

Session 6 The Knowledge of the Transcendent Majesty of God

INTRODUCTION

I encourage you to read the New Testament and mark every reference where God emphasizes the fact that the knowledge of God is prominent or a transforming element in the life of a believer. It would really be good if you did it all the way through the Old and New Testaments. It would take a little while, but it's worth it. It's better than the Tuesday night movie, so why not? Just start doing it, and do it for however long it takes. Just mark it.

While you're doing it, go ahead and mark the passages that actually reveal different aspects of the personality and the character of God. That's a good way to go on a Holy Spirit treasure hunt. Start in Genesis, go through Revelation, and mark every single passage that reveals God's emotional makeup in any way. Mark passages that reveal anything about His beauty, His splendor, His power—not so much an act, like when the armies of the Philistines were defeated by David; there would be thousands of those. I mean the passages that directly reveal God's personality, not in an indirect way, because that would be the whole Word of God.

Mark passages that directly reveal what God's emotional makeup is like, His transcendence, His totally-other-than-ness, or passages that declare how prominent the knowledge of God is in God's plan, or passages that speak about how essential it is in terms of our transformation process. You'll have volumes of passages to study for a long time. It will really strengthen your resolve to dig deeply in this area. It will strengthen your resolve to persevere along these lines of thought.

ISAIAH'S COMMISSIONING TO THE PROPHETIC MINISTRY

Isaiah 6 is Isaiah's commissioning to the prophetic ministry. It says, "In the year that King Uzziah, died I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe"—or the hem of His robe—"filled the temple" (Isa. 6:1). Isaiah was literally in the temple in Jerusalem. He saw Jesus and His garments, and they were filling the actual temple that Isaiah was in. Above the temple stood seraphim. This is the only reference to seraphim in the Bible. There are the seraphim, the cherubim, the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders. Those are different groups of angelic beings associated with the throne of God.

"Each of these seraphim had six wings. With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew" (Isa. 6:2, paraphrased). We don't know how many seraphim appear, but each one of them has six wings.

They cover their face as they gaze upon the throne of God. They're overwhelmed. With two they cover their feet, and with two they fly. The seraphim cried to one another and said, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. 6:3, NKJV)!

He's in the literal temple when this vision occurs. The posts of the door, literally, are shaken by the voice of him who cried out. When these seraphim cried out one to another, the voice of the seraphim shook the literal building.

This is quite an intensive supernatural encounter. Isaiah said, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:5).

Isaiah tells us, “Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs of the altar. He touched my mouth with it, and said, ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged’” (Isa. 6:6-7).

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord”—not the voice of the seraphim—“saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’” (Isa. 6:8). The *Us* is in the plural. It’s like Genesis 1: “Let Us make man in Our image” (Gen. 1:26), speaking of the Trinity.

Then Isaiah said, “Here am I! Send me” (Isa. 6:8b).

Then the Lord said, “Go and tell this people, ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing but do not perceive’” (Isa. 6:9).

ISAIAH IS OVERWHELMED BY HIS NEED TO BE TRANSFORMED

Then it goes on. There are so many points to make in Isaiah 6, but I just want you to see the impact on Isaiah when he sees the glory of the Lord. It would be an interesting study to analyze each of the people in the Bible who encountered God in a supernatural way like this. I’m just going to point out a few of them to you. Isaiah sees the Lord. The impact on Isaiah is what I want you to sense. He’s overwhelmed with his need to be transformed. This is a tremendous motivator to him. Sin appears foolish to him in that hour. Whenever we contact God, whenever the knowledge of God touches us, sin seems foolish, sin seems unreasonable, and sin seems like something we don’t want anything to do with. We disassociate ourselves from sinful ways. That’s what’s happening.

OUR SPEECH IS THE LAST AREA TO BE ENTIRELY SUBDUED BY GOD

He mentions his lips. I don’t think Isaiah had a particular problem with unclean lips. The reason I think he mentions his lips is because our speech is the last area to be entirely subdued by the Spirit of God. What I think he’s saying is this: “I’m an unclean person. The evidence is the fact that my speech is unclean.”

I don’t think unclean speech refers necessarily to cursing or something like that. I think he’s talking about bitterness, slander, complaining—unclean speech. It’s other than holy. It’s not like the angels in my everyday life. It’s filled with the pain and complaint of life and people.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD MOTIVATES US TO LEAVE EVIL

Look at verse 5. When we see the Lord, there’s a sense in which we’re undone. It really does impact the way we view compromise. We despise compromise. We have a tremendous energy against sin. That’s one of the things that the knowledge of God does for us: it motivates us to leave evil. That’s one of the primary features of this encounter in verse 3. “The seraphim cried, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory.’”

THE TRIPLE “HOLY” AND THE TRIPLE “WOE”

The word *holy* is repeated three times. Now Jesus used the phrase, “Truly, truly,” on a number of occasions when He repeated something twice for emphasis. When He did that, it was very powerful, but very, very rarely is a phrase repeated three times for a triple emphasis. It’s a superlative emphasis. As a matter of fact, there are only two examples of it in the Bible. One is related to the being of God: “Holy, holy, holy.” The other one is in

the Book of Revelation, when the angel cries, “Woe, woe, woe,” to the people in the generation of the Lord’s return who reject Him.

There’s a triple *woe* and there’s a triple *holy*. Those are the only times that God has ever allowed that triple emphasis to be recorded in the Word of God. I think it’s interesting that the “Holy, holy, holy” in verse 3 is followed by a singular *woe* in verse 5, but the *woe* is the only other word in the Word of God that’s emphasized in a triple way. It’s spoken at the end of the age by the angel looking at the billions of people who say no to God in the face of the end-time revival. I think the *woe* is related to the revelation of holiness in both cases.

