

a well-reasoned worship

*I*t may still be a habit, so deeply ingrained that, given the opportunity, the appendages of the body would go through the motions on their own, without any initiation by the conscious will.

The habit of youth (at least the youth of my generation) dictated that when presented with a body of water larger than a bucket or backyard swimming pool, one would immediately begin collecting any small, smooth stones lying in the vicinity. Each stone would, in turn, be grasped by its edges between thumb and forefinger, then spun out on a low trajectory across the surface of the water—the object being to see how many times one could skip the stone, glanced off the surface, before it would run out of momentum and sink.

As with most such youthful occupations, competition made the process more interesting, and two young boys could while away a fair portion of a hot summer afternoon skipping stones across the surface of a lake. The prize? Well, the champ didn't win much of anything; the prestige was fleeting, quickly forgotten even before the next activity. But it was something to do.



This is the picture of the relationship most Christians choose to have with God. Uncomfortable with anything deeper, they skip lightly across the surface of Deity, glancing off here and there, picking up little snippets of knowledge, keeping what is pleasant and throwing away the rest.

For the most part we don't know our God. We stumble through our days laboring under well-meaning but ill-conceived notions about Him, clinging to hazy images picked up originally in the Sunday School of decades past, or from the bilge spouted by guests being interviewed outside the latest celebrity funeral. When something pleasant happens, we pronounce our God to be good and loving. But when something unpleasant transpires, we're left bewildered: *How could a loving God have let this happen?*



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The "He" we all refer to is a fascinating, complex God who nonetheless reveals Himself in rather

alarming detail in Scripture. There certainly are mysteries about Him, but far fewer than we imagine. For the most part, God delights in telling us all about Himself, His methods, His habits and ways.

God revealed Himself the best when He sent His Son, for Jesus was not only all-God on the inside, but He displayed God on the outside.

John 14:7-10

"If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 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."

When we worship Him, it is to be with the penetrating submersion of a one-man sub, rather than the haphazard skipping of a stone across the surface. We are to come to God armed with the truth of His personality, as well as an openness of spirit and honesty of heart. Good intentions alone may be sufficient in today's society, but they will go only so far toward establishing and nurturing a relationship with a holy God. Through the inspiration and penning of His word, and the sacrificial birth, life, and death of His Son, God has gone out of His way to reveal Himself to us. And when we worship Him, we are to worship—in a knowledgeable, well-reasoned way—the entirety of His personality.

John 4:22-24

"You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."



*the strength of his arms*² • *life in himself*² • *a discerning majesty*³ • *under his light*⁴ • *eternal "i am"*⁴
*an inventive power*⁵ • *a fair hearing*⁵ • *and justice for all*⁶ • *ownership*⁶ • *removing death*⁷

the strength of his arms

Isaiah 40:15

Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales;

He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

Psalm 145:14

The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.



There is no better example of the yawning gulf between kingdom and earthly logic than the concept of self worth. To the minions preaching the *faux* gospel of self-determination, the individual, and his or her selfish desires, have taken up residence on whatever throne there is in their lives.

This philosophy has been evangelized to countless graduating classes—encapsulated in the familiar poem, *Invictus*.

William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul...

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

In ancient days there existed a contrived panoply of deities—one for every day of the week, every river and tree and impressive mount. These demigods could be consulted much as one would select from a dinner menu, used for whatever plea, confession or absolution was appropriate for the moment. But this must be said of the ancients: at least they had their gods.

Today the god is self. Today the individual is taught that he or she does not need any god beyond themselves. But the concept isn't new; it is, in fact, as old as the first son of Adam:

Genesis 4:4-5

But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was down-cast.

And more than 130 years ago, the President of the United States addressed the same misguided conception of man:

Abraham Lincoln

We have forgotten the gracious hand which has preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving Grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

There is no good way to convince a stranger to God that His ways are best. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that turns someone from the worship of self to the worship of an all-powerful God. But, once the Spirit is in residence, we can nurture this eternal precept by falling to our knees each day before the One who has made us.



Lord God Almighty, I praise Your unfailing strength. And whenever I feel the weight of life bearing down on me, I will remember that You are able—and will always be able—to lift me up, back into Your strong arms.

life in himself

Isaiah 44:6 NASB

"Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.'"

John 5:26-27

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.



It may be one of the most difficult concepts for the human mind to grasp, yet, once grasped, becomes the determining link that sets the God-man relationship into proper perspective.

Within the system of earth, nothing generates spontaneously on its own. If a sprout emerges from the soil, seemingly for no apparent reason, then it is the result of something—squirrel, rain, wind, bird—setting a seed there. If the wind suddenly comes up, it has been generated by invisible weather patterns. If a chicken is

hatched, it is because an egg was laid. Every occurrence in this world is the result of something else; cause and effect is the rule.

