neuroses, and psychoses.

Besides the question "Who am I?" we face other questions, such as "Why am I here on this earth?" and "Where did I come from?" There are basic questions that every adult needs to answer.

We can't be childish with these questions, like the little boy who ran in the kitchen door to ask his mother, "Where did I come from?" She didn't know how to answer, so she took a moment to decide if her son needed an answer for the creation of Adam or an answer for the birds and bees. Then her son solved her dilemma, "Mikey comes from Milwaukee, I just wanted to know where I came from."

The scientists tell us we use only a small part of our brain. We could all be much smarter if we gave ourselves to investigation, learning, memorization and constant review. We could all solve more problems, answer more questions, and constantly help ourselves and our fellow man. We could improve our mind with effort, but most of us don't.

There are two problems here. First, we could grow our ability to use our mind, but most do not give attention to this area of our life. We offer God a mind that is only half developed or ill prepared. *Lord, forgive my laziness.*

If God had a carpenter's shop and we were the tools on a work bench, what tool would he pick up and use. When it comes to chisels, God would usually use the sharpest one; the same with saws, drills, and knives. *Lord, I will sharpen my mind for better use.*

But beyond being sharp, we must be cleaned constantly to keep rust away. A carpenter wouldn't reach for a tool dirtied by a spilled drink or garbage on the tool table. No, God will use a clean tool. *Lord, cleanse me and I will be clean.*

But sometimes a man is working upstairs and his wife calls to hang a picture. The tool he wants is not available; it's down in the basement. He'll grab the most available tool and drive a nail with the heel of his shoe. Sometimes God has a job to do, but the Christian Ph.D. is not available and a preacher is not around. God will grab the most available Christian – perhaps uneducated – but available and ready to be used. *Lord, I'm ready, use me.*

Earlier we said there were two problems. The first was our uneducated mind. Secondly, we just don't know the Lord. We don't understand His nature, what He wrote, nor do we understand His principles of service, how we should serve Him. *Lord, I will learn how to serve you.*

Remember, you got your mind from God. We think, reason, remember and learn because we get these abilities from God. While God' mind is perfect, He can't learn, we must continue to grow in our intellectual abilities.

Some Christians have not grown intellectually, nor do they intend to sharpen their mind. They think that yieldedness to God is enough. God will use us according to our usability. But yielded ignorance is still ignorance. *Lord, I will learn more everyday.*

As you reflect on the heart of God, look in the Word of God to see His mind. Learn the power of intelligence and place your mind under the direction of God. *Lord, here are my thoughts, use them for your glory.*

MY TIME TO PRAY

*Lord, forgive me for my laziness and pride of ignorance,
Give me a discipline to know You more intimately,
And a passion to be used by You.*

*Lord, I want to be the best servant I can be,
I will learn as much as I can learn,
And know you as deeply as possible.*

*Lord, don't let me squander the good mind you've given me,
Or destroy it with sinful things.
Keep my mind sharp for your service.*

Amen

Chapter 5

WHEN GOD IS SILENT

Sometimes we worship God best in silent reverence.

Silent

I believe in the sun when it's not shining, I believe in love even when I feel it not, I believe in God even when he is silent.

–Irish Sayings

CHAPTER FIVE
WHEN GOD IS SILENT

“Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why are you silent in times of my trouble” (Ps. 10:1, *Expanded*)? “How long will You forget me, O Lord? How long will You hide Your face from me” (Ps. 13:1, *Expanded*)?

Jerry Falwell, pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church for over 50 years, died suddenly around 10:31 am on May 15, 2007. The ambulance rushed to his office, the Liberty campus airwaves were overloaded with activity. It seemed every phone in the university rang at the same time. Everyone quickly heard the news, and everyone’s grief was different. Some reacted with explosive weeping; others were too stunned to respond.

Then the announcement went out—students and employees—were told to gather in the church sanctuary at 1:30 pm. That’s a chapel service everyone would attend. No one would cut this meeting. Jerry was dead and everyone had all kinds of questions.

Silently, everyone entered the huge 6,000 seat sanctuary. No one talked, no one whispered. The organ wasn’t being played, no music. Those with red eyes caught a glimpse of other eyes still crying, but they cried inwardly. The only sound was rustling of clothes, or feet shuffling on the tile, and the dull groan of theater seats being occupied. When everyone was seated,

Silence!

The only thing we could hear was the sound of silence. When there is no noise, your ears are alert to hearing anything, but there was nothing to hear. Only an occasional cough or snuffle and then even those coughing tried to muffle his sound.