In some ways I’m getting ahead of myself. I really wanted to work on this more tomorrow, but since we’re here, let’s just do it. The word *holy* is often misunderstood when it’s used about God. The word *holy* has two fundamental meanings. There’s a primary meaning and a secondary meaning. It’s the secondary meaning that most people refer to when they think of God as being holy. The secondary meaning is God’s complete separation from anything that’s impure, but that’s a secondary meaning of the word *holy*. That’s not the primary meaning of the word *holy*. Yes, God is separate from everything that’s unclean. That’s included, but that’s not the primary sense of the word *holy*. The word *holy* comes from a root that means, “totally separate.” Most of you are familiar with that. When something is called *holy* by the Lord, the Lord separates it for a special use. There are holy vessels in the temple; they’ve been sanctified. The words *sanctified*, *holy*, *separate* are actually all the same word. God separates it from its common to a special use.

GOD IS TOTALLY UNLIKE ANYTHING HIS HANDS HAVE CREATED

Incidentally, this was a brand-new word. God created this word for Himself and gave it to Moses when He revealed Himself. He is totally other than everything else that existed. That’s what it really means. The word *holy* is a reference to God’s total other-than-ness. I’ll make up a word: *other-than-ness*. The theological word is the word *transcendence*, *transcendent*. When something is transcendent, it means that it’s totally other than anything else. *Transcendence*.

God is the only subject you can talk about in the true use of the word *transcendence*. Sometimes they’ll talk about the greatest athlete in a particular field, like Wayne Gretsky. He was transcendent in his ability. There’s none who compares. That’s the idea. People will use that word in everyday language, but only for something of unusual superlative. The real word, *transcendence*, which is what *holy* is about, is a total other-than-ness in the absolute sense of the word. God is totally unlike anything His hands have created. In terms of His glory and majesty, He’s so far beyond; He’s as high above the seraphim as He is above a little ant. God is as infinitely high above the exalted seraphim as He is infinitely above the smallest creature.

The gulf between God and the seraphim and the gulf between God and the ant is infinite. The seraph is no closer. God is completely other than. He’s transcendent. There’s nothing that can compare to the being of God.

When the angels cry, “Holy, holy, holy,” what they’re really saying is “Transcendent majesty, transcendent majesty, transcendent majesty,” or, “Total other-than-ness, total other-than-ness, total other-than-ness.” In God’s total other-than-ness, He’s completely removed from anything impure. That’s the second definition, the second use of the word *holy*.

Holiness isn’t an attribute among other attributes. Holiness is the description of what all of His attributes are. His love is holy. His justice is holy. His wisdom is holy. His power is holy. Every one of His attributes is entirely other than anything else that exists.

When you think of God's separation from evil or sin, I like to use the word *purity*. God's purity is holy. It's totally other than any other person's purity, but it's biblical and accurate to use the word *holy* related to purity. Always understand that that's the secondary sense in which the word *holy* is used when it's describing God. The angels are gazing into the face of the Lord Jesus, sitting on a throne, and they have one word to cry. It's the same thing that the living creatures cry in Revelation 4:8: "Transcendent majesty, transcendent majesty, total other-than-ness, total other-than-ness. Nothing can compare, nothing can compare."

INCOMPARABLE QUALITY IN EVERY ATTRIBUTE

Another way of saying *holy* is, "Infinite quality, incomparable quality, in every single one of His attributes." That's another way of saying, "Holy, holy, holy." It's truly amazing. He's the One who calls us to Himself; but we really have no idea to whom it is we're relating. Like I said, He's as high above the seraph as He is above the insect. He literally is. The gulf is infinite between Him and everything that His hand has created in terms of comparison.

That's why many times when the people in the Bible record their encounter with God, they say, "Who is like unto God?" They're overwhelmed. That's not a casual sentence; they're completely overwhelmed. It's a rhetorical question. The answer is, "There is none like unto God."

JESUS CLOTHED HIMSELF IN THE GARMENTS OF HUMANITY

It's an obvious answer. When Jesus looked at them in Matthew 16:15 and said, "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt. 16:15), of course He was the transcendent God walking on the earth, wrapped in the garments of humanity. It was the most unusual experience that He has ever had, walking in the confinement of human form, the transcendent God Himself, looking into the eyes of the creature, the creation.

"Who do you say that I am?" The transcendent One. They're clueless as to who He is. Really, honestly, they are. There's much in the Scriptures about God's transcendence. It's a fantastic subject to meditate on. It's a hard subject to meditate on because our mind has to leave the familiar to enter into the unfamiliar.

As a matter of fact, whenever the Scriptures talk about God's transcendence, it always uses familiar concepts as the metaphors. Often when they talk about God, you find the word *like*. God's eyes were like a flame of fire (Rev. 14). The rainbow around His throne was like jasper and sardis in appearance (Rev. 4:3). The writer is taking that which is familiar as the building block of communication. The writer of any given experience with God would say, "Well, it isn't a whole lot like that, but that's the closest comparison in the natural realm."

It's so totally transcendent compared to this. I mean, Jesus Christ is awesome. I know that seems trite to say, that but He's awesome and He's the One who has called you to sit in His presence on His throne, bearing His name forever. Beloved, I don't know what pain your life is in, but I assure you of this: your life is in a really good position before God in the big picture. You have been called by Him. You're His eternal companion, because He wrapped Himself in the garments of humanity and was crushed by the wrath of God because of His commitment and His longing for you. Maybe the car payment didn't come in, maybe you lost your job, maybe someone in a relationship failed you in a severe way. I don't want to minimize those, but you really do have your act together. You're really connected in the right way. In just a short amount of time it will all become clear. The more my heart connects with the truth of God, the more I see life through different lenses. That's true

of every one of us. We really can't afford not to meditate on the being of God. It's a tremendous disservice to our own personhood to neglect this, which of course is the common neglect in the Body of Christ.

QUESTION:

What's the function of pain?

MIKE BICKLE:

Of course there are volumes of books written about the mystery of pain, about who, what, where, when, and why, but in terms of my own understanding, I'll just go on a bunny trail for a minute. Obedience is mandatory in all of creation. Every single creature will obey God at the end. Every demon in hell will be in hell because of obedience. They'll go to hell not because they want to go there, but because they're obeying the Word of God. When I say every creature will obey, I don't mean every creature will be redeemed. That's not what I'm saying.

"Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess" (Isa. 45:23, paraphrased). That's what Paul is quoting in Philippians 2:9-10; He's quoting the promise of Isaiah 45:23. Every knee will bow, every tongue will confess. Obedience is mandatory. Every demon will obey; every lost person in damnation will obey when they go. The Father, when He gave His Son the position as Heir and King over His vast empire called "the kingdom of God," said, "Every subject will obey You."

THE GOAL OF ALL THE AGES IS A BRIDE WHO FREELY GIVES HER LOVE

But there's something God is after that's different than mandatory obedience. God is after something that's higher. He wants voluntary love. God is after voluntary love coming out of the human spirit. Of course we're influenced by the Holy Spirit to be able to offer that, but still, somewhere in the process we have to say yes. The great plan of the ages is for God to bring forth a companion for His Son. That's what's going on. That's the great mystery of the ages. There are many features to the mystery of God, but in a sentence, the mystery of God is that God is providing an eternal companion who's an equally-yoked bride for His Son. In a summary sentence, that's what's going on. This equally-yoked bride will be a voluntary lover of God, and therefore separate from all of creation in that she's a voluntary lover. The angels aren't depicted as lovers of God. They respect and worship God, but they're never depicted as loving God with affection. I'm not sure the angels have the capacity for affection. My theory is that God Himself possesses affection, and only humans made in the likeness of God have affection in that sense. That's a unique dimension of the human spirit. I mean, angels have intellect, reverence, respect. They have all these kinds of things. They can worship in that limited sense, which is very powerful. It isn't a small sense, but it's limited. However, worship reaches its crowning glory in affection and obedience and respect, in wholehearted love. It's all about the first commandment, right? It's the fact that we uniquely possess the capacity for wholehearted love. Along among God's creatures, we possess the capacity for passionate affection. That's so much like God.

WE POSSESS A UNIQUE CAPACITY FOR PASSIONATE AFFECTION

Of course, what's interesting is that this is the aspect of God that's obscured by Satan—that God is a God of consuming, passionate affection. He's a happy God filled with pleasure. He's filled with passion. I mean, that fire that depicts the being of God is the fire of passionate affection. It's only fire inasmuch as He's removing that which hinders passionate affection. It's only judgment when it gets in the way of passionate affection going forth in its purpose. He's a consuming fire; He's a jealous God (Deut. 4:24). He's filled with hot emotion. That's why we have it.

I'm going to get to this thing. I'm going right there, but I'm building a framework for it. It doesn't make sense, in my opinion, outside of this framework. God uniquely possesses passionate affection; therefore He's a consuming fire, and we possess a capacity for passionate affection that's unique in all creation, and that's what God wants out of the human race, is a voluntary lover for His Son. It's just so powerful; it's just so awesome when those two come together—the redeemed in the embrace of the eternal heavenly Bridegroom. That's so awesome. That's where human history is going.

So God says, "Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to create the sun and the galaxies and the universe in order to sustain planet earth. I'm going to create planet earth in order to sustain all of life—vegetable, animal, and human life. I'm going to create those in order to sustain the human race. I'm going to create the human race in order to have a remnant from the human race to present to My Son at the end of natural history."

Everything was created for the remnant of the human race that would say yes to voluntary love. The only reason there are stars and a moon and a sky is to make earth work. The only reason earth was created was to make the human race work, so that there would be a remnant of voluntary lovers at the end of natural history. That's the only reason everything exists. That's really clear in the Bible, in the Word of God, in a number of places. Everything exists for that purpose. Natural history ends in Revelation 19 at a wedding feast. Everything ends with the Son of God in the embrace of the corporate woman, the Bride of Christ. There are two men in history: Adam and Jesus. There are two women in history: the great harlot and the Bride of Christ. Those are the two representative women of history, and those are the two representative men of history, speaking from a theological point of view.

God's whole goal, the mystery, the hidden plan was to have a remnant from the human race that were voluntary lovers. To sum it all up in a sentence, this corporate woman, the Church, the Bride of Christ, receives the free love of God and becomes a lover of God.

LOVE IS THE CURRENCY OF HEAVEN FOREVER

I mentioned earlier that receiving, understanding, and feeling the fact that we're loved, and then the feeling of being a wholehearted lover, are the two most powerful ways that we were designed by God. That's the reward of life—to be able to feel love from God, and to feel love back to God. In that experience we reach the crowning apex of our creation, being loved and being a lover. Then we're fulfilling what we were designed to be. That's God's purpose.

God knows that, and at the great wedding feast, the only thing that will matter about your life is the degree to which you received love and became a lover, a voluntary lover of God. Of course we do that in all the different facets of our life. We express that not just in private devotional prayer; we do it in the way we treat people. There are a thousand ways to express that love. The Lord looks down at our lives and He says, "The currency of the eternal city, the money that you'll have from the earth, is the fact that you were loved and a lover." The degree that you grew in voluntary love is the currency of the eternal city.

THE LORD KNOWS THAT WE ARE PRONE TO THE DUST

That's what life is about. It has nothing to do with the size of this and that. It's about becoming a voluntary lover. The Lord looks down and says, "You know what, Mike? You're so prone to distraction." Again, it's Psalm 103:14. I quoted it yesterday. "God remembers our frame, and He remembers that we are but dust" (Ps. 103:14, paraphrased). He remembers that we're made from the dirt, meaning our makeup is prone to be

earthbound. God knows that; He remembers it. We forget, but God doesn't. I get distracted and the Lord says, "I remember your frame, your proneness to the dust, to the earth, to the natural realm. I remember that, and I have a lot of mercy on you when you're prone to that."

We're very hard on ourselves, and God is a lot easier on us than we are. He says, "Because you're prone to the dust, prone to the natural realm, here's what I'm going to do."

Because, as we saw earlier, our life is hidden (Col. 3:3). In other words, the glory, beauty, and purpose of our life isn't easily seen through the natural lens. It's totally obscured if we look at it only through natural intellect. It's hidden from us, and we need spiritual revelation to see it. God has a dozen reasons why He created life on earth this way. I mean, there are lots of reasons related to love that He did this. It's masterful; it's awesome. We don't understand it very well, but it's masterful. It's all about love growing.

