

Knowing God *Study Guide*

Section Three: If God Be for Us **Teacher's Edition**

**An Exercise in Spiritual
Growth and Discipleship
Using the Book *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer**

by

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For Leading Study Groups or Personal Self-Study

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Preface

Congratulations on arriving at Section Three of J I Packer's seminal work on practical theology, *Knowing God*. By now, you have been challenged to think deeply about what you believe about the God in whom you live, move, and have your being.

In Part One, you learned about the purpose of theology and the goal of this study. Then, you met the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as you encountered the nature of the Trinity and the Christian Godhead.

In Part Two, you examined the attributes of God, building from the necessity of His unchanging nature through majesty, wisdom, truth, love, and grace, leading to God's judgment, wrath, goodness, and severity, and finally, that our God is a jealous God. These last aspects are challenging for most post-modern Christians to deal with. However, we learned, as Job did before us, that God is God and we are not, and we move on in hope and trust, for whatever He gives we thankfully take.

We now approach the luscious canopy of the Gospel, having faithfully established its root and branch, we reach high to its central meaning since without the final flowering, what purpose, in this case, do the root and branch serve us. Packer calls this section the Heart of the Gospel. It is since it is life-giving to all of creation, that which has been subjected to futility, in hopes of seeing the revealing of the Sons of God, of whom we are. [Romans 8:19](#) We now embrace the joy set before us in hope everlasting.

A prayer for this study

Dear Lord God, you have challenged us in your Word to study to show ourselves approved and told us to leave aside the milk of the Gospel and mature into its meat. Open our hearts, O Lord, and prepare us to learn of you, to drink deep of your revelation of yourself. And as we come to know you better, O Lord, may we also come to know ourselves better. Grant us, by your grace, success in our efforts.

May your Holy Spirit, by his witness, authenticate what we study and learn, and may we always remember that the Spirit testifies and leads us into all truth and knowledge of you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As we struggle to apprehend the faith once delivered to the saints, we thank you, O Lord, for your mercy and patience as we endeavor to better understand you and ourselves. May everything we do be to your eternal honor and glory. Amen.

William (Bill) G. Meisheid

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Section Three: If God Be for Us...

Scriptures

Romans 8:31 “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”

Yes, who could possibly be against us? Satan tries, for sure, but God has our back, and in the end, we can say with Job that we will see our redeemer; we will see God.

Hebrews 9:24 “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.”

Therefore, we can boldly approach the Throne of Grace as He intercedes for us. How overwhelmingly wonderful is that?

Hebrews 4:15-16 “For we have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

We can honestly say that almost every moment of our life is a time of need when His intercession allows us to approach the center of grace and mercy, the throne of God the Father.

1 Corinthians 10:13 “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”

It has all happened before, so whether we end up enduring or escaping, whichever is better for us at that moment, there is a path forward. But we can never forget that we have a Great High Priest who intercedes for us with his blood if we fall.

1 Corinthians, 1:27 “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.”

After all, what better way to show that it is Him, not us, and make it clear? As the Reformation theologians pointed out, without the sufficiency of Christ added to our efforts, even the most talented person cannot accomplish God's purposes. However, in Christ, talent finds its true strength and meaning.

Matthew 19:26b “...but for God all things are possible.”

Finally, looking forward to Romans 8:31, anything, including the struggle of our discipleship, the conversion from balconeer or spectator to traveler or participant, is possible with God.

Quotes

“He whom God has touched will always be a being apart: he is, whatever he may do, a stranger among men; he is marked by a sign.” Ernest Renan (1823–1892), French writer, critic, scholar. repr. In *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 3. *L’Avenir de la Science* (1890).

Once we become Christians, we will never comfortably fit back into the world around us. We are like a fish out of water for the rest of our lives, marked, as the words of the Anglican baptism say, “as Christ’s own forever.” Those who try to return truly understand the aphorism that “you can’t go home again.” It is no longer home. Heaven is now our country, our home.

“God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and the learned.” Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), French mathematician, scientist, philosopher. “Memorial 1654,” p. 69, *Selections*, ed. R.H. Popkin, Macmillan, New York (1989).

