

Aspects

All

The objects lift right off the page, shadows distinct, forming around the irregular shapes, mottled, pitted, and wind-carved. Perched like the alien presence it is on the boulder strewn sea of red dust, the wheeled breadboard trails corrugated tracks in the desert surface, its metallic body parts reflecting the intense sunlight.

FROM

three-dimensional (duh men'shun ul) *adj.* **1.** a) of or having three dimensions b) appearing to have depth or thickness in addition to height and width **2.** having a convincing or lifelike quality.

SEEM

All religions change and develop. If they do not, they will become obsolete. [Consequently,] each generation has to create its own imaginative conception of God.

Karen Armstrong, historian and ex-Roman Catholic nun, in her book A History of God (Knopf)

God, our Father and Mother, who is in the heavens, may your name be made holy . . .

The opening lines of the Lord's Prayer according to the United Church of Christ press



ONE CAN HEAR REPORTS ABOUT the *Pathfinder* mission to Mars. One can see reports on television or the World Wide Web. One can even see normal photographs from the mission, in stark monochrome, printed in magazines or on the Web. But the 1997 mission, with its unique six-wheeled rover named *Sojourner*, really comes to life when viewed through the 3-D glasses included in the August 1998 issue of the *National Geographic* magazine.

Right there on the cover, revealed as soon as the bland brown wrapper is removed, is a dramatic portrait of the little scooter sitting in the ochre dust of the fourth planet from the sun, alongside the off ramp of its mother ship. The coloring of the photograph is odd, with reds and greens separated and curiously shifted. But once the cardboard glasses (inserted right before the Nissan truck advertisement) are cut out and balanced precariously upon one's nose, the image springs to life, and the little vehicle lifts off the page in crisp three-dimensional relief.

Suddenly the idea of an earth-sent vehicle landing on the 'Red Planet,' to be remotely steered via computer from Pasadena, California, to photograph and physically sample various types of Martian rocks and soils — suddenly it all becomes perfectly believable. Seen in three dimensions, the rover and its rock-studded pathway become real, understandable. One can almost reach out and touch the objects portrayed on the printed page.

IN OUR IMAGE

They need to create a comfortable pocket of religion and work from there to create a notion of God.

Orthodox Rabbi Kenneth Brander on children's idea of God

Some "New Agers" go to church Sunday and to their channeler, astrologer or card-reader Monday. Others exult that they have escaped the bondage of religion to the freedom of spirituality. Many say all paths that lead to God are good and are really one.

William Simbro, Des Moines Register

The fundamentalist paradigm of an inerrant and literally true Bible is an American phenomenon developed over the last two centuries. The concept is out of step with the intellectual and spiritual growth of Western religion.

Ivan T. Webber, former attorney

Contemporary churches lose members if they fail to make people feel good, so we find God's message watered down and packaged attractively so as not to offend the consumer's tastes. We bring God down to our level instead of looking up in awe and reverence at God and God's works.

Andrea L. Rash



THERE SEEM TO BE TWO PREDOMINANT CONCEPTIONS OF THE ALMIGHTY, or God the Father. One concept might be termed "God the Pal," or the "God made of Silly Putty." This idea is particularly popular today, in this age of relativism. People feel more comfortable worshipping a God who isn't much better than themselves, so they take the God of the Bible and carefully mold and reshape Him into their own image. When at last He reaches a pleasing, compatible form, they then declare Him right, and hence worthy of their time and, as it were, adoration.

A second popular concept might be termed the "Unapproachable," or "The Silent One." The more spiritual of the two, this idea nevertheless describes a distant God painted in only two dimensions. Like an old Russian Orthodox icon, He stares out unblinkingly, unfocused upon worshippers who know Him as little more than a hand-painted figure: height and width, but no depth.

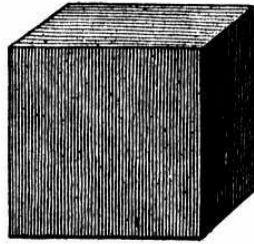
The first is heresy. The second is a lot like loving a picture of your wife, instead of the real person who shares your bed. Both do a disservice to God. What good is it to worship a false image of the Almighty? One might as well go fishing on the Sabbath as worship something conjured from the imagination. It may be, in America at least, that society has been so



dumbed-down and the Presidency so devalued, that we now wish upon ourselves a leader no better than the lowest common denominator, but this will not do for God. He *is* God precisely because He is eternally, unchangeably who He is. A god who could be refashioned into the twisted image of modern man would be worthless, even less than the sum of its parts.