So God looks down and says, "Well, Mike, your life is hidden. The beauty of your life, the purpose of your life, the power of your life, everything that you're about, your rewards, everything is hidden from your natural intellect. It takes spiritual illumination to see it. Because you're prone to the dust, you're made from the dust, and the powerful things about you are hidden even to your own sight and to those around you. They don't see it about you and you don't see it about you. Here's what I'm going to do: I'm going to give you the Word of God and I'm going to give you the Holy Spirit."

So what pain does is this: it drives us to center our life around spiritual reality and spiritual truth. That's what pain does. Let's take any of the five or ten areas of your life, economic, relational, health, ministerial, even your own character, your own spiritual attainment. There are many facets of life. I'm prone to the natural realm; I'm prone to the earth because I'm made of dust. When an area of my life doesn't go right, I say, "Awwww," because my life is a wreck because an area is out of bounds.

The Lord says, "Well, your life really isn't that big of a wreck, because the truth of your life is hidden from your eyes except by revelation. Here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to let that pain touch you."

NO MATTER HOW WEAK OUR LOVE, WE STILL LOVE GOD

Let's say a part of my ministry, or a key relationship, is falling apart. The only place I can find true comfort is when I close my eyes and say, "Wait." That drives me back to the center. By *center* I mean I can focus; I focus on spiritual reality.

I say, "Why am I doing this? As a matter of fact, now that I'm asking the question, why am I on planet earth? Why am I doing any of this?"

Then I say, "Wait a second. I have been loved. I'm a part of the remnant, the few, in all of human history. Compared to the six billion people on planet earth, only about five hundred million, only 5 to 10 percent, have said yes to receiving the love of God."

Did you know that you're one of the few in all of human history who said yes to receiving the love of God? That makes your life so unique when compared to the whole of human history. You're one of the 5 or 10 percent who actually did it. It's called saying yes to the love of God; God touched you and you became a lover of God. No matter how weak you are in your love, you're still a lover of God. It's the fact that you said yes to

the love of God, which made you a lover of God. I'm loved and I'm a lover. No matter how immature, I'm already one of the few successful human beings in all of human history.

It's true. The thief on the cross was significantly more successful because he entered into that loved-to-lover reality in the last moments of his life. His life was so much more successful that all the great kings and emperors of the early world. He was more successful than almost everyone in the Roman Empire because he received love and became a lover in the last moments of his life. He made it, just barely, but he was successful. He's now part of the bride, and he lives in the eternal city.

Jesus said, "Today you will be with Me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43).

A few moments later he awoke and said, "My goodness, what happened?" His life was significantly successful in that day, and the success of it was seen in that day. It was no longer hidden from him. It's an amazing thing.

When my life feels like it's failing in one of those five or ten key areas and I begin to feel pain, I say, "Why am I doing this? Wait. Let me figure out who I am. Why am I doing any of this? I'm loved. The transcendent, holy God feels such hot passion and desire for me. He longs for me. He desires me. He's betrothed to me. He wrapped Himself in the garments of humanity. He was crushed by the wrath of God for me. He likes me. He wants me. He likes me as much as the Father likes Him. Wow. Wow, my life is pretty powerful. I'm already successful. Wow. I receive it and then it becomes a reality in my life."

It's real that He feels this way about me regardless, but when I receive it, then I enter into the goodness of it and I become a lover of God. I say, "I'm loved and I'm a lover; therefore I'm successful."

It's a sentence I've said for years when pain touches my life. I say, "Wait a second. I'm loved, and I'm a lover of God." That's what I'm thinking. I'm already successful. If my whole ministry falls apart, if every relationship breaks, if I die of starvation and disease, I'm already successful in the most absolute sense of the word. I've already been crowned with beauty inasmuch as God has desired me. Already this has beautified my life. And so pain drives me to the only genuine, lasting place of comfort. It's that reality, that definition of my life, that causes me to grow as a voluntary lover, which is the purpose of life on planet earth.

PAIN IS WHAT MOTIVATES US TO REALIGN OUR HEART

I reconnect in that mindset. It's like working a muscle over and over. That's the only place I can find comfort. It's in that reality. It lasts three minutes, or five minutes, and I have to reconnect with it. I have to use it over. Sometimes it lasts longer, sometimes shorter, from minutes to hours. But whatever the case, the comfort of it touches me. Sometimes the sense of it rests on me for a day or two or three, and then something disrupts me again and I say, "I know how I got comfort last time. I don't have to have comfort through eating night and day or having some sensual extravaganza over there on the side. My comfort is most supremely found in that reality, that understanding of my personhood." Everyone's is if they would only drink from that well. It really brings pleasure when we connect with that.

Of course it's hidden to the natural mind. It takes spiritual illumination. God says, "In the process of working that muscle over and over and over, speaking and realigning your heart with truth, in the context of realigning your heart constantly, revelation grows."

Pain is what motivates us to realign our heart—constantly. The realigning is what brings revelation. That’s the context in which the Holy Spirit chose to give revelation. He could have given revelation apart from it, but that’s the one He chose. Pain makes me go into this realignment process. The realignment is the context in which the Holy Spirit gives illumination. The illumination gives me comfort. And that comfort in righteousness, that comfort in God, allows me to become a far more intensive voluntary lover. Therefore my life is on course.

The Lord says, “You know, this is going to hurt. You don’t like it, but it really will make you realign. You really will get revelation, and in revelation you really will be what you were designed to be—a voluntary lover of God. Therefore I’m going to let pain happen in your life.”

That’s what I think pain is about. There are a dozen other ways to talk about pain, but I think it’s about realignment. The things that are hidden about our lives then become clear to us.

QUESTION:

What kind of pain?

MIKE BICKLE:

All kinds of pain. Every kind of pain, including physical pain, because if it continues you begin to ask, “Why am I living on earth? I don’t even like any of this.” Then I figure out why I’m living on earth: to be a voluntary lover. Then I say, “OK, OK, OK.” It realigns us, and the things that are hidden about our life then become clear to us.

