

# INTRODUCTION

*My son, if you will receive my words and treasure my commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding; for if you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding; if you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the LORD and discover the knowledge of God.*

Proverbs 2:1-5

I would like to begin with a profound and intriguing fact: whoever you are, whatever your age, and regardless of your beliefs, God is looking straight into your heart even as you read this sentence.

You cannot make Him leave. You cannot elude Him; you cannot hide from Him. His presence is everywhere all at once; there are no boundaries or circumstances that can prevent Him from seeing you. It is not a difficult thing for the omniscient and omnipotent God of heaven to encounter you and every person on this planet in this way. His ability is not limited to yours—that is why you *need* Him so much.

God is fully aware of who you are, how you conduct yourself, even what you are thinking. Nothing escapes His attention. There is nothing about you that He does not know, whether or not you choose to believe in *Him*. He knows your good deeds as well as your failures and shortcomings. He knows your good intentions as well as your wicked thoughts. He knows where you have sincerely honored Him as well as where you have profaned His holy name.

God is not looking intently at you in order to evaluate your religion. He does not want to judge you—He has the *authority* to do so, and certainly He will exercise that authority in due time (2 Corinthians 5:10)—but this is not His immediate objective. What He wants to know above all else is your answer to this most important question:

*Do you know Me in the way that I want you to know Me?*

Someone says, “Of course I know God! After all, I *am* a Christian!” The decision to be a Christian is an excellent one; there is no finer vocation. However, just because one is called a Christian does not mean he automatically *knows* God in the way He *wants* and *expects* that person to know Him. This is not accomplished through a mere profession of beliefs. One cannot know God merely by sitting on pews in church buildings, listening to sermons, or randomly skimming the Bible. To really *know* God requires serious investments of time, effort, and prayerful meditation. For these reasons alone, most people who call themselves Christians are simply unwilling to commit to this.

You are someone who is obviously willing to do something about this, because you have picked up this book—hopefully with the intent of reading it in its entirety. You are obviously interested in *seeking the sacred*, which means you are deeply interested in drawing near to God. This book will help you to do this—perhaps much more than you will even realize.

The fact is, however, you do not *need* this book to draw near to God; the Bible is the real source of *that* information. This book is simply an expedient toward that endeavor. It is not meant to rival or replace your Bible. Instead, you will find that it contains hundreds of appeals *to* the Bible for accomplishing this very thing. God's Word "has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). I cannot tell you anything more concerning your *access to God* than what the Bible has already declared. Yet sometimes people need help with this subject, since drawing near to God is not an easy thing to do—even though God has already done (and continues to do) the most difficult part.

This book has been written, designed, and produced in order to help people better understand what the Word of God teaches on drawing near to the God of the Word. Its purpose is to give *anyone who wishes* an opportunity to look more deeply into the Scriptures so that they can draw more closely to God. It is not a mere "Bible study," where we open the Bible and comment on various passages—although it certainly is a study *of* the Bible. This book will help bring Bible passages to life and illuminate the pathway to God. It is meant to stimulate your thinking *upward*, since this is the direction that seekers of the sacred always look. Indeed, this is what the apostle Paul taught (Colossians 3:1-4):

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

God has put you here upon this earth so that you might seek Him. This requires that you not just think about Him, but that you think *like* Him (Ephesians 5:1). The God of heaven is anxious for your attention; the record of His love for you is both conclusive and compelling. He has something to offer you that this world is unable to provide: *life with Him*, which is “far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). He wants nothing more than to fill your heart with the realistic hope of being forever with Him. The full intention of this book is to show you all of these things so that you can pursue God in the way that He has always wanted you to pursue Him.

*God is peering into your soul right now to see your response to His invitation to draw near to Him.*

The goal of those who are “raised up with Christ” (Christians) is to “keep seeking the things above.” This means, in essence: we are to be in a constant state of elevating our love, thinking, and behavior to that which

conforms to Christ—not this world, and certainly not our own preferences.

God *expects* this of us because we *belong* to Him: we have surrendered ourselves to His will; we have pledged allegiance to Him above all else. Even those of us who have once “discovered” God may need to *rediscover* Him and engage in fellowship with Him on an even higher level than we have enjoyed previously.

