

Reflections by the Pond

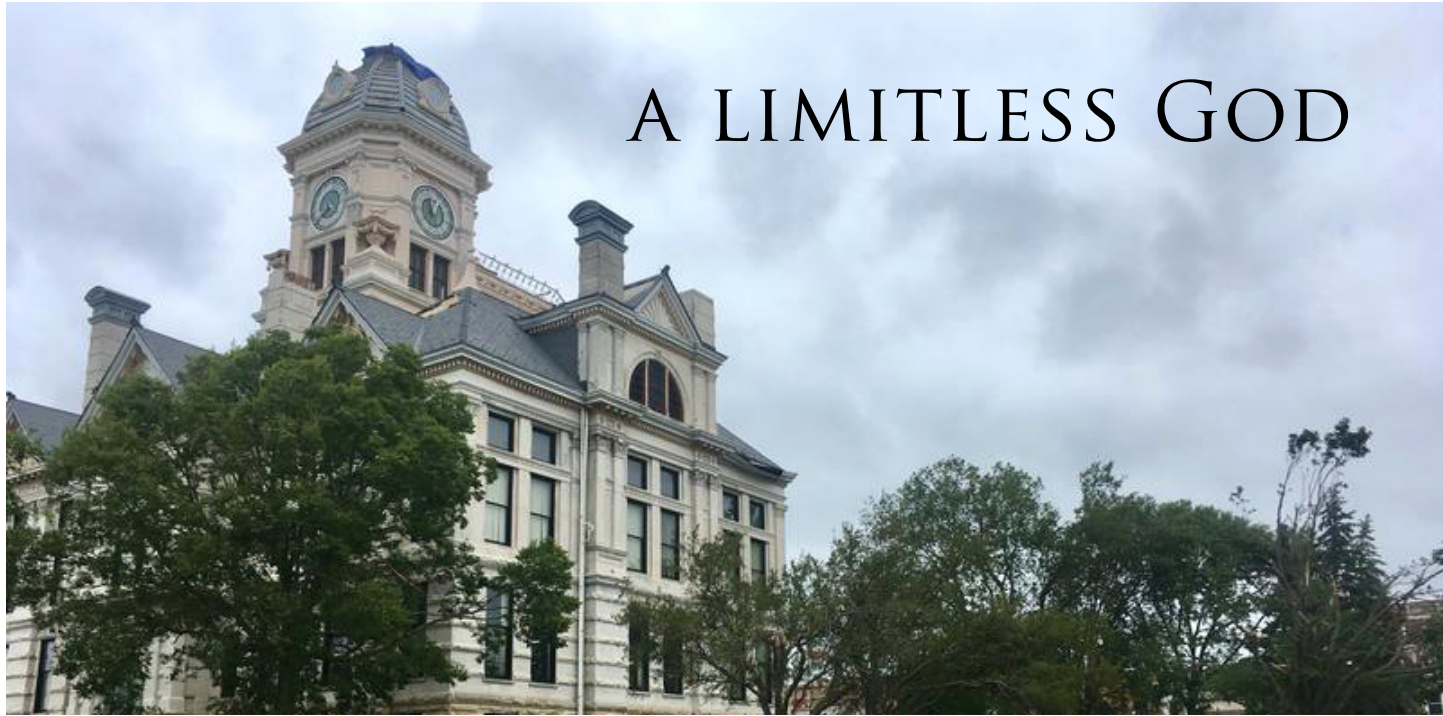
THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL

Heaven's

Breath

So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

1 Kings 19:11-13



A LIMITLESS GOD

IT IS CHILD'S PLAY to recognize the awesome power and majesty of God in the storms of His creation. That, indeed, is part of who He is—part of His personality and character. To stand before the blinding majesty of holy God is to know true, debilitating fear. Just as humans have the power to squash an insect at will, so our God has the power—and the right—to squash any of us like a bug.

Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord, my God, will come, and all the holy

ones with Him! In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light. And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter.

Zechariah 14:4-8

In that day His feet will stand on the

To deny or dismiss this truth is to deny the sovereignty of a holy and just God. There is no thing and no one higher than He; there is no thing and no one with more power in all of His creation. If God has it in His power to remake this globe we call earth, then He certainly has within His power to orchestrate profound and devastating weather events. All are part of His sovereign plan, and all are aspects of His being.

