

Aspects 10th Anniversary!

Encouraging believers to know God and His ways,
and to enjoy a more intimate communion with Him

Our calling, as publishers of this journal, is to encourage individuals within the body to be active, well-informed participants in a deep, life-changing relationship with God. To that end, as we mark ten years of Aspects publication, **Linda and I invite you to join us in expanding its audience.** Are you the leader of a small group Bible study, or Sunday School class? Do you have a ministry to shut-ins or the elderly? Do you correspond with missionaries? Do you know someone who might enjoy reading Aspects?

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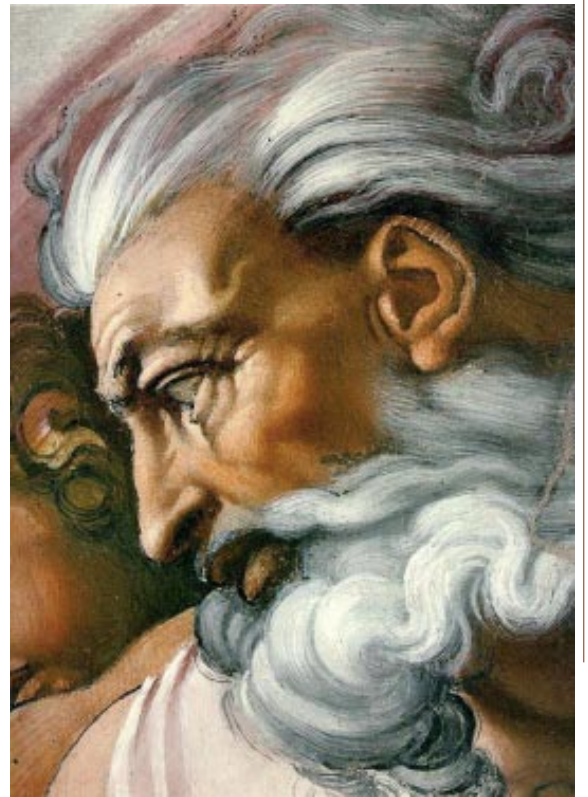
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A final reminder: We do not charge for any of our resources. In this work we do not seek the praise of man—only the pleasure of our God.

To Fill Myself with So Much of God



*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 nkjv*

The church building in which I was raised, so long ago ground into the dust of civic and architectural improvement, was (oddly for the Midwest) built in a “Spanish mission” style, with twin towers on either side of the main entrance and all overlaid in stucco. The main sanctuary was bordered on two sides by small stained-glass windows, in which were emblazoned the names of early saints, remembered by their friends and families. The third side of the sanctuary consisted of huge wooden sliding doors that could be either a wall, for normal-sized crowds, or opened to reveal an auxiliary room full of chairs, for larger congregations.

Ranged across the back of this large room was a series of alcoves that had been used as Sunday School rooms in earlier days of the church. During my childhood the center one of these alcoves had been transformed into the church library.

If one was young and easily distracted, and if one was looking for an out-of-the-way corner in which to while away the very long minutes of a church service, one could find no better haven than that small alcove filled with books.

My favorite book in that collection was a large coffee table-sized volume filled with photographs of the frescoes painted into the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. I'll not deny a young boy's fascination with the book's voluptuous displays of flesh, but what held my interest as well were the faces, and the extravagant body language given the saints and angels by Michelangelo. The figures—meant to be viewed from far below—were, in the close-up views in the pages of the book, twisted into fantastical, even grotesque shapes. Limbs and torsos danced to a tormented, almost macabre tune; eyes bulged from sockets; and just about everyone in the paintings seemed to be either angry or afraid. I was at once fascinated with and repelled by the images of Adam and Eve giving in to the serpent's temptation, then being expelled from the Garden;

Aspects
10th
Anniversary!
Issue

#120, November 2000

the damned souls suffering the anguish of hell; the frantic escape from the rising waters of the Deluge.

Most fascinating of all was the dramatic central image of God the Father giving life to Adam. Here was the sublime gift of creation—a personal, and profoundly intimate expression of God’s generosity and grace. Yet even here the face of God seemed hard: not necessarily angry, but stern. There is no joy to be found in the face over His inventive creation. Here was a God it was easy for a young boy to fear.

It was difficult reconciling the angry God in those glossy pages with the beatific visage looking down at me from the Sunday School wall. The portraits of Jesus were warm, peaceful, gentle and calm. He did not condemn; He did not punish, but invited all to “come unto” Him. Jesus healed the sick and comforted the poor. He laughed and wept, and seemed to have the same range of emotions as I. Yet I was taught that Jesus was as much God as the one I saw portrayed on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. How could it be?