Are you in need of “rediscovering” God? If so, then this book is most certainly for you. I think you will enjoy it immensely. This book is for all those who are searching for a deeper, more meaningful relationship with God: it is for those who desire a more intimate *fellowship* with God. Whoever you are, wherever you are presently in your spiritual walk with the Lord—or even if you are interested in *beginning* that walk—this book can help you discover aspects of God that you may not have yet considered.

In order to enjoy deeper fellowship with the Lord, you must appreciate how glorious and sacred our Lord is. We are to approach Him “with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28); we cannot serve passively or incidentally the One who rules over all of heaven and earth. To do this appropriately requires a proper perspective of God, as well as recognition of our own humanity. We can certainly “draw near” to Him (James 4:8), but we cannot exceed our earthbound limitations.

Then again, men *have* seen the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Christ “is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature” (Hebrews 1:3), and inasmuch as men have “seen” Christ, they have seen the Father (John 14:7-10). Jesus was God’s “in-the-flesh” revelation to man; He was God literally visualized and personified. Multitudes of people *saw* Christ walk upon the face of the earth, perform miracles, and exude heavenly wisdom. Some of these people actually spoke with Him, felt His gentle touch upon their broken bodies, and experienced His divine powers heal them of their demons and diseases. A few others journeyed with Him, ate with Him, and slept around the same campfire with Him. Three of them (Peter, James, and John) actually saw Him endued with heavenly glory (Matthew 17:1-6). Christ is the closest we will ever get (in this life) to seeing the glory of God, and yet none of *us* have seen Him.

This fact appears at first to defeat the entire premise of this book. After all, this book is about “seeking the sacred”; yet I have just implied that none of us will be able to *see* the sacred—at least in this life. On the other hand, it is not necessary to actually *see* something to believe in it. We practice this kind of faith all the time: we do not see the movement of electrons, but we believe in light and electricity; we do not see wind and centrifugal force, but we experience their effects in meteorological activity; we do not see the gravitational pull of the moon’s mass upon the earth, but all life on earth

depends upon the rise and fall of the oceans. Likewise, we do not need to see God in order to believe in Him. Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, vowed not to believe in a resurrected Messiah until he put his fingers in the holes of Jesus' spike-impaled hands. Jesus let Thomas wait for eight days before giving him this opportunity, upon which time He told him, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Then He rebuked him for his unnecessary doubt: "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:26-29).

*God continues to gaze unblinkingly into your heart, examining your every thought. He asks you in a whisper so quiet that only your soul can hear it: Do you believe?*

So it is with us: we are *blessed* if we believe in the God whom we literally cannot see. One of the paradoxes of Scripture is that visible affirmation is not always the key to enlightenment. The apostle Paul certainly "saw the light" of his errors concerning the Messiah during three days of blindness (Acts 9:1-18). Yet this idea works both ways: those who literally see may nonetheless remain unconverted, that is, spiritually blind. Many hard-hearted Pharisees saw Jesus and many of His works yet did not believe Him to be the Son of God. As John recorded in John 9:39-41,

And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind." Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, "We are not blind too, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

Thus, we do not have to see to believe; we do not have to see to be blessed.

This is no support for *blind* faith, of course: what we *do* believe is based upon the irrefutable evidence of the glory of God that *is* seen in the physical and moral world. We "see" the Lord through what He has made (Romans 1:20), what His Spirit has written concerning Him (1 Peter 1:10-12), and how He works in our lives, "[causing] all things to work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

But we are not interested in seeing a mere silhouette of God or a mere character sketch of His attributes (although it is beneficial to *study* His attributes, as we will do in this work). Rather, God wants us to be *seekers* of Him. This is made possible only through our faith in Him. God certainly *could* manifest His glory to us, but then we would believe only with our *eyes* and not with our *heart*. To believe with one's heart—to have faith in God—is far more

difficult than to merely cognitively acknowledge His existence because of what one literally sees.

“Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). To be *seekers* of God is a far more noble pursuit than merely wanting to *see* God. This will not prevent us from desiring to see Him with our own eyes. However, it puts our longing for God and our craving for fellowship with Him in an appropriate context.

Thankfully, not only are we seekers of God, but He is also seeking us. Jesus once told a Samaritan woman that “an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers” (John 4:23). I want to be forever with the Lord; I assume that you do, too. But *God also* wants us to be with Him; He is supremely interested in our quests for deeper fellowship with Him. In fact, He actively *seeks after* those of us who desire to worship Him. It would not matter how deeply we desired to be with God if He did not also desire us to be with Him. If not for His making our “seeking” possible, there would be nothing we could do to bring us one inch, one day, or one thought closer to Him.

Those who seek God must accept the all-encompassing demands of this search. As with any noble pursuit, we must have an appreciation of what it

means to *be* a seeker of the sacred. We must realize the purpose behind that search—what it involves and what it demands of us personally. Zeal and passion are not enough by themselves; we must also *prepare* for that search. Our mind, skills, knowledge, and courage must all be concentrated and focused in such a way that the search we perform will be effective and efficient. We must be willing to postpone or remove altogether all other searches that rob us of the energy required to conduct the *greatest* search of our lives. Furthermore, we must possess a competent approach toward our search: where to start, how to engage in it, and *why* it is to be conducted in the first place.

Any search for which the seeker has no clear purpose or objective is doomed from the start. A person cannot properly prepare for a search with a vague, pointless, indefinable goal. Someone searching for “peace,” for example, who has no clue what it looks like simply cannot organize his efforts in that direction. (The exasperating search for “world peace” within the fractured and self-serving international community is a good illustration of this: no one can really agree objectively what such “peace” looks like, much less how to achieve it.) One’s purpose must be clear, well-defined, and unmistakable. A vague objective will generate nothing more than a wild and fruitless search—kind of like flailing one’s arms and legs about in a hopeless attempt to swim. A great expenditure of time and energy does not *by itself* guarantee profitable results.

Christians are not above these necessary conditions, even though what (really, *Whom*) we seek is spiritual in nature. Likewise, we are not immune to the various pitfalls and hindrances that may plague the search itself.

Christopher Columbus and other early transoceanic explorers, for example, did not confine their vision to a fixed point in time when they would literally gaze upon the very object of their search. They understood that the search itself was difficult, demanding, complicated—even life-threatening. These men had to know a lot about ships, ocean navigation, management of a ship's crew (which included men who probably did not share the explorer's passion for what was being sought, but instead looked only for compensation for their efforts), and possess a fairly good sense of what and where it was they wanted to find. They also had to accept the losses and deprivations of pursuing their quest: months away from their homes and families, poor eating and living conditions, vermin, disease, malnutrition, and the incessant assault of scorching sun, driving rain, and salty ocean spindrift.

Likewise, Thomas Edison—another explorer of a different sort—searched for ways to improve upon the primitive technology of his day, but was not oblivious to the demands of that search. He spent many, many long hours of his life in experimentation and observation, trying to bring into existence devices and machines which the world has since taken for granted.

We can hardly imagine the discipline of mind and diligence of principle under which he must have labored. Thankfully, he was rewarded for his efforts.

Not everyone who so labors is thus rewarded. William Tyndale, for example, worked tirelessly to translate the Latin Bible (Vulgate) into English, only to be condemned as a heretic by the Roman Church for doing so. (Catholic officials once believed that to put Scripture in any “common” language like English was to blaspheme its holiness. They believed that Latin was the only acceptable sacred language.) As a result, Tyndale’s search for a Bible in which the general populace could read was prematurely ended: he was burned alive at the stake in 1536.<sup>1</sup>

Christians today also face difficult—perhaps even life-threatening—challenges. As with seafaring explorers of old, so our search will be difficult, demanding, and sometimes complicated. As with the passionate inventor, so we must have discipline of mind and diligence of principle that cannot be abandoned for lesser things. As with those who sacrificed their lives for the greater good, so we must accept the fact that our search may not *appear* to be successful in our own lifetime, or that it will meet our own initial expectations. For the many ancient explorers who were successful, whose names have become part of human history, there were countless more who were unsuccessful, whose discoveries went unrecognized, or who have simply

vanished from historical memory. Our own posterity may not even care that we *were* seekers. But we cannot linger on these negative aspects. Seeking after the sacred must be a noble and sacrificial pursuit in itself; it cannot be dependent upon any other factors or outcomes.