It’s 2 Corinthians 4:18: we look at things that are unseen instead of looking at things that are seen. That’s the context in which our hidden life becomes clear to us. Our life fully appears to us in the age to come, but the truth of our life appears to us just a little on this earth by the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

Most reactions to pain are destructive. There’s only one right reaction to pain. But here’s the bright side: it’s a decision process. The more you touch even a little of that comfort, the more you go back to that well to drink again the next time you fall into pain. Hunger begets hunger. Reality begets reality. The more you touch it, the more you go back there. The more you go back there, the more you want to touch it. The rich get richer.

That’s what our lives are about. Our lives are about this: being voluntary lovers. That’s the currency of the eternal city. You may have everything broken in your life, economically, physically, socially, in your work, in your relationships, in every area, but if you’re a voluntary lover, you’re already one of the most successful human beings who have ever lived, and you’re one of the most beautiful human beings who have ever lived. When God’s love is received, it beautifies your life before Him, and then you become a part of the Bride of Christ, the one desired by the wisest, most passionate Being in all of existence. He desires you. That itself crowns you with beauty and meaning because He wants you. That already defines you as beautiful, no matter who else does.

YOU WERE MADE TO BE BEAUTIFUL IN THE EMBRACE OF THE BEAUTIFUL GOD

It isn’t an accident that everyone longs to be beautiful. We have different language for it, but we were simply created to long to be beautiful. However, the obsession with natural beauty in the Western culture is so destructive. It drives us into so many addictions and disorders in life, but the desire for beauty is a God-given thing you can’t repent of. You were made to long to be beautiful, but in the embrace of the One who defines

beauty. Again, men don't usually talk about it like that. We talk about being cool or something and we don't use the word *beautiful*, but it's the same craving that was put into our human spirit that's answered mostly by God. It's answered a little in the natural, and human beauty isn't sinful in the natural, but the obsession in the Western culture with natural beauty is really incredible.

People try to repent of wanting to be beautiful. That doesn't work, because you were made to want to be beautiful. You can't repent of wanting to be successful; you can't repent of wanting to be great. God made you in His image; you have a longing to be great, to be successful, and to be beautiful because God is. You just have to derive it from reality. God's definition doesn't come from natural definitions. Natural definitions aren't all evil, but they are all secondary. When they become primary, God says, "I will let pain touch you to drive you to reality, to the primary definitions of life." Then our life appears in truth before us instead of being hidden from us.

That's why keeping the Word of God on your shelf with dust covering it is like people who are starving outside of a grocery store, refusing to go in. We say, "Please go inside; you're dying of malnutrition. Please go into that store. You'll like it if you'll just go into it and open it and eat to your heart's desire, to your full delight."

"THE HEAVENS OPENED, AND I SAW VISIONS OF GOD"

We looked at Isaiah 6: transcendent majesty. That's what I want you to get from the word *holy*: transcendent majesty, transcendent majesty, transcendent majesty.

Another example of seeing the Lord is the end of Ezekiel 1:1: "The heavens opened, and I saw visions of God" (Eze. 1:1). What a great sentence. Again, my reason for sharing this is not to make you mad if you don't have an open vision of God, but it's to show you what the knowledge of God does to the human soul when it encounters it at whatever level. Whether it's the glory of God that you see a little when you meditate on the Word of God, or the glory of God that you see more when you have an open vision, which none of us ever have except for a few people, or whether it's the vision of God that you get on the last day when you stand before the throne of God—whatever vision, whatever level of perceiving God's glory, isn't my concern right now. It's the fact that the glory of God, the knowledge of God, really does transform the heart. That's the point. There are many, many levels of seeing the glory of God.

Well, he's seeing the glory of God at a pretty heavy-duty level. "Then I looked, and behold, a whirlwind coming out of the north . . . Within it came the likeness of four living creatures" (Eze. 1:4-5). Ezekiel 1 uses the phrase *likeness* probably about twenty times because Ezekiel is dumbfounded.

He says, "I can only talk about the unfamiliar by appealing to the familiar. The familiar isn't really that close to what I see, but it's as close as I can get."

"I SAW THINGS THAT WERE IMPOSSIBLE TO UTTER"

It isn't just unfamiliar in the sense of language, but it's even unfamiliar in terms of human thinking. It isn't just that he struggled for language. He looked, and like Paul said, "I saw things that were impossible to utter" (2 Cor. 12:2, paraphrased). In other words, "I can't even begin to utter them. I have no language. I don't even have a grid of understanding that would give me even a category for what I saw."

I only make that point to let you know, it's really awesome what's on the other side, what's awaiting you forever. It's really, really quite awesome.

So Ezekiel sees the four living creatures. Then he sees the likeness of a throne (Eze. 1:26), and if you want to put something by verse 26, put, “Revelation 4.” Revelation 4 is the picture of the throne of God in the clearest way. It’s the clearest picture God gives us of His throne. It only gives us a few details, but it’s the clearest one we have.

I spent quite a bit of time over the years studying Revelation 4 because it’s the clearest picture God gave us. It really will do something to you to study it. I just want to leave you with it. I challenge you to study every single detail you can think of in Revelation 4. Study it for years. I don’t mean one Saturday afternoon. Study Revelation 4. Say, “I’m going to lock into this; I’m going to ask the Holy Spirit to bring me some understanding of every single detail.”

Of course, whatever picture you have in your mind now, when you get there one day you’ll say, “Wow, I had a very small picture when I was down there on the earth.”

Look at the very end of Ezekiel 1:28. “When I saw it, I fell on my face” (Eze. 1:28). There you go. He’s overwhelmed again, just like Isaiah. He’s completely overwhelmed at what he sees. I’m not saying that you have to see God in an open vision before it overwhelms you. No, I think that God can touch and overwhelm our hearts little by little, and change our emotional chemistry just through meditating on the Word. We don’t have to have a full-on experience to have our heart slowly transformed and changed in the way that it feels and thinks.