When silence surrounds you, several different emotions capture your thinking. Usually you focus on why you're being quiet. Everyone was thinking about Jerry. Why would God take Him? What's going to happen now? Why did this happen?

Then people's thoughts turned inward, what will I do? How will this affect my future?

There was a silence in the room that day even amidst several thousand people. It was not eerie, nor was it scary. It was not even threatening. It was simply reverent. Everyone waited in the presence of God and everyone knew what was on the mind of everyone else. *God, why did you take Jerry Falwell?*

We all sensed the corporate grief, so the meeting didn't begin immediately. We let silence have its healing ministry.

Why is it we are told to be silent in God's presence? "The LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Hab. 2:20). Sometimes God doesn't want us to talk to Him, or even praise Him. Some times God wants us to be quiet and think about Him. You may think nothing is happening when people are silent, but a lot could be going on.

In silence, people repent of their sins.

In silence, people meditate on Scriptures and grow spiritually.

In silence, people stand in awe of God.

In silence, people wait for God to speak to them.

Sometimes, God reveals Himself in loud thunder and crashing lightning. So God speaks in a loud compelling voice. But at other times, God speaks in a still quiet voice. Sometimes God speaks in silence, but we don't hear Him because we are so busy talking. Doesn't God say, "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10)?

There are times when we feel God in His quietness, but we missed Him in the thunderous noise surrounding us. Jesus sent His disciples in a boat into the storm. Because God knows everything—better than a weatherman—Jesus knew a killer storm awaited to attack them. When the storm struck, the disciples screamed in panic; I can almost hear their yelling, competing with the sound of the storm. Quite a noise was coming from that little boat.

Then Jesus came walking to them on the water. In the midst of noise and a hurricane, and crashing waves; Jesus came to them, and spoke, “Peace, be still” (Mark 4:39).

Can you imagine the emotional shock to the disciples, when the lake was instantly transformed into a quiet night with nary a breeze blowing, clouds gone, moon and stars twinkling? On a calm lake you can worship and meditate on God. *Lord, take away my turmoil and give peace to my heart.*

When Jerry Falwell died, everyone focused on their hurt and loss. No one realized God was about to do supernatural things for the church. Jonathan—Jerry’s youngest son—would immediately step in to carry the church to even greater heights. Over a thousand people came to receive Christ and over 1,200 would join the church in the next 5 months.

Then there was Jerry, Jr., the oldest son who became President and Chancellor of Liberty University. The following semester after Jerry Sr. died, attendance reached the first goal Jerry, Sr., set over 30 years earlier. The father had set a goal of 25,000 students. Three months after Jerry Sr. died, over 28,000 students enrolled on campus and in the distance learning program under Jerry Jr.’s new leadership.

Don’t fear silence, it’s there that God speaks. Seek silence, for in the quiet place you’ll find God.

This Quiet Place

*In this quiet place, I'm reminded of the grace
That saved my soul, and made my heart brand new.*

*And in this quiet hour, I can feel Your holy power
Giving me the strength to know just what to do.*

*For it's in this quiet place, that I've learned to seek Your face,
To deny myself, take up my cross, and follow You.*

*This quiet place is the closet of my prayers.
Where I can go to God and know that He is there.
And it's in this quiet place that I find ability to care
For the hurting and the hopeless, present everywhere.*

*But when I lose compassion that I need and my fire for souls
Is lost indeed, I go to my knees, to my quiet place and discover
That I have not been there.*

Charles Billingsley

MY TIME TO PRAY

*Lord, thank You for speaking clearly in the Scriptures;
Thank You for silence when I understand Your will.*

*Lord, thank You for looking beyond my feelings,
To work Your perfect will in my life*

*Lord, I wait silently and reverently in your presence,
Speak for I am listening for your voice.*

*Lord, I will do what you tell me to do.
I want to please you with my life.*

Amen

Chapter 6

DID YOU KNOW GOD THINKS ABOUT YOU?

The more you reflect on God's purpose for your life, the better you can fulfill His will.

Thinking

So, what does God think of you? He thinks you are precious; perfect; privileged and profitable.

- Dan Anderson (Sermon Central)

CHAPTER SIX

DID YOU KNOW GOD THINKS ABOUT YOU?

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

It was nine o'clock at night on a cool June night at Camp Ben Lippen, high in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina. I (Elmer) had just finished my freshman year at Columbia Bible College and was working to prepare the dining hall for campers the next week.

That night I was washing the winter dust from the dining hall with a bucket, mop and a hose with running water. I was barefooted, wearing only a pair of rolled up blue jeans.

I was a little disgruntled because the other two guys working with me had gone to bed, claiming to be tired. I always liked to complete a job before quitting, so I told them, “You go ahead to the cabin, I'll finish.”