Two recent events have displayed some of God's might to this writer. If but a mere whisper compared to what He can, and one day will, do, they each were impressive demonstrations of His capacity.

And our impotence against it.

The first was an abrupt and unexpected straight-line wind storm that struck us in June. Eighty-mile-per-hour winds blasted out of the west, bending decades-old oak trees as if they were only tall blades of grass. Leaves, branches, heavy limbs and entire trees were flung across our property like detritus shooting from a powerful shredder. On other properties large established trees were literally uprooted, some crashing down upon garages, sheds and houses.

Watching this fierce gale play out its

destruction from the shelter of our home, we would not have been surprised if the house had suddenly lifted off its foundation to loft, in the fashion of Dorothy's Kansas dwelling in *The Wizard of Oz*, into the next field—or even next county. We were utterly helpless, and could only watch it happen as we prayed that the damage would not be too bad for us.

One could *feel* God in that lateral rain and wind. Was He angry? piqued about some offense the populace of Central Iowa had committed against Him? Or was He, as an attentive Creator, simply releasing pent-up pressure in the biosphere of this planet, a check against an even more cataclysmic event? Or was God patiently demonstrating His capabilities for someone of little faith?

The truth is, no matter His motives, the practical effect of the storm for this household was favorable. While it indeed required much manual labor to clean things up, it was as if God had looked down upon us in pity, turned to an attending angel and said something akin to, "Looks like Lampel hasn't got his wood in for this winter. Let's drop a few dead trees for him. And while we're at it, let's bring down enough green limbs for

the *next* winter as well."

So whatever God's initial mood and motive for creating such a destructive storm, it redounded to our benefit.

While others had their roofs caved in.

PERSPECTIVE

More recently, and with far more attendant destruction, an EF-3 tornado (peak winds of 136-165 mph) churned through the center of Marshalltown, Iowa—the town in which I was born and raised in the 1950s and 60s. Local television footage revealed site after site damaged or destroyed—homes, streets, commercial buildings, factories, neighborhoods, the hospital, and the historic and beautiful county courthouse—most holding special memories from my childhood and youth. Images from the devastated downtown area hearkened back to the aftermath of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, with huge piles of bricks and rubble mounded in the street before once sound, now destroyed buildings.

And again we must ask: If God is sovereign—and He is—then what was He accomplishing in this? God is not impetuous; we may not understand them, but He always has His reasons. Believe me,

suffering through storms such as these—the sensation and nauseating sound of sitting inside a jet engine with the afterburner kicked in—certainly *feels* like God’s wrath. It feels and sounds like the world coming to an end. And the only divine emotion that seems to fit is unbridled wrath, an unrelenting, unstoppable divine anger.

But just because the Lord God is in control of such cataclysmic events, it does not mean that He, Himself, is *in* them. And it does not necessarily follow that the event is an expression of His feelings or mood. After all, does heaven share our fragile, human perspective? To nucleons, the tiny atom is the universe. To an ant, a puddle is an ocean. To the One who created the cosmos, the entirety of this earth is but a speck in its vastness. So who are we to gauge His momentary mood by weather events in one small corner of a globe which is, to *us*, of unimaginable vastness.

Do you not know? Have you not heard?
Has it not been declared to you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

It is He who sits above the circle of the earth,
And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers,
Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain
And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.
He it is who reduces rulers to nothing,
Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.
Scarcely have they been planted,
Scarcely have they been sown,
Scarcely has their stock taken root in the earth,
But He merely blows on them, and they wither,
And the storm carries them away like stubble.

Isaiah 40:21-24



Is the storm an expression of His discipline, or His compassion? Is His affirmative answer to our prayer an expression of His kindness, or His corrective judgment? Are the infirmities of human life signs of his chastisement, or His instruction?

To bow before the sovereignty of an omnipotent, limitless God is to accept that we cannot know what He is expressing in every act of His will. ◆





OUT OF THE WHIRLWIND

And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind.

IN THE LANGUAGE OF Old Testament Hebrew, these recent windstorms, both the straight-line winds outside our house, and the tornadic winds that passed through my hometown, were *se'ôrâ*—a violent, stormy, destructive tempest “sweeping all away before it.” And the Lord God certainly *can* dwell in these windstorms.