But God is unique. He did not have a beginning, as He will not have an end. Nothing greater set the seed for God; He was neither born, nor created.

No one gave Him life. Rather, God *is* life; He is the generator from which life is created. On earth, the generator that makes electricity has been created by other machines and human hands. But in heaven, the Generator of life is self-existent. He not only is self-generating—*He was never generated in the first place*. God has always been.

And there is no God besides Him.

A.W. Tozer

The human mind, being created, has an understandable uneasiness about the Uncreated. We do not find it comfortable to allow for the presence of One who is wholly outside of the circle of our familiar knowledge. We tend to be disquieted by the thought of One who does not account to us for His being, who is responsible to no one, who is self-existent, self-dependent, and self-sufficient.



Almighty God, You are unique. One God, yet Father, Son and Spirit—there is no one like You. Woe to those who search in vain for something other than the God who has always been, who is, and who will always be; their end is clear. But I worship You, the King, the One who has life in Himself.

a discerning majesty

Exodus 15:7

In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble.

Micah 5:4

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.



Our God is no less discerning than He wishes His people to be. Those who imagine the Lord God to be something of a spineless milquetoast, a maudlin simp desiring only to dwell safely within a sticky-sweet

loveliness—these people do not know their God well at all.

When Jesus—everything of God, yet in flesh—was confronted with the base and flagrant commercialism of the Jerusalem temple, He vented His righteous anger in a most physical way:

Mark 11:15-17

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations”? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”

When He was challenged by the Pharisees, Jesus patiently instructed those who were eager to hear, but then turned the full force of His indignation upon those who were rejecting His message:

Matthew 23:27

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean.”

The world would have us question our faith whenever it takes on a discerning edge. It would have us believe that Christianity is to be swathed in a simpering sweetness that happily receives all blows, and blindly loves everyone—even those serving evil. But listen to the counsel Jesus gave His disciples as they were preparing to go out and preach the gospel in His name:

Matthew 10:12-16

“As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”

The God we worship does not wink at evil, but neither does He run out of patience and compassion for those who draw near to Him.



Your Majesty, 'tis mercy all that I might touch the hem of Your robe as it passes. I worship Your terrible splendor, even as I revel in its tender, compassionate light.

under his light

Isaiah 9:2

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

Psalm 27:1

The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?



In an old *Star Trek* episode, the crew of the starship *Enterprise* arrives at a planet where the human inhabitants are being driven insane by a strange, alien life form that looks very much like an oversized, gelatinous amoeba. It somehow invades the body, causing profound pain, paranoia, madness, and, ultimately, death.

The life form threatens the crew of the *Enterprise*, and in the process of solving the mystery, so as to save the people of the planet, they discover that the alien life prefers the shadows over areas of sun light. This eventually leads them to the method by which to kill the aliens and remove their evil presence from the human body: bathing the entire planet in brilliant light.

1 John 1:5

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

Humans are born under the power and influence of evil—a dark evil that brings on pain, paranoia, madness, and, ultimately, death. This ancient evil hates the light and loves the shadows; the cover of darkness is where it does its best work.

God is the absence of darkness, and God is the absence of death. His cleansing light scours out the evil lurking in the shadows of our lives. Under its penetrating rays, the darkness withers and fades, replacing evil with good, sin with righteousness. Life in the shadows leads to death, but life under God's light leads only to eternal life with Him.

William Law

Receive every day as a resurrection from death, as a new enjoyment of life; meet every rising sun with such sentiments of God's goodness, as if you had seen it, and all things, new-created upon your account: and under the sense of so great a blessing, let your joyful heart praise and magnify so good and glorious a Creator.



My Lord, Your brilliance fills the heavens as the reborn sun pierces the morning sky. I worship the Light of Your presence as someone born into darkness—corrupt and blind. You have opened my eyes and, by grace, given me hope.

eternal “i am”

Psalm 90:2 NASB

Before the mountains were born,
Or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting,
Thou art God.

Psalm 93:2

Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity.



The knowledge of history is a comfortable and useful companion to the knowledge of God. Those who have even a passing familiarity with the millennia of mankind's groanings will look upon today's tribulations from a more balanced perspective. And those who can catalogue civilization's high points and great victories will balance today's ecstasies within that larger context.

History means little to a teenager who knows of nothing before the time of his own birth, and eternity means little to the adult who has set his affections on the things of this earth.

The worship of a God who exists outside of time and history gives the knowledgeable supplicant an eternal, timeless perspective that cannot be found on earth. Both tragedy and good fortune settle into the framework of a Kingdom being held safely in the hands of One who knew all events before He even created the time into which they would be set.

A.W. Tozer

The mind looks backward in time till the dim past vanishes, then turns and looks into the future till thought and imagination collapse from exhaustion; and God is at both points, unaffected by either. Time marks the beginning of created existence, and because God never began to exist it can have no application to Him. “Began” is a time-word, and can have no personal meaning for the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity.