Mopping my way across the dining room I came face to face with a tattered blue sign with silver letters. A rusty nail held the sign against a 4X4 pole.

God
Has A
Plan
for
Your Life.

“Ha,” I laughed, and then thought, “Is it God's plan for me to mop the floor while my buddies go to sleep?”

I stood there for a few minutes staring at the sign, thinking about the words. Then I asked myself,

“Does God have a plan for my life that includes working while my buddies sleep?”

“Yes,” I concluded.

I realized I had to live for God in big things and little things, like mopping a floor. I was not responsible for what my buddies did; I was responsible to God for everything I did.

So, I went back to mopping the floor with new enthusiasm, thinking, “I have to please God in everything, even mopping the floor.”

Do you realize that God thinks about you and He thinks about you at all times? He says, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you” (Jer. 29:11).

Some people don’t even realize God thinks. As a matter of fact, God has intellect, emotion, and will, just as we have the three powers of thinking, feeling, and choice. That is our personality (the old term was personhood). When God bent over the lifeless clay man, the one we later called Adam, God breathed Himself into Adam, “And man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). *Lord, I’m awed at the sight of the divine bending over a lifeless clay man.*

God does not have a physical body, but He has the power of mind. . . He thinks; God has the power of emotions . . . He loves; God has the power of will . . . He chooses.

God has all the powers of thought that we have, but our ability to think didn’t start in our physical body. We are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, 27). When you look into the mirror each morning to comb your hair, you see an image of yourself. What you see is exactly like you, but it’s not you. It’s your image. When God looks into your face He sees His image. In one sense, God sees Himself in us. We’re like Him, but we’re not God.

You think because God thinks, and your thoughts guide your life. You have many powers of the mind. You remember because God knows everything actual and potential. So you bring past experiences into your mind to help you guide today’s activities. You have the power

of choice because God wills, and as you better understand your choices, you better control your life.

Because God has a mind, He remembers. Because God sees our sins, we pray, “Do not remember the sins of my youth” (Ps. 25:7). You must constantly pray, “Remember me, O Lord” (Ps. 106:4). Isn’t that what the thief on the cross asked of Jesus, “Remember me when You come into Your kingdom”?

When we remember, we give effort to recall what we previously experienced. Like the little boy studying for an exam, we memorize so we can recall facts out of our mind for a test. But God doesn’t have to give effort to recall, for if He did, that would say God at one time didn’t know everything. That can’t happen for God knows all things without effort. He knows all things at all times.

What else does God do with His mind? He reasons. Didn’t He say, “Come now, and let us reason together . . . though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Is. 1:18). When God invites you to reason with Him, He wants you to know what He knows about your sin. When you confess your sins and correct your evil ways by repenting, God knows. When you ask for forgiveness, God cleanses you as white as snow. *Lord, I accept Your invitation.*

God thinks about you constantly, you are never out of His mind. You can only think about one person or group of persons at a time. But God is unlimited, He can think about everyone at all times. No one is ever out of His thoughts. And God knows all about you, for God is all-powerful, He can know everything about you, all the time. And He knows everything about everyone, all the time. *God, You are overwhelming, You are much bigger than any conception I had of You.*

MY TIME TO PRAY

*Lord, You have thought up a good plan for my life;
Thank You for thinking good things for me.
I want to know Your plan for my life,
I want the good things You have been thinking.
Lord, teach me to think my thoughts after You,
I yield my thoughts to Your superior plan;
I want to do Your will.*

Amen

Chapter 7

GOD HAS UNIQUE PLANS FOR EVERY UNSAVED PERSON

One of the greatest motivations for someone to become a Christian is that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

Plan

God has in His will a secret plan that He made before creation.

This plan is in full progress daily.

(<http://www.dewitttabernacle.org/godswill.html>)

CHAPTER SEVEN

GOD HAS UNIQUE PLANS FOR EVERY UNSAVED PERSON

“For I know the plans and thoughts I have for you, says the Lord, plans of peace and not evil, to give you a good end” (Jeremiah 29:11, *Expanded*). “You will show me the path of life; in Your presence *is* fullness of joy; at Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

I (Elmer) was preaching in South Korea at the Bible Baptist Church in Seoul. The pastor, Daniel Kim took me to play golf at a prestigious club high in the mountains. While on the practice tee I went back to the car for a jacket. It was then I looked in the large caddie room and saw about 50 young ladies “waiting for a bag,” a phrase meaning they were waiting for an assignment.

The girl caddies in Korea all wear the same uniform, a pleated skirt, and bobby socks with black and white oxfords. In this club, they wore red blazers.