The God of heaven — the one God, the *only* God — is a spirit, so He is, admittedly, somewhat mysterious to flesh and blood. Since He is, one can only truly know Him through the work of another spirit: the Holy Spirit. That gentle Friend illumines the word, thus opening for us the portals of understanding into His printed text.

But God is also fully three-dimensional. The God of Scripture is no mere paper cutout stuck on a wall, distant, unfeeling, detached from His creation. He's not made of cold plastic, with a hard surface impervious to weather, erosion, and prayers. We may not know the material of His construct — being spirit, He may have none beyond pure thought — but the Father has revealed Himself to us using words and imagery comfortable to our senses. We need not remake Him into something He is not, something we can more readily understand, for He has already made Himself understandable for us.



AN INTIMATE COMMUNION

And He walks with me,
 And He talks with me,
 And He tells me I am His own,
 And the joy we share as we tarry there,
 None other has ever known.

THERE CAN BE MANY REGRETS BETWEEN FATHER AND SON, and one of mine is that it took me so long to really get to know my dad. One of the great inconveniences of life is that a child must pass through stages of arrogance and rebellion when growing up, thus distancing himself from those best equipped to help him mature. Were we to come prepackaged from the womb with the reason and maturity of our adult years, we could then put them to use in those critical formative years, and be the better for it. But no, we are destined to stumble forth, being persistently stupid, learning slowly more from our mistakes, rather than through our infrequent victories.

Some of my best memories of my dad (who went home to the Lord while I was still in my twenties) are from our few times together during his final years. My wife and I would travel from California, Mom and Dad would travel from Iowa, and we would meet to camp together at some midpoint, such as Colorado or Wyoming. There we would see the sights, take pictures of the mountains, eat Dad's pancakes for breakfast, and play games inside the canvas-topped camper when the rain poured down.

It was only then, as adult son and adult father, that we could talk about important things: feelings, past joys and yesterday's

regrets, life experience and memories of growing up. It was only then that he could speak to me, not as an equal, but as someone old enough to understand. Only then could we walk side by side, eye to eye, sharing the lessons of life that every father hopes to share with his sons. Only then was I ready to receive what he had to give.

IN THE GARDEN

I IMAGINE GOD MAY HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR HIS CHILDREN, to spend time with them as He had so many times before.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. *Genesis 3:8*

In those days, God revealed Himself to man, enjoying — in the days before The Fall — a more intimate communion with all of His creation. He didn't just *declare* that things be done, but actually participated in their execution.

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be

What soul ever perished for believing that God the Father really has a beard? C.S. Lewis

alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. *Genesis 2:18-19*

Here was a God who subscribed to the hands-on approach to management. He didn't just send the animals in the general direction of Adam, but actually "brought them" to him. Then, when the beasts of the field proved to be insufficient companionship for the man, God personally did surgery, to create a true companion for the first man.

So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. *Genesis 2:20-22*

Again God came near to the lives of these two, but Adam and Eve ultimately rejected that sweet communion. Over quiet intimacy with their Maker they chose the brightly painted promises of the serpent. And, as a result of their choice, God never again enjoyed such close familiarity with His creation.

PEACE, PERFECT PEACE

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. *James 4:7-8*

THE FIRST GARDEN, NESTLED IN THE BEGINNINGS OF FOUR RIVERS, becomes for us the symbol for any place of serenity in which we can most easily find and commune with God. And in that garden, He waits for us, indeed, moves about looking for us.

But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"
Genesis 3:9

It's too easy to say "Well, He's an angry God looking to punish and hurt people, so I won't have anything to do with Him." How convenient that is; how easy then to excuse the absence of a relationship.

Or we say that God — if there is a God — is irrelevant. A Des Moines teenager claiming to be Unitarian, when interviewed said that

Knowing myself is more important than following tradition. God does not play much of a role in my life — if there is a God. I'm into free will. Development of the divinity within each person [is the center of her religion].

Another teenager, raised in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, said

If there is a God, he put us here to help each other survive. I try to help friends and help the environment. If there is a God, this is how he would want people to be, I think.