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,
“Who is this that darkens counsel
By words without knowledge?”

Job 38:1-2

And indeed in that scene it is not difficult to ascertain the divine mood. If stopping short of anger or wrath, the Lord was at the very least piqued. He had heard enough from these pious fools counseling the wretched Job—presumptuously in the Lord’s name—and He was there to set them straight.

We do ourselves no favor by forgetting that God remains, to this day and beyond, what He has always been. There is no “God of the Old Testament” and “God of the New Testament.” There is just God.

HOLINESS

And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”

Luke 22:20

It is true that throughout the history of man God has established a number of *covenants* with the people of His creation. In every one of those contracts God was saying, essentially, “If you do this, I will do this,” and in at least one of them in the Old Testament God included the flip-side, “If you *don’t* do this, I will do this.” But in only one of His covenants—the new covenant established by Jesus—did the Lord God say, “Do this and you will be saved for eternity.” The Mosaic Covenant made no mention of an eternity with God; the benefits for obedience pertained only to life in the here and now.

Even in the new covenant in Christ Jesus, however, God includes the flip-side, “If you *don’t* do this...”

“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides

on him.”

John 3:36

God’s wrath is a constant; that attribute of a holy and just God did not disappear at the cross. The same quality that poured out all-consuming, fiery justice on Sodom and Gomorrah still exists today. Against what is this wrath directed in our time? The same recipient as in the Garden of Eden: sin. Not the people, but the sin they commit against God. God hates sin; He hates it with a burning wrath.

If He didn’t hate sin, He would not be holy.



In this God, like His Son, is the supreme example for the conduct of our own lives. We are to hate sin as our God hates sin. We are to hate its presence in our lives, and we are to hate those things that encourage sin within us.

“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil;
Pride and arrogance and the evil way
And the perverted mouth, I hate.”

Proverbs 8:13

The holy wrath of God telegraphs to ev-

ery attentive believer His desire for *us* to be holy. It is true that Christians need never fear the wrath of God; His wrath will never consume us. At the same time, however, by embracing His grace and mercy as the totality of His character we—by forgetting that He remains a God of wrath against sin—we too easily forget that God wants us to be holy as He is holy.

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

1 Peter 1:13-16

The fierce winds that buffet this earth from time to time are a reminder for us not just of our God’s anger towards sin, but of His desire for us to be holy, as He is holy. ♦



SOVEREIGN MIGHT



And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake.

TO FEEL THE EARTH MOVE beneath one's feet can be disorienting, even nauseating. As we go about our daily lives it is easy to think of this globe we inhabit as a solid, immovable ball of rock. But it is not. This globe (especially in its crust) is in constant motion, shifting, trembling, thrusting, sinking, rolling. Once in a while something below the surface snaps, and the result can be violent, cataclysmic, terrifying.

And terrified was precisely what Israel was when they were summoned to the foot of Sinai to witness and experience the terrible might of their holy God.

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.

Exodus 19:16-18

They had made all preparations for the audience, purifying themselves corporately and individually, and had been given instructions that upon pain of certain death they were not to make contact with the mountain itself, but to remain outside its border. Here was a precursor to the later "holy of holies" in the tabernacle and temple: no ordinary man or woman, no matter how physically clean, could bear the physical presence of the Lord God. Only the high priest—in this moment, Moses—could survive such an encounter, and under the laws of the future covenant that priest must bring with him an atoning blood sacrifice.

This cataclysmic manifestation of God's presence was so terrible that the people could not suffer it. They pleaded with Moses to be their go-between, for they could not bear the raw power of the Lord in person.

Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die."

Exodus 20:19

Was Yahweh throwing a temper tantrum with this violent display? Was he irked

with Israel, and setting the stage to punish them? No, this demonstration of His sovereign might was intended to encourage Israel toward a righteous life.

Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin."

Exodus 20:20

The Lord God was in the earthquake that made the entire mountain tremble. His presence made the mountain itself so holy that if anyone took even one step onto the lower border of the mountain they were to be immediately put to death. This display was for one purpose: The Lord was demonstrating to His chosen people that in Him they were not dealing with a ridiculous golden calf, with a lifeless and impotent man-made idol sitting on a shelf. The One who brought them out of bondage was Creator and God of the universe, sufficiently powerful that just His presence was sufficient to manifest tumultuous weather, to make a mountain flame and smoke like a blast furnace, to make a mountain of solid

granite tremble and quake, sending debilitating fear into everyone nearby.