I got the one girl that was much larger than the others, because my “American” bag was heavier, and she was the only one fluent in English. As we walked down the first fairway, I asked her name, and then asked if she knew Christ as her Savior.

“Oh yes!” She gave a spontaneous testimony of reading a gospel tract while a student at Korean National University; she was majoring in American Literature. She began to explain in detail the tract *Four Spiritual Laws*, written by Bill Bright. She repeated the first law,

“God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” She had been gripped by the statement, then explaining, “Buddha doesn’t love me personally and individually.” She experienced the love of Christ as she read the tract. Then she explained,

“Buddha doesn’t have a wonderful plan for my life, I never read anything so compelling in all my life.” She had been raised a Buddhist, yet never felt a relationship to him, nor did she

worship him. The caddie bubbled on with her testimony of joining the Campus Crusade group at her university and going witnessing for Christ among unsaved students.

“What’s your greatest passion in life,” I asked.

“To meet Bill Bright, shake his hand, and tell him how much I appreciate his booklet because I came to know Christ as I read his tract.”

“I’ll tell him next week,” I casually replied. “I have lunch plans with him.”

“She dropped the golf bag and stood transfixed and shouted, “YOU KNOW BILL BRIGHT?”

“She began to shake and weep, not so much for her love of Bill Bright, but because of her love for Jesus Christ. We stopped in the fairway and she didn’t get her composure back until we had prayed. The young girl planned to become a full-time worker with Campus Crusade.

Did you know God has plans for every individual, both believers and unbelievers? That means God has a wonderful plan for your life? Have you found it, and are you following it?

Does God make plans like we do? Yes! Some make plans for a vacation to have a wonderful experience. Some young people make plans for college, to be a lawyer or counselor. Some make plans to start a business so they can build a fortune, or create a business to make life better for their fellow man. What are your plans for your life?

Seldom do people make their plans to fail. A girl never plans to spend a miserable evening on a date, nor does a ball team plan to lose. God has good plans of success for all people, He doesn’t plan for an alcoholic to die of cirrhosis of the liver, nor does He plan for a young man to be an inner city gang member who must murder a girl to be inducted into a gang. *Lord, I know you don’t plan for me to fail. Help me fulfill the good plan You have for me.*

What do we do when we make plans? We usually make destination-plans where we are going, and then we make event-plans what we will do when we arrive. Next, we make travel-plans how to get there; and finally we make time-plans when we will leave and return. *Lord, do you have all these plans for me?*

If you want to understand people, examine how they make plans. Purposeless people – who don't have a clue – don't make any plans. Undependable people can't carry plans out. Confused people don't know what to do, and addicted people can't make themselves do what they're supposed to do.

But God is none of the above. First, God has plans for every person to become a Christian. “(He is) not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9). But all people are not saved. The Bible says, “All have sinned” (Rom. 3:23) and all people were born sinners, “in sin my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5). Sin keeps us from God.

But God planned to overcome this sin obstacle. The heavenly Father sent His Son to live among sinful people, but Jesus never sinned. It was God's plan for all to be saved: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). God provided salvation for all; now everyone can be saved, can't they?

No, when a person rejects Jesus Christ, they can't be saved (John 14:6, 10:9). Christ is the only way to heaven.

Spiritual blindness keeps others from understanding God's plan for their lives. “The god of this world (Satan) has blinded the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should illuminate them” (2 Cor. 4:3, 4, *Expanded*).

Finally, Satan is more than an evil force or influence to keep people from God. Satan has plans for your life, far different from God's plans. Satan plans to destroy everyone he can.

You would expect a living God to have plans for people to live eternally. Jesus said, “My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:29). *Lord, I rest in your plans for my eternal security.*

Also, you would expect a good God to plan a good life for His followers. Don’t the children pray, “God is great, God is good?” Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly” (John 10:10). The first promise in that verse is “eternal life” in heaven. The second promise is an abundantly good life on earth after we are saved. *Lord, give me abundance in my life as I live for you.*

And what kind of life would you expect from God who is absolutely free to do anything He wants to do? You would expect God to give you freedom to choose His plans for your life. Jesus said, “I am the door of salvation, by me you shall enter and be saved, and go in and out (in freedom) to find food to eat” (John 10:9, *Expanded*). *Lord, I need your deliverance from sin to be free to accomplish good plans for my life.*

Then think of God’s plans for your success. Don’t we all have dreams for success? A high school girl wants to be homecoming queen, and the high school boy wants to be quarterback on a winning team. And doesn’t every insurance sales representative want to be a member of the million dollar round table? God plans for your success. He promises, “This Book of the Law shall not leave you . . . if you meditate in it day and night . . . then it will make you successful and you will prosper” (Josh. 1:8, *Expanded*). *Lord, I will reflect on Your instructions so I can be successful.*

When we reflect into the heart of God, what will we see? We’ll see all the good things He has planned for us. Paul gives us an itemized list of the good things God has planned for us.