Lord God, I kneel before Your timeless throne to worship—no, to embrace—Your eternity. Some may set their faith in modern institutions, but I choose to set my faith in You, O Lord—You who were ancient before time even began.

an inventive power

Job 38:2-4

"Who is this that darkens my counsel
with words without knowledge?
Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you, and you shall answer me.
Where were you when I laid the earth's founda-
tion? Tell me, if you understand."

Psalm 119:73

Your hands made me and formed
me; give me understanding to learn your com-
mands.



It may be one of the more common stumbling blocks to Christianity. The unregenerate mind cannot fathom that the same God who created the universe—if, indeed, it believes He did—is also responsible for every new life born into this small world. They cannot believe that a universal God can also be personal; in their minds, the two are incompatible, so, choosing one, they reject the intimacy of Christ.

The worshiping heart, on the other hand, knows that God is personal, without His creative might being diminished. In fact, it is precisely that supernatural juxtaposition that defines "grace." Grace is a God, who doesn't have to, loving me. Grace is a God inventing the universe, but also inventing me.

Grace is love undeserved.

A.W. Tozer

Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines Him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving. Grace takes its rise far back in the heart of God, in the awful and incomprehensible abyss of His holy being; but the channel through which it flows out to men is Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

*My God, how wonderful Thou art,
Thy majesty how bright,
How beautiful Thy mercy seat,
In depths of burning light,
In depths of burning light!*

*How dread are Thine eternal years,
O everlasting Lord:
By prostrate spirits day and night
Incessantly adored,
Incessantly adored!*

*How wonderful, how beautiful,
The sight of Thee must be,
Thine endless wisdom, boundless power,
And awful purity,
And awful purity!*

*O how I fear Thee, living God,
With deepest, tenderest fears,
And worship Thee with trembling hope,
And penitential tears,
And penitential tears!*

*Yet, I may love Thee, too,
O Lord, Almighty as Thou Art,
For Thou hast stooped to ask of me
The love of my poor heart,
The love of my poor heart!*

Frederick W. Faber



O Lord God, I worship Your creative power—a power that flung the universe into being, yet deigned also to create a being as lowly as I. By this same power, create in me an understanding of Your grace, and a deeper devotion to You and Your ways.

a fair hearing

Isaiah 5:16

But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness.

Job 37:23

The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress.



For a very long time I had hoped to be selected for jury duty. It seemed to me to be a fascinating process, one filled with human drama, and I had been eager to participate. How extraordinary that our judicial system has been so devised that ordinary men and women would be called to sit in judgment on one or more of their fellow human beings. It is at once a remarkable and sobering proposition.

Even before I arrived at the courthouse I was considering the human factor in the judicial equation. Here would be a handful of ordinary people who would do their level best to render a just and fair verdict according to the law. Yet, try as they might, they would not succeed in being anything more than who they were. The jurors would sit in those wooden chairs and hear testimony filtered through their years of experience and prejudice, likes and dislikes, bias, personality, religious faith, and opinion.

No matter how hard they tried to rise above their temporal inadequacies, they would still be imperfect human beings standing in judgment of another.

Monetary penalty or reward, acquittal or time in prison, even life itself would be in the hands of people as fatally flawed as the one on whom they would stand in judgement.

As I parked my car and walked toward the courthouse, I was grateful that my eternal Judge was someone without any of these failings. I was thankful that mine would be the only absolutely, perfectly fair judge who ever existed—one who had no ulterior motives, no deceit or malice, no political axes to grind.

John 5:28-30

“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”



Lord God, man is corrupted by his power, but You are exalted. Man's justice is stained by his sin, but Your justice, O Lord, is pure. With unflinching eagerness I draw near to Your throne of justice, knowing that I will receive a fair hearing, and righteous judgement.

and justice for all

Psalm 89:32

I will punish their sin with the rod,
their iniquity with flogging;

Psalm 89:33

but I will not take my love from him,
nor will I ever betray my faithfulness.



A.W. Tozer

The message of justice discharged and mercy operative is more than a pleasant theological theory; it announces a fact made necessary by our deep human need. Because of our sin we are all under sentence of death, a judgment which resulted when justice confronted our moral situation. When infinite equity encountered our chronic and willful in-equity, there was violent war between the two, a war which God won and must always win.

But when the penitent sinner casts himself upon Christ for salvation, the moral situation is reversed. Justice confronts the changed situation and pronounces the believing man just. Thus justice actually goes over to the side of God's trusting children. This is the meaning of those daring words of the apostle John: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our

sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

But God's justice stands forever against the sinner in utter severity. The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate for the consciences of millions. It hushes their fears and allows them to practice all forms of iniquity while death draws every day nearer and the command to repent goes unregarded.