We strive to know a genuine God known by real men, travelers on the road of grace, not the being found in the imaginings of balconceers, a god suited for Olympus, not Heaven.

God pity them both! and pity us all, who vainly the dreams of youth recall. For of all sad words of tongue or pen, The saddest are these: "It might have been!" John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892), U.S. poet.

Because you are in this study, those are not your sad words; instead, yours are striving for the "what will be," and it is our motto going forward in Christ, for we are becoming in Him. Paul expressed this in Philippians when he admonished us to look forward, not back. Philippians 3:13-14

"If I am not, may God put me there; and if I am, may God so keep me." Joan of Arc (c.1412–1431), French patriot, martyr. Quoted in *The Trial of Jeanne d'Arc*, ed. W.P. Barrett (1931) On being asked whether she knew she was in God's grace.

We strive to be at the center of God's will, where he wants us to be, doing what he has given us to do. Being in his grace will indeed move us to be in his will.

"God is subtle, but he is not malicious." Albert Einstein (1879–1955), German-born U.S. theoretical physicist. Quoted in Einstein, ch. 14, R.W. Clark (1973).

Our God is in many ways mysterious, so it takes effort and submission to apprehend him and often understand his purposes for our lives. However, far from being malicious, this is part of the threshing floor where the wheat of the Kingdom is separated from the chaff that is discarded.

"There is hope. There is hope everywhere. Today God gives milk and I have the pail." Anne Sexton (1928–1974), U.S. poet. "Snow."

Seek the Lord while He may be found. Isaiah 55:6 Today, God gives wisdom. Is your mind open? It is your pail, and you decide what to put in it.

"The gods help them that help themselves." Aesop (6th century B.C.), Greek fabulist. Fables, "Hercules and the Wagoner."

One of the great falsehoods in the history of religion is when this Greek pagan concept is wrongly applied to the Christian God. God helps everyone sometimes (rain falls on the evil and the good) ([Matthew 5:45](#)), and He always holds His children in the palm of His hand.

"God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!" Friedrich Nietzsche. The Madman, in *The Gay Science*, first edition, "Third Book," aphorism 125 (1882).

In Nietzsche's, and all others like him, fevered imaginings, they believe they are powerful enough to kill God or at least the belief people have in Him, not realizing they have fallen into Satan's trap and his folly. What a surprise so many have when they come face to face with the judge of all the earth and realize God is far from dead and his eternal Son sits in their eternal judgment.

Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 1

Since some parts of Section Three are too intense and detailed to be covered in one lesson, we will break some of the chapters, such as this one, into multiple lessons.

Today's theme: Where God's sacrifice meets our soul.

Or we could say, "Where the Blood of Christ meets the sinner's heart." When we use the term soul, we speak of our inner life expressed in our experiences: this would cover our mind, heart, will, and imagination. It also includes our thoughts, desires, passions, and dreams. It is basically how we relate internally. But your spirit goes further. It speaks of the same inner life concerning our interaction with God: It touches your faith, hope, love, character, and perseverance as they relate directly to our response to the demands that God makes on our lives.

Scriptural background: 1 John 4:10 "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice [propitiation] for our sins."

The focus is not on us but on God, his love, not ours, Jesus's sacrifice by the will of the Father, not on our efforts. We are concerned not with the Kingdom of Self, to use the analogy of Campus Crusade, where the sinner sits on the throne of their kingdom, but with the Kingdom of God, on the throne of grace.

Quotes for the week

"...yielding momentarily to sin when sorely tempted, acknowledged his error when calm reflection had shown it to him, and came forward with noble frankness and offered up his grandmother as an atoning sacrifice—in those old days when the luckless sinner could keep on cleansing his conscience and achieving periodical happiness as long as his relations held out." Mark Twain. Samuel Clemens, author, newspaperman. *Roughing It*.

Interestingly, in the paganism Clemmons pilloried, others always paid, which is a very poor shadow of the actual payment by the only "other" that truly mattered, Jesus Christ, the eternally begotten Son of God. Someone always pays; if not Christ, then you must pay.