As I grew up and learned that even humans were more complex than their simple, well-groomed portraits, I also came to realize that my God was far more complex than the simple, warm-hearted portraits of His Son that had decorated my Sunday School walls. At the same time, I understood that any God able to work with and command the complexities of my own life, must surely be something greater and more interesting than the hard-faced portraits painted into the ceiling of that Vatican chapel. Any God who could orchestrate the creation of the universe, yet also stoop to know and save me, could not possibly be faithfully rendered in paint and wet plaster—regardless the artistry of the one wielding the brush.

He must surely be someone with an intellect more detailed, a personality more gentle and profound, a sense of Himself beyond the fleshy, muscular tyrant spread across the pages of a library book. These images did not square with the One who had permeated my heart—nor did they fit the person I read of in the pages of His own book.

*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,
1 Peter 1:8*

A Cosmic Love Affair

The process of filling oneself with God is, essentially, participation in a grand, cosmic love affair that spans all time and all space—yet is carried out and chronicled in the tender privacy of the human heart. Just as we are surrounded by the invisible tempest of angelic/demonic conflict, we have at our disposal—yet rarely apprehend—the invisible fullness of an eternal, omnipotent God.

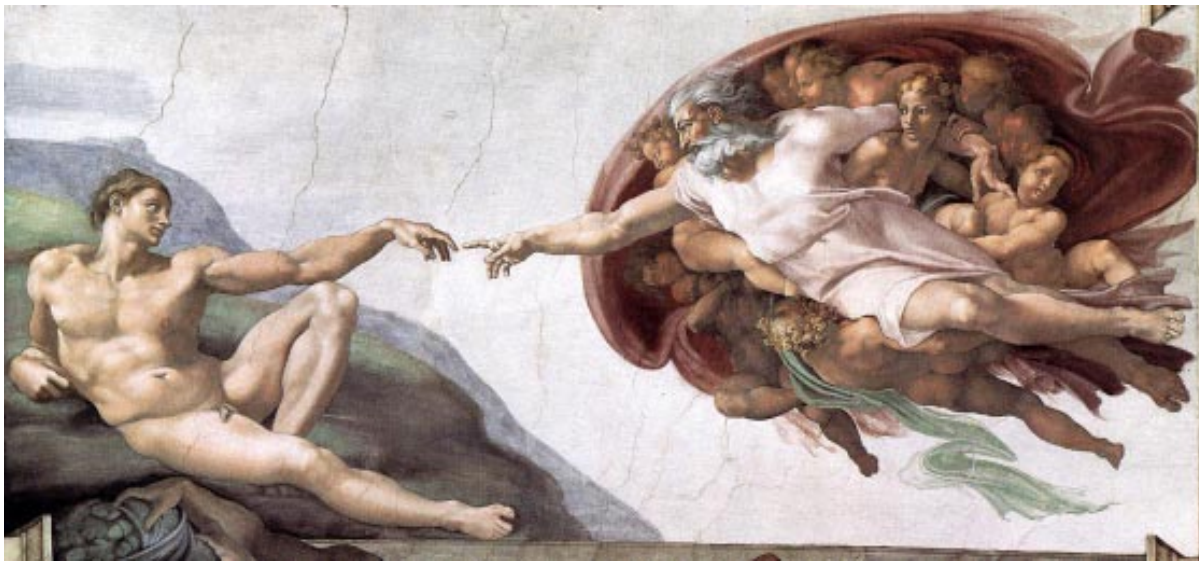
“Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, “O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 2 Kings 6:16-17

Most people are so firmly, even desperately attached to the pragmatic and tangible loam of earth that they remain blind to the spirit world ranging all about them. And, unaware of that, they remain blind to much of what God has to offer their temporal life.

The brain belongs to the earth, but the *mind* belongs to the spirit.

From the beginning of man’s existence, God has condescended to minister to him on the earthly plane. One need not rise into the heavenlies to meet God; He is pleased to meet man where he lives. But God is not of the

earth; He only meets with man here for man's benefit. God is spirit, and dwells in a spiritual place. For man to apprehend the fullness of what God has to offer, he must release his hold on the familiar and dare to soar in spiritual realms.



"I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"
 John 3:11-12

I observe with respect the man who is hired to excavate around the foundation of our house. I watch him expertly move the earth, then make repairs to the cement wall that not only supports the floors above, but keeps out soil and moisture from the floor below. I respect the man's skills, his dedication to his craft. But then I wonder: In this man's mechanical world of toil and sweat, is there time left for the spirit? As he feeds his body for labor, does he feed his mind as well? He knows soil and cement, gravel and sand. He can fashion them all into structures of permanence—walls and sidewalks that will last for decades. But has he so fashioned his eternity? Is his spiritual mind as alive and expert as the brain that holds all his earthly knowledge?