“And now, brothers, as I close this letter let me say this one more thing: Fix your thoughts on what is true and good and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine, good things in others. Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about” (Phil. 4:8, *LB*).

And how will we get these good things God has planned for us, “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:9). When we live the good life, God will give us good things.

Yes, God has a wonderful plan for every saved and unsaved person. God wants everyone to experience His love and salvation, and become a dedicated disciple of Jesus Christ. God wants to use a great scientific mind to discover a cure for cancer for His glory and honor. There are those who have turned their back on God and have missed the wonderful opportunities God is waiting to provide for them. Because so many have rejected salvation, think of all the benefits lost to mankind.

There could have been cures to AIDS and we could have solved so many of the perplexing problems facing humanity. What if there was no Winston Churchill to rally the Allies against Hitler? What if there was not George Washington to get America through Valley Forge and ultimately win the American Revolution. What if there was no Martin Luther or John Wesley?

Let’s think about your life. God loves you and has a special plan for your life that is wonderful. Do you know what it is? God’s plan ought to become clearer to you each day of your life. “But the path of the uncompromising believer is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and clearer until it reaches its full strength of high noon” (Prov. 4:18, *Expanded*). As you follow the Lord, His plan for your life will get brighter and brighter.

If you're not aware that God has a plan for your life, then start a two-fold process. First, the Bible says you can find God's will and know it, "Understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). Second, yield your life right now to God. From now on make sure that what you do is what God wants you to do. *Lord, I want to follow Your plan for my life, show it to me and I will do it.*

God is too wise to show you every part of His plan at once. Oh, He may show you some things that He wants you to do, but He may not tell you *where* you will do it, or *when*. God may call a young person into foreign mission activity, but it will be years before that person knows where he will serve, and he may not know until later if he will preach, plant churches, teach native pastors, or be an administrator.

When you drive at night, your headlights reveal approximately 100 yards of lighted roadway. You are unable to see past those 100 yards, but as you travel, you are continually able to see what's just ahead of you. The same with God's plans, you usually see only a short distance at a time, not your entire journey. *Lord, show me today's plan and I'll do it.*

Maybe God doesn't show you His entire plan for your life because it might be too hard for you. Maybe you'd reject it if you knew how tough your future will be. God's plan might involve intense study at a university or medical school. Right now you hate to study. You might reject the future based on your limited understanding of God's long-range plan. But with time, you'll come to love school and the discipline of study. With time you'll love that plan.

Since we make plans, isn't it natural for God to have plans? We plan our short-term work day; doesn't it make sense that God has short-term plans for you? Also, we make long-term plans for our family, or our business, or for a retirement home. So God has long-range

goals and plans for your life. *Lord, show me your short-range goals so I can do them, then in time I'll accomplish Your long-range plans for my life.*

God wants you to plan your life in accordance with His plans. Just as an architect draws a blueprint of what he wants to accomplish, so the workman must slowly construct a building in accord with the pre-drawn plans. Therefore, you must work diligently to build your life in accordance with God's pre-determined plans. *Lord, I'll study Your blueprint for my life. Then I'll daily build what You pre-determine for me.*

Sometimes a worker runs into problems as he constructs a building. There may be unseen bedrock or an unexpected stream of underground water. When digging a foundation for a dormitory at Liberty University in 2006, such a spring was discovered and the whole dorm was moved hundreds of yards. In our lives the onset of problems or sin may mean a change of plans. A young man graduated from Liberty University and planned to go to the mission field, but his wife refused. As she was working to put her husband through seminary, she discovered a world of entertainment and fun that she enjoyed. She divorced the future missionary, and he had to change his plans. What happens when sin, or your disobedience, or your laziness, disrupts your plans? *Lord, forgive me when I've messed up, I want to get back into the center of Your plans.*

I (Charles) have a global positioning system (GPS) that gives me directions to any place in America. I love the system because I can find my way to any church or hotel. I can also find most any restaurant with the touch of a button, it gives me a menu of all types of restaurants, Mexican, Italian, Steak Houses, Fast Food, etc... When I choose one, it guides me there on the closest route. But when I miss a turn, this voice says, "Reprogramming." Then it gives me another route, i.e. the best route from that new location.