We in this age have deemed ourselves too sophisticated, too intelligent to attribute physical phenomena to deity. Earthquakes are simply the result of geologic shifting or sinking or thrusting—all purely natural events.

But if one holds to this position while still claiming to believe in God, this ignores the fact that His word declares that He is the One who *created* this “natural” earth, and who still calls the shots. The Lord God remains King and Controller of all that is.

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and
the one who formed you from the
womb,
“I, the LORD, am the maker of all things,
Stretching out the heavens by Myself
And spreading out the earth all alone,
Causing the omens of boasters to fail,
Making fools out of diviners,
Causing wise men to draw back
And turning their knowledge into foolish-
ness,
Confirming the word of His servant
And performing the purpose of His mes-

sengers.

It is I who says of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be inhabited!’

And of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be built.’

And I will raise up her ruins again.

It is I who says to the depth of the sea,
‘Be dried up!’

And I will make your rivers dry.

It is I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd!

And he will perform all My desire.’

And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built,’

And of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’”

Isaiah 44:24-28

Just as in the scene played out before the prophet Elijah, the Lord may not be “in” every earthquake, but He is the One who orchestrates them. His reason for each may not be obvious to mere short-sighted humans, but His reason is always there. God is in control, and we would be wise to use the opportunity of each “natural disaster” to acknowledge His sovereign rule over not just this globe, but over each of its inhabitants—and to acknowledge His untouchable holiness, and hatred of sin. ◆



LOOKING FOR POWER



After the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire.

MOSSES WAS IN FOR A BIG MOMENT, no doubt the biggest moment in his almost eighty-year life thus far. He was about to have a conversation with God. And the Lord would speak to Moses from within fire.



To this writer, the Old Testament in our Bibles is far more than a chronicle of Yahweh's selecting and working with the people of Israel. For one thing, it can be demonstrated that the entirety of the Old Testament serves as a fifth—literally, the first—gospel of Jesus the Christ. The first three quarters of our Bible are filled to overflowing with the Christ. For example, repeatedly throughout the Old Testament, when Father God sent a messenger to earth to deliver His word or to accomplish some divine act, He sent God the Son, in the person of “the angel of the Lord.” These were preincarnate visitations of the second member of the trinity, in which the definite article is always used: “*the* angel”—a phrase not found in the New Testament, where it is always “*an* angel” (except for Matthew 1:24, referring back to verse 20, which describes the angel as “an angel”).

And one reason we can safely associate this angel, or messenger, with the Son of God is that in this first visitation with Moses at the “burning bush,” and subsequently during the exodus, the identities of the supernatural phenomenon are intermingled.

Now Moses was pasturing the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed.

Exodus 3:1-2

Later in the same paragraph the voice speaking from the fire identifies itself to Moses.

He said also, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Exodus 3:6

Here is not just your ordinary, run-of-the-mill messenger, but God Himself in the form of “the angel of the Lord.” And He was “in” the fire. Later, when Israel was on its way out of Egypt, the Lord—that is, *Yahweh*, *Jehovah*—conducted the nation by day and by night.

Then they set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness. The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.

Exodus 13:20-22

God was in the supernatural phenomenon, but just as with the burning bush, he is also described later as “the angel of God.”

The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and

there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night.

Exodus 14:19-20

Once again God, as both Yahweh and the Son, indwells a fiery phenomenon.



In the inexorable passage of His plan of salvation for man, the Lord God uses the element of fire quite a lot. From Genesis to The Revelation God uses fire—either real or metaphorical—to symbolize His glory, His protective presence, His righteous judgment, and anger against sin. It is associated with the Holy Spirit, with prophetic utterances, and with religious zealotry.

But with Elijah, God was not in the fire.

SOMETHING IMPRESSIVE

There are times in every believer's life when he or she needs a personal, intimate encounter with God. Very often when we are in dire straits, or when we are at our lowest in spirit and ready to throw in the towel, or when the goal for which we have been reaching comes up

against seemingly insurmountable obstacles. We have reached the end of flesh; now we need the One who dwells beyond the limits of flesh.