When asked if she prays, she replied, "Yes, regularly." To whom?

That's a good question. I ask whoever is listening to watch over people I care about and the world, because humans seem to be pretty mixed up.¹

Indeed.

We need not wonder about God's personality. And we need not wonder whether He is paying attention to our lives.

They say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob pays no heed."

Take heed, you senseless ones among the people;
 you fools, when will you become wise?
 Does he who implanted the ear not hear?
 Does he who formed the eye not see?
 Does he who disciplines nations not punish?
 Does he who teaches man lack knowledge?
 The LORD knows the thoughts of man;
 he knows that they are futile.
 Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD,
 the man you teach from your law;
 you grant him relief from days of trouble,
 till a pit is dug for the wicked.
 For the LORD will not reject his people;
 he will never forsake his inheritance.
 Judgment will again be founded on righteousness,
 and all the upright in heart will follow it.

Psalm 94:7-15

God the Father welcomes us into His garden to spend quality time with Him. In His wisdom, He's made it easy for us, revealing

I come to the garden alone,
 While the dew is still on the roses;
 And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,
 The Son of God discloses.

He speaks, and the sound of His voice
 Is so sweet the birds hush their singing,
 And the melody that He gave to me,
 Within my heart is ringing.

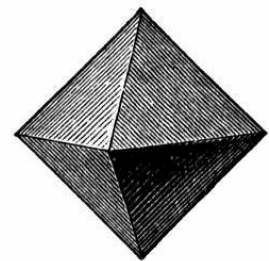
And He walks with me,
 And He talks with me,
 And He tells me I am His own,
 And the joy we share as we tarry there,
 None other has ever known.

C. Austin Miles

THE GREAT STONE FACE

THE CLASSIC 1968 SCIENCE FICTION MOVIE, 2001: A Space Odyssey, has as its central image (aside from HAL, the talking computer) an immense, black, rectangular monolith. It is first seen on earth, taking a mysteriously pivotal role during the time when apes learned aggression and (according to the movie) turned the evolutionary corner on their way to becoming mankind. The monolith is next seen freshly excavated on the moon during the time of that satellite's colonization by earth. Then, near the end of the film, the monolith is discovered floating free in space near the planet Jupiter.

The entire movie is a bit strange, but the black, featureless monolith is a compelling image. It's just *there*, and it's not uncommon for people to reach the end of the movie thoroughly befuddled as to its purpose and meaning. It just stands there, silent except for periodically emitting a shrieking, high-pitched tone that drives men mad. There are no marks on its surface, no identification. It seems to have come from nowhere, but to have been in existence for an eternity. The monolith is enigmatic, and indestructible.



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

His nature through all members of the Godhead. The Spirit fulfills His role; Christ Jesus His. And together they describe a tender, compassionate God who seeks us for our own good, who invites us to dwell with Him in peace and comfortable dependency.

He *wants* to be our Father. He wants us to walk with Him in His garden, to bring Him our sorrows and joys, our anger and questions. And, as a loving dad who can now speak openly with an adult son or daughter, He eagerly takes the opportunity to share from His own life, and the immense wealth of His wisdom.



I think many people imagine God is like that black monolith. He's just *there*, standing mute and unresponsive, emotionless, and grim, an enigma filled with dark mysteries and eternal truth locked up within His walls.

There are those who somehow take comfort in this conception of God. They really don't *want* a personal, feeling God around to meddle in their affairs. It's much more economical — and

requires far less risk on their part — to imagine a God who is just *there*, like some great unblinking monolith.

But that's not the God Scripture describes.

The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. *Genesis 6:6*

God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.
Exodus 2:24

You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, *Exodus 20:5*

Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. *Exodus 32:14*

Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the LORD. And he could bear Israel's misery no longer. *Judges 10:16*

The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. *Psalms 2:4*

DELIGHT EXPRESSED

THE TRUE PERSONALITY OF GOD THE FATHER can be seen in those nearest to His heart. When they obey Him, they reveal His nature, and those behaviors with which He chooses to be associated.

The Ark of God (Ark of the Covenant) had been moved about several times after being recovered from the Philistines, who had captured it at the battle at Ebenezer. King David was determined to bring it back to Jerusalem.