Filling oneself with God is a process that begins in the mind. Or you may prefer to call it the heart.

kardia, kar-dee'-ah:
 prolonged from a
 primary kar (Latin cor,
 "heart"); the heart, i.e.
 (figurative) the thoughts
 or feelings (mind)

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.
 Romans 5:5

Regardless the terminology or imagery, God is at the center of it all. The engine that drives the process—from both ends—is *His Spirit*. To know the mind of God we must first link up with Him, and *remain* in contact for His Holy Spirit to pour into our mind and heart copious helpings of the Father Himself.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
 Ephesians 3:14-19

A Matter of Trust

Every student/teacher relationship represents a transaction of trust. Every time an individual sits under the tutelage of a superior, a certain level of trust—even faith—is implicit. And the older the student, the more explicit is the level of trust.

When I was a child attending Franklin School, I had one teacher for all day, for the whole year. And short of my parents moving to a different school district, there was nothing I could do about it. My teacher for fourth grade was wonderful; the one for third grade even more so. But the hideous shrew I had for fifth still gives me nightmares. As a child, I had no say in their selection. Even in junior high and high school, where I could select my subjects and have a different teacher for each, I had no say in which one I got. Nor could I choose to leave; even if by a certain age I could legally drop out, my parents would never have permitted it.

But if, as an adult, I were to sign up for a night class on, say, “How to be a Better Writer in Five Easy Lessons,” I am more in control. If on that first night I observe that the teacher is a blithering idiot who has nothing new to teach me, I always have the option of leaving the class—or, if one is available, switching to a different instructor. It’s a matter of trust: A teacher’s role is to fill the student’s life with knowledge, wisdom, and superior experience. If the student finds that the instruction of the teacher cannot be trusted, then he or she will have to leave—or look for a different teacher.

*“No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him”—
but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.*

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. 1 Corinthians 2:9-13

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,
so that you may overflow with hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Romans 15:13*

If I am to let God fill me with His wisdom and life, I have no other option than to go to Him. There is only one teacher of that curriculum—only one source. My only other option is to reject the instruction. I can drop out.

And many do. Like self-absorbed, short-sighted teenagers who drop out of school because they “don’t need to know that,” the church is populated with many who reject the outpouring of God’s fuller life. Some get sidetracked by the vernacular; when phrases such as “the indwelling,” “being filled with the Spirit,” or (even scarier) “baptized by the Spirit,” are bandied about, they elect to opt out, rather than tread mystical paths.

No matter the various dressings of tradition or doctrine, it all boils down to the same thing: being filled more with God.

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming

like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Phillip. 3:8-12

Like many other teenagers and young adults, I passed through a period of rebellion. It was a time when I rejected the wisdom and instruction of my earthly father, declaring them to be both insignificant and immaterial. Happily, before he went to live with my heavenly Father, I realized the utter stupidity of that position and spent good, productive times filling myself with more of my dad's life, learning more about his history, more about what lay in his heart.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Matthew 5:6



It is a matter of trust. Filling ourselves with more of God is as profound, yet as simple and direct as that. It is as direct as deciding who we will trust; it is as simple as putting down our busyness to spend quiet time with Him. It means getting out of the kitchen and curling up at His feet.

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42

God and the spiritual world are real. We can reckon upon them with as much assurance as we reckon upon the familiar world around us. Spiritual things are there (or rather we should say here) inviting our attention and challenging our trust.

Our trouble is that we have established bad thought habits. We habitually think of the visible world as real and doubt the reality of any other. We do not deny the existence of the spiritual world but we doubt that it is real in the accepted meaning of the word.

The world of sense intrudes upon our attention day and night for the whole of our lifetime. It is clamorous, insistent and self-demonstrating. It does not appeal to our faith; it is here, assaulting our five senses, demanding to be accepted as real and final. But sin has so clouded the lenses of our hearts that we cannot see that other reality, the City of God, shining around us. The world of sense triumphs. The visible becomes the enemy of the invisible, the temporal, of the eternal. That is the curse inherited by every member of Adam's tragic race.

At the root of the Christian life lies belief in the invisible. The object of the Christian's faith is unseen reality.

A.W. Tozer

Taken as a Whole

When we're ready to get serious about it, there are two essential components to the process of filling up a life with God. First we must admit our need of the filling. A life full of itself has very little room left for God. Like the alcoholic that has hit bottom, we must face the fact that we need more of something greater than ourselves. For the believer, that something is God Himself.

There is no human substitute for the power and ministry of the Godhead. The most intelligent earthly scholar cannot replace a Christian's time spent in the word; the most compassionate, wise counselor cannot replace the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Both temporal resources can be valuable, even vital, but neither can be used in place of direct contact with our God.

So each individual must reach a place where he or she admits the need for God—as much of Himself as He is willing to pour into their life.