We also cannot think that if we just look hard enough, we will always find something worthwhile. As mentioned, the expenditure of great amounts of energy does not automatically translate to success. Likewise, luck has nothing to do with salvation. No one accidentally finds divine grace; no one stumbles into heaven. Instead, the seeker must know exactly what he is seeking after and must be (or quickly become) familiar with whatever tools, resources, and processes are necessary for making that search successful.

The joy of finding what we are searching for motivates us to endure the discomfort and frustration that accompanies that search. In this way, Jesus also looked beyond the cross and its suffering and humiliation. His focus was on the joy of obedience to the Father and the satisfaction of accomplishing what was in the best interest of all mankind: “for the joy set before Him [He] endured the cross...” (Hebrews 12:2). This incentive was sufficient to overcome all the difficulties on the way to His goal. So we too must endure the hardships of the search, knowing that our obedience and God’s grace will ultimately lead us where we ought to go. “It is for this we labor and strive, because we have

fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers" (1 Timothy 4:10).

*God, His eyes fixed intently upon your thoughts, continues to watch for signs of your submission to His will. His Spirit whispers again: Have you fixed your hope on Me?*

We must also recognize the desperate *need* for this search. Without engaging in this search, we imply that God is not worth seeking, and that our present knowledge, status, and ability are all that we need to rescue ourselves from this sinful world. This is absolutely untrue. Without God's saving power, we are *unsaved people*. We are hopeless and lost without Him; without searching for God, we will not "be with the Lord." Our seeking after the sacred, then, cannot be perceived merely as an exciting adventure, intriguing curiosity, or elaborate (but expendable) hobby. Rather, our spiritual, eternal future depends entirely upon it. We are not merely missing out on a great opportunity if we are not seekers, as though we have just missed a great deal on a Caribbean cruise or a new car; we are *ruined beyond redemption*. To be content with who we are or what we know presently is to consign ourselves to certain spiritual death. We cannot accept the horrible consequences of the *failure* to seek after the sacred. We cannot afford *not* to be seekers.

As seekers, we must also have personal desire and motivation. Jesus once said, "Whoever wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). I want to emphasize the beginning of that statement: "Whoever *wishes....*" In other words, *only* whoever deeply desires the Lord is of the right disposition to be His disciple. This is the first priority; this must *precede* the search itself. All those who *do* find Christ, having made Him the object of their pursuit, will be those who had earnestly desired to find Him in the first place.

This book is designed to whet your desire for the Lord. Even more so, *God's Word* is designed to whet this desire, which is why we will often look into it. No one can desire Him *for* you; no one draws near to God by proxy.

*Meanwhile, God continues to look deeply, penetratingly, and probingly into your heart. His face is ever before your face. You possess the breath of life which He gave to you—His strong desire is for you to seek the Source of that life. He longs for your awareness of Him; He stands ready to lead your pursuit of His glory; He craves fellowship with your soul.*

What, exactly, is *your* desire, dear reader? Do you know the Lord as He wants you to know Him? Are you truly a seeker of the sacred? Do you wish to *begin* your quest? Or do you wish to rise to the next level *of* your quest? If so,

the rest of this book will explore exactly what this means and what you must do to fully and appropriately undertake that search.

In the end, however, you will find that the information you needed in order to accomplish this search was right before your eyes all the time. In the end, you will discover that *God* was looking lovingly and intently at you all along, leading you homeward to Him.

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<sup>1</sup> Tyndale completed translating the New Testament in 1525 and had begun working on the Old Testament when he died. His work was resumed and completed by his colleague Miles Coverdale in 1537, and Tyndale himself was posthumously exonerated (*The Origin of the Bible*, ed. by Philip Comfort [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1992], 265.)