So David went down and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

2 Samuel 6:12b-15

Here is the behavior of someone in tune with their God. King David is thoroughly outside of himself, bubbling over with joy and praise to God, shouting and singing, trumpets blaring. Everyone has turned out for this wonderful event. And the king is so filled with adoration for his Lord that he can no longer contain his joy, and begins dancing about as hard as he can. Well, then his lovely wife, Michal, caught the display . . .

As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart. When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!" *2 Samuel 6:16,20*

Michal accused her husband of showing off for the servant girls. Vulgar exhibitionism. But that wasn't what had taken place at all.

David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD'S people Israel — I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor." *2 Samuel 6:21-22*

King David's dancing was for the Lord. He was simply demonstrating his love for the Lord in a tangible, physical way. He wasn't showing off for the servant girls at all, but showing his thanksgiving and love for his God.

Much like God shows His love for us.

"The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."
Zeph. 3:17

The word translated "rejoice" in this verse is a joy that expresses itself in the gestures of the body.² It means, literally, to spin around. In other words, God dances over us with singing! His love for us is so full that, at times, it must be expressed physically.

Our God is no blank-faced monolith, unfeeling, cold and hard. Nor is he some stodgy curmudgeon, always frowning at our exhibitions of joy. He loves us and cares about us — and sometimes even *He* leaps about with joy over us.

We're usually the stodgy curmudgeons. *We're* the ones too inhibited, too proud, to demonstrate our adoration of the Lord. But *He* is never inhibited; God is never too proud to dance joyfully for us.

When Christianity says that God loves man, it means that God *loves* man: not that He has some 'disinterested,' because really indifferent, concern for our welfare, but that, in awful and surprising truth, we are the objects of His love. You asked for a loving God: you have one. The great spirit you so lightly invoked, the 'Lord of terrible aspect,' is present: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, not the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist's love for his work and despotic as a man's love for a dog, provident and venerable as a father's love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes. *C.S. Lewis*



O past and gone!
How great is God! how small am I!
A mote in the illimitable sky,
Amidst the glory deep, and wide, and high
Of heaven's unclouded sun.
There to forget myself for evermore;
Lost, swallowed up in Love's immensity,
The sea that knows no sounding and no shore,
God only there, not I.

Gerhard Tersteegen

ON HOLY GROUND

IN HIS GRACE, GOD THE FATHER SENT US THE SON as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. He also sent His Son, Jesus, to be an earthly representation of the Godhead. As their creator, God knew that people — even people many centuries later — would be drawn more to a flesh-and-blood Savior than a mystical Spirit.

Since that was God's intention, it's all right for us to focus our attention upon Christ Jesus as Brother and Lord. There is no petty jealousy in heaven; God the Father does not have His feelings hurt when we spend more time with the Son or the Spirit.

Yet it's easy to forget that God the Son is a faithful representation of God the Father. Everything Jesus was and is — His personality, behavior, thought process, language — comes not from thin air, but directly from the Father.

Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves." *John 7:16; 14:10-11*

"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."
from John 14:9

Yet, in other ways, God the Father is, indeed, different — and that difference is one of the ways that He is a fully-realized, three-dimensional Being.

The apostle John had quite a different reaction to God the Father than he did Jesus. At the last supper, during that troubling, melancholy moment while the Savior was unburdening His heart to His closest associates, it was John who reclined next to Him — so close that the disciple was actually leaned against Him.

There was reclining on Jesus' breast one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. *John 13:23 NASB*

This was John, and his love for the Lord was deep, personal,

What higher, more exalted, and more compelling goal can there be than to know God? *J.I. Packer*

and affectionate. Now contrast this tender moment with the Savior with John's experience many years later when, in a vision, he is transported into the throne room of God the Father. Though John doesn't write of his feelings or personal response, there is nevertheless a sense of hushed awe in the words he uses with which to describe the holy setting.

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne,

and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. *Rev. 4:2-6 NKJV*

The scene being played out before the elderly disciple is one of powerful, unceasing worship of a most holy, righteous God.

The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

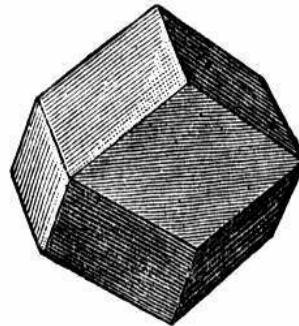
"Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!"