God's plan is much like my global positioning system. When I take a wrong turn, God doesn't drop me like a hot fajita. No, God wants me to glorify Him and serve Him. He reprograms and gives me the best plan for the rest of my life from my new location. *Lord, thank You for forgiving my past sins and failures. Thank You for every time You've reprogrammed Your plan for my life.*

MY TIME TO PRAY

*Lord thank you for the good plans you have for me,
Forgive me when I've sinned and missed Your good things.
I turned away from selfishness and evil,
I look to You to guide me by Your plans;
I will follow Your plans as You show them to me.*

*Lord, thank You for giving me direction and purpose in life
When I was lost and doing my own thing.
Thank You for saving me and giving me a new purpose
To glorify You and serve You in all I do.
Lord, You had a wonderful plan for my life when You saved me.*

*Help me learn Your plan and do it.
Lord, I find happiness and pleasure in fulfilling Your plan.
Keep me in the center of Your will.*

*If I ever stray from doing Your plan,
Bring me back and reprogram my life.
Amen*

Chapter 8

GOD REMEMBERS NO LONGER

Because of His nature, God can't forget anything, but because of Christ's death, God can choose to forget our sins.

Remember

Forgiveness was provided at the cross and your freedom from the memory of past sins is found at the cross of Christ.
- Greg Johnson (from Sermon Central)

CHAPTER EIGHT

GOD REMEMBERS NO LONGER

I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34).

Young Johnnie got a new slingshot and tried it out in the backyard of his grandmothers’ farm. He shot at the barn door and missed. He shot at the gate and missed. He shot at some birds flying overhead, and missed. Then, he went down by the stream and shot at a snake, and missed.

Walking back into the farmyard, he shot at Grandmother’s duck and hit it in the head, killing it instantly. He looked both ways and thought, “*No one saw me.*” He quickly got a shovel out of the tool shed and buried the duck behind the barn.

That night after supper Grandmother asked Johnnie’s sister, “Mary Jane, will you wash the dishes?”

“No, she said deviously, “Johnnie likes to wash dishes.” Then she whispered to him, “Remember the duck.”

Johnnie gladly washed dishes, he was afraid of what would happen if Grandmother found he had killed her pet duck.

The next morning after breakfast, Grandmother asked Mary Jane to sweep the hall and porch. She answered, “No ma’am, Johnnie likes to sweep.” Then she whispered, “Remember the duck.”

That week Johnnie swept every morning, washed dishes after every meal and did every other task his sister Mary Jane wanted him to do.

The next Saturday morning, Johnnie couldn't take it any longer. He told his grandmother the story of killing her favorite duck. Through his tears Johnnie sobbed, "I'm sorry."

"I know," Grandmother said, "I was washing dishes at the window when I saw you hit my duck. I saw the panic on your face, and I know you didn't mean to do it."

"Did you give him a nice burial?" Grandmother asked.

"Yes," Johnnie answered, "but why did you wait so long to forgive me?"

"I forgave you the moment I saw the anguish in your face," Grandmother replied, "but I wondered how long you'd stay in bondage to Mary Jane."

Many are in bondage to a sin they did. They go through life blaming themselves for something they did. Their conscience—called Mary Jane—whispers, "Remember the duck."

Because people are convicted by a past sin, they spend their life in miserable bondage because Mary Jane continues to whisper, "Remember the duck."

Everyone needs to remember, "The blood of Jesus Christ God's Son cleanses from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Just as Grandmother forgave Johnnie the moment he killed her duck, so God forgives us the moment we sin. That's the nature of God's forgiveness.

Instead of enjoying freedom in Christ, some Christians walk around dejectedly in bondage. They are slaves to the sin they have committed.

The Bible says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34). Notice, it doesn't say God forgets sin. Why? God knows all things at all times. If He forgets and doesn't know, that would breach His nature. If God forgets, He wouldn't be God.

But God can "remember no more." When He does that—He chooses to remember no more—God is still omniscient. He is in charge. Our sins are buried in the deepest sea (Micah 7:19). God knows they are there, but He chooses not to remember.

There are two steps to forgiveness. The first is a picture of Grandmother looking out the window to see her favorite duck killed. That's a picture of God looking out the window of Heaven to see our sin. He forgives us the moment we sin because, "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us the moment we sin" (1 John 1:7, *Expanded*).

The second step is Johnnie going to Grandmother to confess his sin because he has offended her and hurt her. He killed her favorite duck. That's a picture of our going sorrowfully to God to make things right with Him. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

God has forgiven us before we confess, but we must come to Him to tell God we're sorry. We don't confess for God's sake, we confess for our sake.

There's a difference between our *relationship* and our *fellowship* with God. God instantly forgives us when we sin because of our *relationship* to Him. He is our heavenly father, we are His child. That can't be broken.