It is with trembling joy that I bow before Your justice, O God. You do not trifle with sin, yet anger does not consume Your love for me. As a son who has done wrong does not hesitate to approach a loving father, may I never shrink from coming into Your court when I have sinned.

ownership

Job 41:11 NASB

“Who has given to Me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.”

Col. 1:16

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.



There are two principal facets to God's ownership of the believer's life. First, because we were purchased at the cross—which means that He owns us lock-stock-and-barrel—He may do with us as He pleases—without seeking our approval.

If I borrow a friend's car, I would ask his permission before doing certain things to it. I may go ahead and add oil to the engine, or refill his gas tank, but I certainly wouldn't have the car repainted in chartreuse without first obtaining his permission. I may wash and wax it before returning it to him, but I certainly wouldn't have the seats reupholstered in striped fabric of candy apple red interspersed with deep purple—not if I valued his friendship, that is.

But if I owned the car—if I were the one who had written out the check for its purchase—then I would feel free to do whatever I pleased with the car. I could have it painted any obnoxious color of my choosing, or upholster the seats in whatever offensive fabric I could find. I could cash it in for scrap metal, or park it in the garage for twenty years. It would be mine.

The second facet to His ownership is that, having paid a high price for us, God cherishes His possession. When I spend only a small amount to purchase a cheap,

plastic tool, I care little if it breaks or is lost. I simply shrug off the loss and buy another. But when I spend a great amount to buy a finely crafted, expensive tool, I take very good care of it indeed. I protect it, clean it after each use, and make sure I return it to its spot in the toolbox after each use. If I accidentally break the expensive tool, I repair it; if I lose it, I search high and low until it is found.

1 Cor. 6:19-20

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

The world rebels against God's Lordship. It mistakenly refers to slavery under evil as "liberty," and servanthood under a merciful God as "slavery." But through the ministry and counsel of the Spirit, the believer understands that true liberty comes only by the hand of God, and true peace comes only by accepting Him as Lord and Master of one's life.

Psalm 119:45 NKJV

And I will walk at liberty,
For I seek Your precepts.

Great Creator and Lord over every living and unliving thing, I rise this day to worship You. I praise this mysterious peace from You—the peace I have knowing that I, too, am one of Your creations, made for Your pleasure and Your will.

removing death

Isaiah 25:8

He will swallow up death forever.
The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth.
The LORD has spoken.

2 Tim. 1:9b-10

This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.



Sometimes, as a mental and spiritual exercise, I try to imagine death: How could I best describe the state of death? Modern man treats death all too lightly—treating it either as simply the cessation of existence, or as something so nominally unpleasant that it can be dismissed as insignificant.

But when I think of death—*God's* definition of death—I think about Adam and Eve. Here were two people who enjoyed a unique, blissful communion with their Creator. As no one has since, they spent pleasant hours with Him, walking the garden paths, learning from Him, listening to His voice, and enjoying His company. But then, through their own weakness and greed, they lost it all. And for the first time they experienced separation from their Lord.

Genesis 3:17b-19, 23-24

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."
So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

If we consider death as a state of separation from God, then Jesus experienced the ultimate death. For when Christ took upon Himself all the sins of mankind in one moment, because He, in His purity, could not bear the nearness of such impurity, God the Father rejected His own Son who wore it. And that moment was for Christ the ultimate death.

Mark 15:34

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

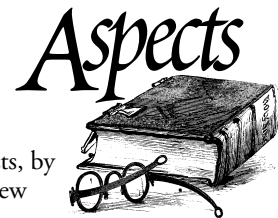
But His death removed its curse for us. And because death has been vanquished, the believer cannot escape grace. It is there, at the beginning, giving us entrance into the fellowship of God. And God's graceful ways—His gentle kindness—pervade every moment and aspect of living within that fellowship—a fellowship from which we can never be removed.

Brooke Foss Westcott

There is nothing in the fact of death, nothing in the consequences of death, which Christ has not endured for us.



Heavenly Father, I bow down before Your matchless grace. You are mercy, for You hate death as much as I, and so have given a means by which I—and anyone—might be delivered from that end. I worship the grace that brought me life through the Son, Jesus Christ.



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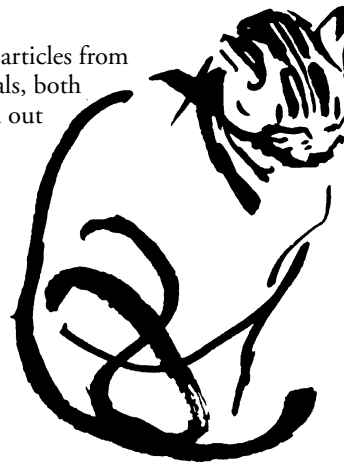
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