But [Elijah] went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat."

Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. The angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, because the journey is too great for you." So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.

1 Kings 19:4-8

As so often happens, the prophet Elijah had just come off a tremendous high, and so was now at his lowest ebb. By the power of the Lord Elijah had just won a dramatic victory over the 950 prophets

of Baal and Asherah that served under the evil rule of Ahab in Israel. But now he was on the run, away from King Ahab and the king's loathsome wife, Jezebel.

Now, in seclusion at the mountain where God met with Moses in the burning bush and later to give him the ten commandments, Elijah, at his lowest, needs encouragement from the Lord Himself. Perhaps he looks for the dynamic God of the fire from heaven that had consumed his sacrifice. He needs to be reminded that he serves a God more powerful than any other.

He looks for something impressive.

Sic 'em, God!

So God sends a wind strong enough to break pieces off the mountain. But He is not in the wind. Then God sends an earthquake that shakes the mountain to its footings. But He is not in the earthquake. Finally God sends a fire, just like He did before the prophets of Baal. But no, He is not in the fire.

Then, with a voice so soft, so gentle and tender that Elijah could not tell if he was hearing it with his ears or only his heart, the Lord says to His weary and despondent prophet, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ◆



A VOICE OF GENTLE SILENCE

...and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing.

When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

TEMPEST AND CONFLAGRATION.
Upheaval and storm.
God can and often is in them all.
But some times He is not.

THE HELPER

Something remarkable happened shortly after Christ Jesus returned to the Father—something absolutely new in the history of man.

God came *back* to earth in spirit form

(His “native” form) to dwell permanently in each believer. Throughout the course of history He had done something similar, but only for brief periods of time. God as spirit would come for a reason, to do something specific, to impart something supernatural and divine, to empower a prophet. But then He would depart. Now something new: the Holy Spirit would arrive and *stay*, as a promise, as a guide, as a comforter and encourager, as a pledge

against the day when the believer would stand—*at last!*—in the physical presence of his God and his Savior.

During the time before the Incarnation of the Son, God’s presence on earth was restricted. Even within those faithful to Him, only the high priest could come into His presence—and then only once per year, after making a blood sacrifice for his sins and the sins of all Israel.

Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.

Hebrews 9:6-7

The common man or woman of Israel could pray to Yahweh; they could give thanks to Him for their daily bread. But what they could never do, under penalty of certain death, was step into His presence.

While Jesus walked this earth, God in flesh was far, far less restricted. Imagine, sitting around the evening fire, conversing face to face with God! Imagine greeting God, embracing Him, kissing Him! Yet God the Son, prior to His resurrection, could still be in just one place at a time. He voluntarily walked this earth as just another man, with the same restrictions of temporal flesh. Only after Jesus had returned to the Father did He send the Holy Spirit.

“But now I am going to Him who sent

Me; and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment...”

John 16:5-8

WHISPERINGS OF THE SPIRIT

Now, in Christ, things would be different. God would no longer dwell on earth solely in a temple or tabernacle holy of holies; now He would dwell in the holy of holies within each individual believer.

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

God has not lost His ability to speak through dynamic phenomenon. He still can rend the heavens and move mountains at will; He can deliver wind and rain

capable of both benefiting man, and destroying his most substantial works. And, of course, the medium through which He has and continues to speak with the force of a whirlwind remains His written word.

But now, more often than not, when He desires to speak—and He *is* a speaking God—He does so not through fierce climatic or geologic events, but through whisperings of the Spirit, a voice of tenderness and familiarity. Here is more than just an extraordinarily intimate God-man connection; here is a *familial* connection.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

Romans 8:14-17

Through the constant, indwelling Spirit, only available because of the atoning

work of Christ Jesus, God is free to move us from within, rather than from without. And with the sensitivity of an attentive, loving Father, the God of the universe speaks His correction and forgiveness, His guidance and affection.

He quietly whispers to us, "What are you doing here, My child?" ♦

His priest am I, before Him day and night,
Within His Holy Place;
And death, and life, and all things dark and bright,
I spread before His Face.
Rejoicing with His joy, yet ever still,
For silence is my song;
My work to bend beneath His blessed will,
All day, and all night long—
For ever holding with Him converse sweet,
Yet speechless, for my gladness is complete.

Gerhard Tersteegen

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