But *fellowship* is another matter. That describes our joyful approach to him. Nothing can affect our eternal relationship with the heavenly Father, but our sin can convict us and steal our happiness. We must go to Him when our fellowship is broken to tell Him, "We're sorry," and ask God "to restore our fellowship."

MY TIME TO PRAY

*Lord, thank You for the blood of Christ, my Savior
That cleanses me of all sin;
I accept Your grace and walk in mercy;
Thank You for forgiving me before I ask.
But Lord, when I slip and fall into sin;
I'm sorry for my sin, that I didn't mean to do;
Forgive me and restore my fellowship with You.
Amen*

Chapter 9

DID YOU KNOW GOD READS AND WRITES?

God has a written record of your faithful works, not to remind Him, because He knows and remembers everything. The written record is for your sake.

Read and Write

The difficulty of literature is not to write, but to write what you mean; not to affect your reader, but to affect him precisely as you wish.

-Robert Louis Stevenson

CHAPTER NINE

DID YOU KNOW GOD READS AND WRITES?

“And I saw God sitting on the Great White Judgment Throne . . . and the dead stood before God to be judged. The books of works were opened and the dead were sentenced according to their works. Then the Lamb’s Book of Life was opened and anyone whose name was not there was cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15, *Expanded*).

I (Charles) was recently on a plane from Atlanta to San Diego. It was like any other trip. I lugged my belongings onto the jet, stuffed my stuff into the overhead bins and took my seat. I was seated next to a man who greeted me with a half smile and a hello. Then he didn’t speak to me for the next four hours. He read his book and I read my usual materials—a Bible and a newspaper.

We began our final approach into San Diego when suddenly the man looks at me and says, “Hi Charles, I’m Ted Baxter. I have been listening to your music for years and thought I could take these last few hours to observe what you read and how you treat people.”

Thankfully, I was innocent and kind that day! It was a serious reminder to me that people are watching our testimony and want us to be authentic Christians.

Did you know God has a record of all your works? Does that mean God writes, because there is a record of all we do? Does it also mean that God can read?

In times past, people wrote by hand. Does that mean God wrote our records by hand? Is God up to date? Do you think God now keeps His records on a computer? Maybe a laptop? That would mean God has learned to type. By the time we update our thinking about God’s record, maybe He will keep them on a Blackberry, or on an iPod, or maybe a device that’s not yet invented.

Of course God is not limited by time, Jesus is yesterday, today and forever. Maybe God used an upgraded computer before computers were invented. Just as a computer has files and pages, God's records could have been written by a voice-activated computer of the future.

Have you ever thought that God doesn't need to write things down? He knows all things perfectly from the beginning. He knows without effort. As a matter of fact, if God had to write things down to remember them, that means at a past time God didn't know everything, because He had to give effort to know them. That meant God was not God-like.

God doesn't write things for His benefit. He keeps records for our benefit. God writes things down and reveals them to us—for our sake.

When God judges the unsaved, they can never say He is biased, because their record speaks for itself. The unsaved can never say God makes mistakes, the record is accurate. The unsaved can never say someone changed their record; the record is complete and accurate. And finally, the unsaved cannot say, "I didn't know what I was doing." God's record includes both motives and actions. The Bible says, "They are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). *Lord, I know my name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life.*

Don't forget God keeps records to reward His children. God has a crown of rejoicing for those who win the lost to salvation (1 Thess. 1:19, 20; Phil. 4:1). Those who bravely endure persecution for Jesus' sake will receive a crown of life (Rev. 2:10). Those who practice self discipline will receive an incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25). Those who teach and shepherd others will receive the crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:1-4) and finally, there is a crown of righteousness for those who love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). *Lord, it's not a crown I seek, I just want to be with You in heaven.*

Lest you think receiving crowns will be like a military service where men and women are given ribbons to wear proudly, it is not. When we appear before God's throne, we will see that we are not responsible for everything we did that deserves merit. No! God did it through us. Christ deserves our rewards. We will see our unworthiness when we look on the face of Jesus, and the Bible describes what we will do. "They cast their crowns before the throne" (Rev. 4:10).
Lord, I give all my rewards to You.

God sees all we do and writes a record in His book. Then when we appear before His throne, God will have something good to say about every one of His children. No matter how little a person has done, God will have a reward for him. God knows because he cares about every one of us. "Then each man's praises will come from God" (1 Cor. 4:5).