*For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.
Col. 1:9*

Once this obstacle is breached, we face another decision: will God be permitted in unfiltered. We live in a world that is big on filters. The practice goes by many high-sounding names—the more common of which would be “post-modernism” or “relativism.” Different from healthy discernment, this is the practice of rejecting absolute truth in favor of a self-defined truth. The habit of the members of this contemporary society is to filter out anything unpleasant—to reject anything that challenges the individual's personal belief system.

Near our home in San Diego (where we lived for twenty years), there was a “soup and salad” restaurant. Here one paid a flat fee, then helped oneself to a bounty of salad fixings and a selection of homemade soups. The salad bar in this restaurant was probably fifty feet long, double-sided, and replete with every imaginable companion to the chilled plate.

When we would visit, I would begin with the basics of lettuce, tomatoes, carrots, onions and grated cheese—passing by the pickled beets and cucumbers. Moving further down the line, I would grab a large spoonful of the crab salad, but pass by the three-bean salad; the potato and macaroni salads were favorites, but not the grated carrot; the creamy Jell-O and pineapple salad (the one put together with whipped cream) would be added to my plate, but not the one containing raisins; finally, a dressing would be selected from the many available.

From the salad bar, one would move on to the simmering pots of soup. I would usually pass up the vegetable or chili and help myself to a bowl of hearty turkey noodle. Across from the soups were the breads—fresh baked and still warm from the oven. The muffins were a favorite, usually choosing the apple-nut over the cornbread—unless, of course I was having chili, in which case the cornbread would be the perfect companion. Later I would return to sample the slices of cheese pizza or sweet almond cakes, but never anything that contained coconut.

And finally, after everything else had been consumed, I would waddle over to the final station for a small dish of chocolate or tapioca pudding, not wasting my time on the more healthy cubes of red Jell-O.

This is the kind of pick-and-choose relationship some Christians have with God. They move down the line, pushing their tray before them, selecting only those parts of Him they think they'll like. “Let's see, I'll have some of that



grace and forgiveness—but I think I’ll pass on the correction. How about just a little light Sunday School—but none of that heavy Bible study. And give me plenty of that ‘old-time religion’—but go easy on the conviction and wrath. For dessert, I believe I’ll have a large helping of that love and compassion—hold the holiness.”

To be truly filled with God we must take *all* of Him. We cannot pick and choose what we want of God. He is not broken down into compartments, bins filled with His various character attributes, bins from which we may select or reject. He is of a piece, unified, inseparable. He is to be taken as a whole.

Some people will say, “I’m comfortable with Jesus, but God the Father is too intimidating.” But Jesus said

“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, Phillip, 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.” John 14:7-10

Jesus was only a physical representation of God’s true character. If we are drawn to the Christ as our compassionate Savior, we must remember that His compassion has come from the Father. If we love Him for His sacrifice, we must remember that that same sacrifice began at the Father. Like Abraham, it was He who placed His only Son upon the altar. Jesus, in His death, demonstrated no greater love than did the Father.

What God in His sovereignty may yet do on a world-scale I do not claim to know. But what He will do for the plain man or woman who seeks His face I believe I do know and can tell others. Let any man turn to God in earnest, let him begin to exercise himself unto godliness, let him seek to develop his powers of spiritual receptivity by trust and obedience and humility, and the results will exceed anything he may have hoped in his leaner and weaker days.

Any man who by repentance and a sincere return to God will break himself out of the mold in which he has been held, and will go to the Bible itself for his spiritual standards, will be delighted with what he finds there.

Let us say it again: The universal Presence is a fact. God is here. The whole universe is alive with His life. And He is no strange or foreign God, but the familiar Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whose love has for these thousands of years enfolded the sinful race of men. And always He is trying to get our attention, to reveal Himself to us, to communicate with us. We have within us the ability to know Him if we will but respond to His overtures... We will know Him in increasing degree as our receptivity becomes more perfect by faith and love and practice.

Tozer

*Come down, O Love divine,
Seek Thou this soul of mine,
And visit it with Thine own ardor glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
Within my heart appear,
And kindle it, Thy holy flame bestowing.*

*O let it freely burn,
Till earthly passions turn
To dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
And let Thy glorious light
Shine ever on my sight,
And clothe me round the while my path illuming.*

*And so the yearning strong,
With which the soul will long,
Shall far outpass the power of human telling;
For none can guess its grace,
Till he become the place
Wherein the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling.
Bianco da Siena*



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Editions: Print, Ascii, Pdf

Seeds of Encouragement is published every Monday morning as a brief, simple reminder of God's presence in our lives.

Frequency: Weekly

Editions: Ascii

Reflections by the Pond offers thoughtful considerations of life, nature, and the world in which we live from a Spiritual perspective. It is published every Wednesday.

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