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

"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. 4:8-11 NKJV

Though he doesn't tell us what was in his heart, it's not hard to imagine the speechless awe with which the apostle John witnessed this scene. And we certainly wouldn't expect him to recline next to the throne of God and lean his head against the Almighty's breast!



Woe to those who forget that God is most holy and righteous. His condescension to earth through Christ and the Holy Spirit in no way diminishes His utter holiness. His willingness to interact with impure earthly beings in no way diminishes His own purity.

When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And

Moses said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. *Exodus 3:4-6*

God did not send His Son as an easier way to righteousness because He had lowered His standards, but because He has insisted upon them. Holiness is still required to enter God's presence; it's just that the requisite holiness is now obtained through Christ, rather than the wobbly stepladder of the Law.

Caught in this dilemma, what are we Christians to do? We must like Moses cover ourselves with faith and humility while we steal a quick look at the God whom no man can see and live. The broken and contrite heart He will not despise. We must hide our unholiness in the wounds of Christ as Moses hid himself in the cleft of the rock while the glory of God passed by. We must take refuge from God in God. Above all we must believe that God sees us perfect in His Son while He disciplines and chastens and purges us that we may be partakers of His holiness. *A.W. Tozer³*

OPEN ARMS, FORGIVING HEART

SANDWICHED BETWEEN THE GOD OF PRISTINE HOLINESS in the account of Moses and the burning bush, and the high and mighty recipient of worship in John's revelation, is the loving Father of Christ's parable about the prodigal son. All three describe the same God — not the obsolete God of the Exodus, the mysterious God of the future, or the human-like God of a fanciful story, but three aspects of the same eternal "I AM": The God of grace through Jesus Christ.

There are two ways to think about the grace of God: One is to look at yourself and see how sinful you were and say, "God's grace must be vast — it must be huge as space to forgive such a sinner as I am." That's one way and that's a good way — and probably that's the most popular way.

But there's another way to think of the grace of God. Think of it as the way God is: God being like God. And when God shows grace to a sinner He isn't being dramatic; He's acting like God. He'll never act any other way but like God. On the other hand, when that man whom justice has condemned turns his back on the grace of God in Christ and refuses to allow himself to be rescued, then the time comes when God must judge the man. And when God judges the man He acts like Himself in judging the man. When God shows love to the human race He acts like Himself. When God shows judgment to "the angels which kept not their first estate" (Jude 6), He acts like Himself.

Always God acts in conformity with the fullness of His own wholly perfect, symmetrical nature. God always feels this overwhelming plenitude of goodness and He feels it in harmony with all His other attributes. There's no frustration in God. Everything that God is He is in complete harmony, and there is never any frustration in Him. But all this He bestows in His eternal Son. *Tozer*

SIDETRACKED

"A certain man had two sons . . ."

THE GRADE SCHOOL I ATTENDED, FRANKLIN SCHOOL, was located on Main Street, just through the block on which I lived. The normal way for me to get to school each day was to go out the back door, across our back yard, "cut through" the Wigand's back yard, down their drive, and cross Main Street to the school yard. The return trip was the same, but reversed, and never took more than two minutes for the entire journey. Mom could always expect me home just a few minutes after the school bell rang.

"The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living."

One day after school a classmate, one of the Nelson boys, invited me to, instead of going right home, join him catching crawdads down at Linn Creek. The creek (or "crick," as we called them in those days) ran east and west along the backside of the football field and track that was behind Franklin School, then angled north to define the boundaries of the park that was our summer playground. The creek was a tiny tributary, shallow, muddy, and smelled not unlike the sewer that crossed its path — but the Mississippi never held more fascination for Tom Sawyer than did Linn Creek for us.

"After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs."

He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything."

I knew it was wrong. I knew I'd get into trouble for it. And I did it anyway. Instead of going right home after school that day, I went down to the creek with the Nelson boy. We caught crawdads, looked for garter snakes and frogs, and generally got wet and muddy and had a wonderful time.

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father."

The Nelson boys had parents who didn't really care where they were or when they got home from school, so, when we decided to leave the creek, they probably headed off to some other adventure.

I went home to my sure execution.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate." *Luke 15:11-24*

I was one half-hour — all of thirty minutes — late getting home from school that day, and my mom was beside herself. *Where had I been? What had happened to me? Was I hurt?* Boy, did I get a lickin' that day. And I learned the rather painful lesson that no matter how much the creek beckoned, I was to always come right home after school.