I like the man—no, not the man, Moses. Sorry! I was thinking about a preacher who preached on this one time. He said this: “It’s true that when you see God you die. Anyone who sees the face of God would die. If you plug a billion volts into something that can only take 110 volts, it just dies.” It dies in that regard, because the capacity is so unmatched it isn’t a “suitable companion,” so to speak. You see God and you die.

Even in the far lesser sense, any time we see a little of God, we die to our self. We really do. We die to the natural realm in terms of its values. I don’t mean that we become irresponsible in our jobs; we become disassociated more and more with the values of the natural realm. We die to those values every time we see God.

So he falls on his face here. I just want you to see the passage. There’s a lot here. Go down to the library and get some commentaries and study out each phrase. I mean, I’ll give you more than you can study in a lifetime here. I can’t study all of this stuff. I have it on my list to study whenever I get that free time. If something really touches you, study it out. Then go ahead and study Ezekiel 2 and 3, because there’s more about it in Ezekiel 2 and 3.

Go to the end of Ezekiel 8:1. “The hand of the Lord fell upon me there. Then I looked, and there was a likeness like the likeness of fire, and from the appearance of His waist downward was fire; from His waist and upward the appearance of brightness like the color of amber, and He stretched out the form of a hand and took me by the lock of my hair. The Spirit lifted me and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem. . . And, behold the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision I saw in the plain” (Eze. 8:1-4, paraphrased)—back in chapter 1.

My point is this: he's encountering God again. I just want you to know that it's there. I'm just barely advertising the passage, but if you write them down, in the weeks and months and years ahead you'll look back and say, "Hey, I still want to follow through on that."

"OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE"

Ezekiel was a person who, when he encountered God, it overwhelmed him.

The next book over is Daniel. Turn to Daniel 7:9. This is one of my favorite passages—Daniel 7. "I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool;"—really white—"His throne was a fiery flame" (Dan. 7:9).

The throne of God in Revelation 4 doesn't depict the fire like this. We put the visions together and we know the throne of God is a throne of fire. Again, Deuteronomy 4:24 is the main passage here: "Our God is a consuming fire." The throne He sits on has all the colors of Revelation 4 pictured in them, but it's engulfed in flame.

God, like we said yesterday, clothes Himself in garments of light (Ps. 104:2). He has fire and light, the brightness of light all around Him protecting those attendants to His throne from being destroyed by fully gazing upon Him. Remember, when He unveils His glory, heaven and earth are no more. It's His mercy that He puts a garment around Himself. He's the transcendent God. Its wheels are a burning fire.

"A FIERY STREAM ISSUED AND CAME FORTH FROM BEFORE HIM"

Daniel 7:10. I like this a lot. "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him" (Dan. 7:10). Another version says, "A river of fire proceeded from the throne of God." The throne is filled with fire; there's a river of fire which is the person of the Holy Spirit proceeding out from the throne of God. There's a river of fire. Then there are myriads and myriads of angels. "The courts were seated, and the books were opened" (ibid). He's seeing the last day, the day of judgment. All history appears before Him. You'll really see this one day in its full glory. With your very own eyes you'll see this scene one day.

There's a river of fire coming from the throne of God. It goes on and he sees a vision. In verse 15 he says, "I, Daniel, was grieved in my spirit within my body, and the visions of my head troubled me" (Dan. 7:15). In Daniel 7:28 he says, "I was deeply troubled" (v. 28, paraphrased). And then, later on: "I was afraid and I fell on my face" (Dan. 8:17, paraphrased). "I . . . fainted and was sick for days . . . astonished by the vision" (v. 27, NKJV).

Again, it's the human impact when God is unveiling a little of Himself. So Daniel 7 and 8 are good about that. Daniel 10 is a really good one. In verses 1-9, Jesus appears to him. A great terror fell upon all of his friends. They fled to hide themselves. No strength was in him; his vigor turned to frailty; he retained no strength. "I fell with a deep sleep with my face to the ground" (Dan. 10:9, paraphrased).

I love this. He sees a little glimpse of Jesus. Everything in him is undone. Believe me, Jesus wasn't completely unveiled in His glory. He had turned the watts down significantly when He appeared to this frail man. I mean, he was a strong man among other men, but he was frail compared to the thing that he was seeing. You know what the Lord says to him; look at verse 11. He says, "O Daniel, you are a man greatly beloved" (Dan. 10:11, paraphrased). In other words, "I really like you, Daniel." Daniel is trembling.

The Lord literally appeared to Paul Cain in his youth, when he was eight years old, and called him as a prophet. Many of you know Paul Cain. He's a prophet. He said, "I love you, Paul."

Paul literally said, as an eight-year-old boy, "If You love me, don't ever show Yourself like this to me again." He literally said that to the Lord as the Lord was commissioning him.

Here Daniel is on his face, trembling and broken; he has his face to the ground (cf. Dan. 8:9). The Lord says in verse 11, "O Daniel, I really like you."

I can imagine Daniel saying, like Paul Cain, even in verse 11, "Well then quit appearing this way if You really like me."

Isn't that a great first sentence? I put it in my own language. "I really like you. You're greatly beloved. I really, really like you, Daniel. As a matter of fact, I like you as much as My Father likes Me."

Six hundred years later, when Jesus was in the upper room, we would learn that that's how much He liked Daniel. Jesus liked Daniel as much as God the Father liked Jesus.

"THE PEOPLE WHO KNOW THEIR GOD SHALL BE STRONG, AND CARRY OUT GREAT EXPLOITS"

Look at Daniel 11:32, right in the middle. This is talking about the end-time generation. The Antichrist is growing in his dominion on the earth, afflicting the people of God. Wickedness is abounding. "But the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits" (Dan. 11:32). Isn't that something? Strength is linked to the people who grow in the knowledge of God in the end times.

