

Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S. LAMPEL

Taking God

Seriously

part one



TRY AS WE MIGHT TO SEPARATE THE TWO—to separate faith from everything else in our lives—contemporary culture will inevitably invade and contaminate religion. The Christian faith, however, was never meant to be isolated from the world; it was, from the beginning, meant to be salt and light to a darkened society.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 5:13-16

Yet with that comes risk. The responsibility, ultimately, falls on the individual—on you, and me. Can we be serious about our interactions with society, with today’s depraved culture, in spite of the siren song of its media? And, far more importantly, will we be serious about our faith, our relationship with Father God and His Christ?

Will we, once and for all, and in spite of the cultural rot taking place around—and sometimes even *in*—our churches, begin to take God seriously?

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit from itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.”

John 15:4-6

The Center

THE LATE TEACHER R. C. SPOUL distills taking God seriously with the Latin “*coram Deo*,” which means, literally, “before the face of God.” Sproul expands its meaning:

To live coram Deo is to live one’s entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God.

However one states it, we begin taking God seriously by acknowledging His centrality in our lives. He is not a neighbor; He is our spouse.

He is not our buddy; He is our Lord. He is not our aged grandfather whom we visit once in a while; He is someone we live with, day in and day out.

God is not secondary; He is primary.

Of course we are to love our neighbor, but we are to love God more. Of course we are to be devoted to our wife or husband, but we are to be devoted to God more.

A Cosmic Love Affair

You will show me the path of life;
In Your presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
Psalms 16:11 NKJV

SURELY SOMEWHERE NEAR THE START of taking God seriously is a resolve to fill oneself with Him. How can one do this without knowing *who* He is? And what is the point of that, if we do not accept *all* that He is?

God is not an opinion. God is a knowable fact. To that end He has given us all of creation, for it speaks of Him; He has given us Christ Jesus, for the Savior displays Him; He has given us the Holy Spirit, for He clarifies and interprets Him; and He has given us His word, the Bible, for it reveals and communicates His mind.

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.

From the beginning of man’s existence, God has condescended to minister to him on his earthly plane. One need not rise into the heavens 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 realm. 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

A Transaction of Trust

Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. And she had a sister called Mary, who was also seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the preparations alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things, but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42

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.

If I am to be filled with God's 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.

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.

Just so, before it is too late, we are to spend good, productive times with our heavenly Father, filling ourselves with more of His life.

It is a matter of trust. Filling ourselves with more of God is as profound, yet also 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.

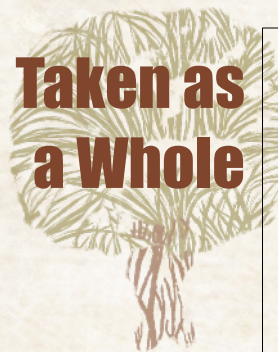
It means getting out of the kitchen and curling up at His feet.

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

WILL GOD BE PERMITTED INTO OUR LIVES 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 cult of self is to filter out anything unpleasant—to reject anything that challenges the individual’s personal belief system.

This is the kind of pick-and-choose relationship many Christians have with God. They move down the line, pushing their cafeteria 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 take God seriously we must be filled with Him. To be truly filled with God we must take *all* of Him. We cannot pick and choose what we want of God. He cannot be broken down into compartments, bins filled with His various character attributes, bins from which we may, at our personal discretion, choose to select or reject. He is of a piece, unified, inseparable.

He is to be taken as a whole.

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

“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.” Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you

have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.”

John 14:7-10

Jesus was—and remains—the 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 and faithfully reflects the compassion of 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 His own Father.

*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

The Real Jesus

SINCE HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION IN THE FIRST CENTURY, the unbelieving world has painted Jesus as a wan milquetoast, a simpering flower child, a well-meaning but ultimately ineffective goody-two-shoes. Those who deny the deity of Christ like to demonstrate their equitableness by acknowledging those traits of His that reinforce their own societal and political agenda—those traits that make *them* look good, while letting them off the hook for their own bad behavior: Christ's forgiveness, longsuffering, grace, and love. This, they know full well, effectively diminishes Jesus, and thus His gospel. Their position is, since Jesus was just a nice guy who let people walk all over Him, then His followers today—Christians—should shut up and do the same.

The problem with this position is that their picture of the earthly Jesus is so grossly incomplete as to be dead wrong. Anyone striving to emulate Him—anyone wishing to live their life according to what Jesus would do—should be eating their Wheaties and strapping on their work boots, for the Son of Man was no easy pushover.

The true portrait of Christ Jesus from the gospel accounts is that of a complex individual whose purpose in coming to earth was not simplistic but multidimensional. Beyond that, in answering questions about Himself He might speak of His role in the moment—His first coming—or He might speak of His *future* role—His second coming. But Jesus was rarely explicit regarding the time frame in His answers. In fact, He often answered with obtuse parables meant not to clarify, but to intentionally befuddle.

And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."

Matthew 13:10-13

The Lord Jesus was unwaveringly patient and gracious toward the sincerely repentant and honestly confused, but He did not suffer fools gladly. Those who were proud or hypocritical He publicly rebuked in a most caustic, colorful manner.

"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the sanctuary, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is obligated.' You fools and blind men! For which is more important, the gold or the sanctuary that sanctified the gold?"

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. In this way, you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

Matthew 23:16-17, 27-28

This world also likes to use Jesus as an example of a great *unifier*, someone who wraps his loving arms around everyone, no matter who they are,

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left."

Matthew 25:31-33

what they do, or what they believe. He is often cited by those who would meet dissension with “Can’t we all just get along?” But Jesus did not “just get along.” He declared outright that in fact He was *not* a unifier, but a divider, for some would believe and some would not, even those in the same family.

“I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am

until it is finished! Do you think that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Luke 12:49-53

Even to one of His principal disciples, Simon Peter, Jesus did not hesitate to vent His anger when faced with Peter’s persistent ignorance.

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders

and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.” But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

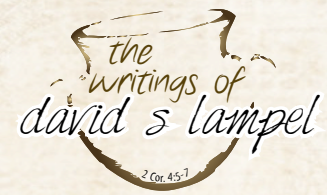
Matthew 16:21-23

If the unsaved prefer to filter out Jesus’ more energetic traits, they utterly ignore who and what He will be when He returns to earth as Judge and King. Here is no insipid milquetoast; those who deny His deity in the here and now will be in for a rude shock when the Son of Man returns—not as a sweet and gracious hippy, but a fierce warrior determined to dispense the frightening wrath of a holy God. ♦



Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sits on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; having a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself, and being clothed with a garment dipped in blood, His name is also called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the wrath of the rage of God, the Almighty. And He has on His garment and on His thigh a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”

Revelation 19:11-16



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