As young as I was, however, I learned another, even more valuable lesson that day. Even though I experienced a burning sensation in my posterior for the next few hours, I learned that of the two sets of parents — the Nelsons and the Lampels — mine loved me more. Even then I understood that though it was sometimes expressed with worry, fear, anger and eventual punishment, my parents loved me enough to care. Beneath my mom's anger that day was a more powerful relief that I was finally home safe and sound.



THAT IS THE PICTURE OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER. Though we may be a "long way off," He stands watching and waiting, hoping for our safe return. How sad it must be for those who think God to be more like the Nelsons: distant and disinterested, leaving us on our own to stumble unaided through life, not caring whether — or even if — we ever come home.

And how lonely it must be to live thinking of the Father as only an angry, short-tempered God who loves nothing better than to box a sinner about the ears. The truth is much more reassuring.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

Psalm 103:11-14

BEYOND ALL MEASURE

IN SPEAKING OF THE HOLINESS OF GOD, Tozer points out that

We cannot grasp the true meaning of the divine holiness by thinking of someone or something very pure and then raising the concept to the highest degree we are capable of. God's holiness is not simply the best we know infinitely bettered. We know nothing like the divine holiness. It stands apart, unique, unapproachable, incomprehensible and unattainable.⁴

Just so the entirety of God's personality. The qualities of God that make Him dear to His people — those intimate qualities that describe Him, for example, more as our heavenly Father than the all-powerful Lord of creation — are not just the same as ours raised to the highest power. The physical universe cannot contain the extravagant riches of His personality. It is wildly more than our small minds can comprehend.

The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

Genesis 6:6

To consider the grief He experiences, for one example, it would be inadequate to think of the most empathetic person one knows, then imagine that quality ten times, one hundred times greater, and apply it to God; the grief God experiences on our behalf would make even that seem like a muddy pothole when compared to the Pacific Ocean.

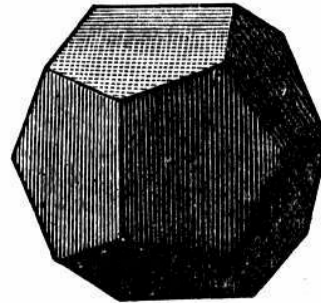
To truly know God is to be surrendered to Him. It is a rare soul that is repelled by the truth of God; most are repelled by a lie — a twisted, distorted image of His real personality. To know the truth about our great and compassionate Father is to be drawn into Him, swept up into His strong, protecting arms.

Jesus knew, of course. Being of the Father, He knew the full extent of His personality, and love for us.

"Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

John 17:17-23



In order to know God, we must often think of Him; and when we come to love Him, we shall then also think of Him often, for our heart will be with our treasure. Brother Lawrence

Or consider His love for us. We could imagine the most pleasing composite of every real and fictional mother we've ever met who, for us, embodied the very quintessential quality of tender love. We could even add into that the more pragmatic, sometimes gruff, uniquely male brand of love demonstrated by the finest fathers we've ever known. Then, to round out the package, we could mix in some of that warm, knowing, yet sometimes contentious love of a brother or sister. We could then take that exquisite example of the very finest human love there is, expand its qualities one hundred, one thousand, times — and against the love God feels and demonstrates for us, it would seem like a gentle breeze washed over and absorbed into a hurricane.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. *Romans 5:7-8*

O worship the king, all glorious above,
O gratefully sing, His power and His love;
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise.

O tell of His might, O sing of His grace,
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
And dark is His path on the wings of the storm.

Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light,
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail;
Thy mercies how tender! how firm to the end!
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer and Friend. Amen.

Robert Grant

Notes:

1. Both interviews are from an article on teenagers' perceptions of sin, published in the *Des Moines Register*, October 9, 1991.
2. *gyl*, gheel, Hebrew Stg 1523; or (by permutation) *guwl*, *gool*; a primitive root; properly to spin round (under the influence of any violent emotion), i.e. usually rejoice, or (as cringing) fear :- be glad, joy, be joyful, rejoice.
3. *The Knowledge of the Holy* (HarperCollins, 1992), p167.
4. *Ibid*, p163.

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