In Daniel 12:4, the angel tells Daniel to shut up the words of the book, to seal the book until the time of the end. At the time of the end, "many shall run to and fro" (Dan. 12:4). That means travel shall increase significantly. Of course, in the last ten, twenty, thirty, and forty years, compared to the previous thousands of years of human history, travel has increased at an exponential rate beyond comparison. He says, "Knowledge shall increase" (ibid). Those are the two things that will significantly increase: travel and knowledge. Of course, with the computer and the Internet, if the amount of knowledge has doubled in the last ten years, it's probably going to triple again in one or two years because of where this thing is going.

You automatically think of natural travel and natural knowledge, but I believe it means the knowledge of God shall increase, too. I don't think it means just, "Natural knowledge will increase." Knowledge and the experience of the human race at the end of the age will increase. I believe spiritual as well as natural knowledge increases, not only natural knowledge. It doesn't say natural knowledge only. I believe it's the generation of Ephesians 4:13. They will attain to the unity and the knowledge of the Son of God. It will increase in that generation.

That's just a little from the book of Daniel. Let's go to Jeremiah on our way back to Isaiah. Jeremiah is right next to Isaiah. Again, I'm just giving you passages to stir up your thinking. There are many in Jeremiah as well. This subject is everywhere in the Word of God. We can't afford to neglect this in our personal lives.

"HIM WHO GLORIES, LET HIM GLORY IN THIS"

Look at Jeremiah 9:23-24. “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom” (Jer. 9:23). In other words, don’t let him get his identity from his giftedness. This refers to the really uniquely intellectually-gifted man or woman who has creative abilities. *Wise* would speak of intellectual, artistic abilities. They may be craftsmen, or whatever abilities are related to knowledge. Don’t let him glory, don’t let him get his identity in the fact that he or she is exceptionally intelligent or creative or artistic. Don’t let the mighty person, the person of position, the king, the ruler, or the president; don’t let the person of political power and influence, whether in the company, in the nation, or in the church, obtain his identity from his position. Don’t let the rich man get his identity from the fact that he or she owns millions of dollars. Don’t let them get their identity from their ability to make economics prosper in their life. Let them glory, let them get their identity, let them define their life by this: “that he understands and knows Me” (v. 24). Let their identity be rooted in that fact, because to *glory* means to get your identity and to define your life by it.

God says, “Let him define his life as successful, let him define his life as meaningful and powerful in that he understands and knows God. That’s the identity I want him to live out of.” Some of the poorest and most ungifted people in the natural have their identity based in the fact that they know God a little. He says, “Especially know that I am the Lord who exercises kindness to people. I am the Lord who judges things in righteousness” (Jer. 9:24b, paraphrased). Judgment means God removes the things that get in the way of love. Then he says at the end, “I really like these things” (v. 24c, paraphrased). “I really delight in them. I really like these things. I like kindness, I like removing things that hinder love. I like that they define their life by their pursuit of Me, not by how much power, how much gifting they have. They define their life by the fact that they’re pursuing the knowledge of Me. I really like that.”

Even the majority of believers define our lives by our wisdom, our giftedness, or our creativity. A preacher defines his life by how well he preaches, by how many people listen. Even in the church world, the person defines his life by how much influence he has, how many people come to the conference, his position over the denomination, his might, or how much wealth he has, how much freedom from other people because he has financial independence.

The Lord says, “What I really like is when you define your life by the fact that you’re pursuing the knowledge of Me. That you either pursue it or attain it is what I like, and these particular aspects of My character.”

Turn to Jeremiah 3:14-15. “Return, O backsliding children, says the Lord” (Jer. 3:14). “Why? Why do I want you to return? What’s the motivation? Because I’m married to you. I really want you” (Jer. 3:14b, paraphrased). Isn’t that wonderful? “Return.”

“Why? Why should I return and obey you?”

“Because I really want you. I chose you to be My partner. My heart is aching over you. That’s why I want you to return.”

“I WILL GIVE YOU SHEPHERDS ACCORDING TO MY HEART”

Then He goes on, and He doesn’t say “the end times” here in verse 15, but the context makes it clear in verse 17 that He’s talking about the end times. He says, “I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jer. 3:14c).

Here's my point. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in the end-time church will feed the people on the knowledge of God. Not only on that; they'll feed them on ministry skills and many other things, but God is raising up a whole company of shepherds, men and women, who will feed the people on knowledge and understanding; not only in ministry skills, but in the knowledge of God. The Church will attain to the knowledge of the Son of God before it's over.

“YOU SHALL CALL ME, ‘MY FATHER,’ AND WILL NOT TURN AWAY FROM ME”

Look again at verse 17. “At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the Lord” (Jer. 3:17b). So it's at the very end. The nations will be gathered to the name of the Lord. Look at what gathers the nations: the nations will be gathered around the revelation of the character of God. They will be gathered to the name of the Lord.

He goes on. At the end of Jeremiah 3:19, he says, “But I said: ‘How can I put you among the children and give you a pleasant land, a beautiful heritage of the hosts of nations?’ And I said: ‘You shall call Me, ‘My Father’”—the Father heart of God will be revealed—“and will not turn away from Me” (Jer. 3:19). They will not turn away from him in that day. “Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel,’ says the Lord” (v. 20).

The Lord says, “I'm going to be a father to you and a bridegroom to you in that day. I will show you My tender fatherhood, and I will show you what you mean to Me—that you have broken My heart when you walk away from Me because I see you as a wife. I desire you as a man would desire his wife.”

OK, now we just have a few more minutes here. Where are we going to go? We have a lot of verses here. Let's just keep working our way back to Isaiah. Then I'll quote a few to you that you can look up later.

Isaiah 33. This is another favorite one; I really like this one a lot. It's an intercessory prayer, but it reveals how important the knowledge of God is. It reveals how inevitable it is that God's knowledge is going to fill the Church.

It starts off as an intercessory prayer in Isaiah 33:2, “O Lord, be gracious to us, for we have waited for You. Be their arm”—or their strength—“every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble, at the noise of the tumult, when the people shall flee” (Isa. 33:2-3, paraphrased).

It's talking about a time in history when there will be trouble in all the nations. It's called, “The time of Jacob's trouble.” There will be a time when God shakes everything that can be shaken. It's the time of trouble, the time of the noise of the tumult, when the people are fleeing in the nations at the end of the age. Again, there are a lot of verses you can put with that to make it clear that that's what he's talking about.