MY TIME TO PRAY

*Lord, I know you've forgiven all my sin, because You said,
"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son
Cleanses from all sin" (1 John 1:7).
So I will not appear at the Great White Judgment Throne
Only the unsaved will be judged out of Your books.
Lord, I don't want a prize or reward for serving You
Because Jesus has done so much for me;
It is the least I could do to serve You.
Amen*

Chapter 10

THE UNKNOWABLE OF GOD

Because we are human, there are certain things about God we'll never know. We must accept and worship God for what we know about Him.

Unknowable

A thinking man's greatest pleasure is to have searched for the knowable, and to have stood in awe before the unknowable.

–Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

CHAPTER TEN

THE UNKNOWABLE OF GOD

“And Abraham planted a grove of trees on the edge of the desert at the seven springs of Beersheba (the wells where an oath was promised), and Abraham called on the name of El Olam (the eternal hidden God)” (Gen. 21:33, Expanded).

My (Elmer) wife was 31 years old when she found out the secret of all secrets about her life. She found out she was adopted. Discovering that secret of her birth was so transforming that it shook her inwardly. She was not the physical child of Elvira and Elton Forbes; they adopted her when she was two months old. Since she was not her mother’s daughter, that explained some of the many differences between her and her adoptive parents.

Finding out a secret releases some powerful forces, Ruth had to ask “Who am I?” and she was freed from the biological necessities of her adoptive parents. Since she didn’t know—and since has not found out—who her parents were, she was free to become who she wanted to be.

Did you know God has secrets?

God was first called *El Olam* at the Oasis at Beersheba. The name *Olam* meant God was eternal, “from everlasting to everlasting, you are God” (Ps. 90:2). But *Olam* has a second deeper meaning “The things forever kept secret.” It carries the meaning “God hides” or “The God of eternity can’t be understood by humans.” It’s not that God hides, but that we are human and just can’t understand all that God is like. Therefore, there is part of God that we can never understand.

We can only know the things of God that he reveals to us, and at the same time, God will not tell us certain things about Himself, because it's hidden from us.

Ruth's parents didn't tell her she was adopted because there was a current "old wives tale" that adoptive parents were told, "The baby won't understand" or "the baby won't love you if she finds out she's adopted."

But that's not what Ruth thought. She loved her parents more because they picked her, and voluntarily sacrificed for her. Ruth felt special because she was chosen, whereas birth parents don't have a choice with the child they receive.

In Genesis 21, Abraham first called God *El Olam*. Apparently, the shepherds who worked for Abraham had dug some wells at Beersheba in the flat sandy desert of south Israel. The shepherds of Abimelech violently took the wells away from Abraham's servant, perhaps because the Philistines thought the south desert belonged to them. They treated Abraham as a trespasser.

Later, Abimelech realized God was protecting Abraham. This heathen king was fearful of offending the God of Abraham, so he came to make a peace treaty with Abraham. Before they agreed, Abraham brought out 7 lambs as a gift to Abimelech, apparently to "buy" the wells so he could live there. "Thus they made a covenant at Beersheba" (Gen. 21:32).

After Abimelech left, Abraham worshipped the Lord at *El Olam*. There were probably a lot of things Abraham didn't understand about God. Perhaps He didn't understand how God would eventually give him the entire Promised Land. Perhaps he didn't understand how the fear of God gripped Abimelech's heart. Could this well be God's down payment to Abraham for the Promise Land, as though God is saying, "I'm

giving you the title deed to the well of Beersheba as proof that I will later give you the entire Promised Land.”

This book is about encountering the heart of God. Therefore this chapter is about the things that God won't reveal, and you can't know. God has said, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29). Did you notice why God shows us certain things? It's so we may benefit from them, or obey them.

Lord, help me to respond correctly to everything You reveal to me.

These are some secrets God doesn't tell us about. If He did, it might overwhelm us, or scare us, or paralyze us. Suppose you knew who you should marry from infancy, you may not learn many things from experience, or you may not learn from many people. Suppose you knew the day you will die? Some would live for self until the last minute, and then prepare for death. We would never grow to become what God wants us to be, if there were no mystery, no challenge, and no threats.

You must worship *El Olam* for who He is, and for what He does. *El Olam* doesn't do things the way we do them, and we can't understand Him. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Is. 55: 8, 9). *Lord, I surrender to Your thoughts, and to Your way of doing things.*

When Abraham couldn't understand what God was doing in his life, he stopped to worship *El Olam*.

MY TIME TO PRAY

*Lord, I pause to worship You for Your work
Today in my life and family.
I don't always understand what You are doing
And at times I resist Your plans and purposes.
Lord, forgive me for my selfish struggles against You,
Teach me to trust You when I can't see
What you are doing in my life.
I want You to lead me and give me
The best You want me to have.
Amen*