Isaiah describes it as the time when “You lift Yourself up and the nations are scattered” (Isa. 33:3, paraphrased). That's an interesting phrase: “the time when God lifts Himself up.” We talked about this yesterday. There are time frames in history when God's zeal is aroused and He just does it. It's the time when God lifts God up. Isn't that an interesting phrase? It's the time when the nations are being scattered. It's when the nations are being shaken.

THE STABILITY OF THE NATIONS IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Hebrews 12:26 describes how, at the end of the age, everything that can be shaken will be shaken. It's the time when God's plunder shall be gathered (Isa. 33:4). Do you know that God has an inheritance? He has a plunder. He's plundering the nations for this remnant that belongs to Him. "The Lord is exalted . . . He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness" (v. 5). Look at verse 6. It's the time when "Wisdom and knowledge are the stability of our times, and they are the strength of salvation; the fear of the Lord is God's treasure" (Isa. 33:6, paraphrased). Here, the treasure is unlocked.

There's so much in verse 6, but just let me give you a summary. It's the time when the knowledge and the wisdom of God is the stability of the nations. It's the stability of the times. There is coming a time when God shakes everything that can be shaken. That's clear from Hebrews 12:26 and Haggai 2:7. Those verses tell us that God will shake everything that can be shaken in the final generation, when He reveals Jesus one final time. There will be a great shaking at the end. In that context, which this passage is describing, there will be one issue that's the stability of the times, or the stability of the people of the nations. It will be also their strength and their stability. It will be wisdom and knowledge specifically of God. The wisdom and knowledge of God will be your stability and your strength, because it will change the way you think and feel on the inside.

The fear of the Lord will be the treasure which God will unlock for the nations. That's the great treasure, that you will look at God and you will tremble in awe before Him. You will tremble in awe before Him.

"WHO AMONG US SHALL DWELL WITH EVERLASTING BURNING?"

God says, "Now I will arise, now I will be exalted, now I will lift myself up" (Isa. 33:10, paraphrased). When He does this, sinners in Zion will be afraid. They will say, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings" (v. 14, NKJV). God is going to release the devouring fire of Himself, and sinners will not be able to contain it.

I'm going to skip a lot here. He's talking about the great revival at the end.

Verse 17. Look at this. He says that in this particular time frame, "Your eyes will see the King in His beauty" (Isa. 33:17). in that day. Your eyes will see Jesus Christ in His beauty like no other time in history.

Verse 21. "There"—in that place—"the majestic Lord will be for us" (v. 21). He will be like a broad river and a stream. God, the majestic God, will appear, and He will be like a flowing river to His people.

Verse 22. "The Lord is our Judge; the Lord is our Lawgiver; the Lord is our King; He will save us" (Isa. 33:22).

THE STRENGTH OF THE PEOPLE WILL BE THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Then look at verse 24. When God is revealing Himself this way the inhabitants will no longer say "I'm sick"; the sinners will be forgiven. "Those who dwell in it will be forgiven their iniquity" (Isa. 33:24). There will be divine healing and tremendous cleansing of sin when God shows Himself as beautiful before the eyes of His people when everything is shaken, when the stability of the nations is the knowledge of God. The strength of the people will be the knowledge of God when the divine treasury is unlocked.

We won't look at Isaiah 35:1-8, but it says the same thing. I realize you're on automatic pilot right now. You're thinking, "We're on overload here." I'm giving you the verses to write them down. I understand that I'm giving you more than you can take because I'm moving too quickly with too many verses. I'm going to quote a few to you and just tell you a little about them; you don't even have to turn there.

Habakkuk 2:14-20 says the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God. The knowledge of what God is like will fill the earth (Hab. 2:14). Put verse 20 beside it, and then write chapter 3:3-4. It's fantastic! The entire population of the earth will encounter the knowledge of God. Micah 5:3-4 says the same thing about the end-time generation.

Micah 7:14-15. Really it's verses 14-20, but make a note of verses 14-15 especially, and on to verse 20 as well.

Haggai 2:6-7—we already quoted that one. Zephaniah 2:11 and 3:17. Again, there are many more. I'm going to give you a few more people who saw God. We have Isaiah 6, Daniel 7, and Daniel 10. We have Revelation 1. That's the time when John fell before Jesus like a dead man. Ezekiel 1 and Ezekiel 8. There was the time in Exodus 32 and 33 when Moses encountered God, and the Lord appeared to him in glory.

Another one is Job 38-42. That's a fantastic one. For five chapters Jesus reveals to Job how great Jesus' power is. Jesus is giving Job sentence after sentence of how great His power is. Of course at the end, in Job 42:3-5, Job says, "I fall to the dust with my hands on my mouth. I'm an idiot, You're awesome, You win" (Job 42:3-5, paraphrased). Job says, "You win."

I'm giving this to you for your study in the future—Job 38-42. If you want to study the character of God, it's fantastic. You know Peter: when the disciples are fishing all night in Luke 5, he falls down and says, "I'm a sinful man; depart from me." There are many more as well.

Well, I think we're at the end of human strength—all of us. Let's stand.

MINISTRY TIME

Some of you are shepherds who will feed the people of God on knowledge and understanding.

O Lord, we love You. Lord, we don't have really any understanding of who You are. Transcendent majesty, transcendent majesty. In Your eyes we will see the King in His beauty. Our soul longs for this. Wisdom and knowledge of God will be the stability of the times. They will be the strength of salvation.

"For I will unlock the treasury and show you the fear of the Lord. You will stand in awe before what you see of the knowledge and wisdom of God."

Lord, in our spirit we say, "We want to be Yours."

Lord, we understand only a little why You allow pain. We want to be voluntary lovers of God. We want to be lovers of God. Oh, we want to be lovers of God.

We're just going to tell God that we love Him. I will ask the Holy Spirit to minister to you, just as you're standing there gazing upon the throne of God, gazing upon the Lord.