"The effects of the incapacity shown by the popular leaders in all the great members of the commonwealth are to be covered with the 'all-atoning name' of liberty." Edmund Burke. English statesman, author, orator, politician, philosopher, and supporter of the American Revolution. *Reflections on the French Revolution*.

We all need a covering, even an imagined one, for we all feel naked (like Adam and Eve) in our sin. We are either washed clean (not covered but cleansed) by the Blood of Christ, or we put on our figurative fig leaves to cover over our unremitting sense of sin; for the Committee of Public Safety and the Revolutionary Tribunal, it was the fig leaf of liberty. Ultimately, fig leaves are the excuses we use to delude ourselves that our sin doesn't matter.

"I do not charge the merchant or the manufacturer. The sins of our trade belong to no class, to no individual. One plucks, one distributes, one eats. Everybody partakes and confesses, with cap and knee volunteering his confession, yet none feels accountable. He did not create the abuse; he cannot alter it." Ralph Waldo Emerson. American essayist, philosopher, and poet. *Essays and English Traits: III. Man the Reformer*.

This is an intriguing question about an unrelenting problem: Do we perpetuate sin/abuses by being part of the commerce, e.g., buying shoes/clothes/anything manufactured in third-world sweatshops or agribusiness that rapes the ground (not farms it) to leach out the last possible crop from the dying soil. If we start down this road, where do we draw the line? If not, how are we stewards of the earth as God

Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 1

commanded? (Genesis 1:26-28) There are no easy answers as we try to unwind this Gorgan's knot of moral complexity.

Concern: Expiation Vs Propitiation

We must understand the difference between expiation and propitiation and not minimize God's wrath over sin.

Expiation and propitiation differ, though most modern theology has lost the distinction. Here is the best distinction I have ever heard. Expiation: The offense is paid for, so the penalty for the offense is removed. However, the wrath remains. Propitiation: The result of expiation is applied to the wrath of God, and He moves from being against us to being for us. Through propitiation, we are restored into fellowship and favor with God, and the love of the Father replaces wrath. Ultimately, Jesus died to save us from the wrath of God. This could be a very long study on its own.

There have always been those who have argued against God's anger against human sin and, therefore, claim no need for this appeasement, as if the mere thought were denigrating their view of God. The very idea that God should need to be appeased was/is anathema to them, and therefore, the passion and cross are anathema also. However, what is forgotten in this approach is an appreciation of God's utter holiness and the clear attempt to put aside the obvious statements in Scripture concerning his wrath against sin.

“Thus, I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads,” declares the Lord GOD.” Ezekiel 22:31

Remember, many over the centuries have tried to drive a wedge between the “OT God,” noted in this verse, and the Father of Jesus, or the “NT God.” God does not change, as we discovered in Chapter 15, “The Wrath of God.” That doesn't work.

1. Why do you think the “progressive” church, and to some degree the “emergent” church, focuses almost entirely on God's love, allowing it to crowd out any other possible representation of God's nature?

This effort is as old as Christianity and seeks to negate the cost of God's love for us, or, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer noted in the *Cost of Discipleship*, for some people, grace is cheap. As long as you don't venture into the painful area of the cost of redemption, you can stick to the warm fuzziness of God's love (better, in my opinion, thought of as *luv*). This approach focuses only on acceptance and sees a God with only open arms. Holiness is never mentioned because that brings up awkward things they either deny or avoid dealing with.

Progressives generally never consider the cost of their propositions, whether in theology or politics; it's as if everything were free for the plucking and no one has to pay or put out the resources to produce. That just isn't so. Creation is a unified whole, and God is consistent in everything except where He explicitly notes his exceptions. These are rare and always clearly stated.

“Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amount to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience...” Colossians 3:5-6

2. How is sin like idolatry, and how is this insight a key to understanding God's wrath against sin?

We sin because we weigh what we want in the balance and consider it more important than what God wants. In effect, we worship what we want, bowing our knees to its demands, not God's. Despite its fleeting, ephemeral nature, we have left our first love (God) for another (our desire).

While the whole of pseudo-Christian and non-Christian arguments fight against the idea of God's jealousy and wrath, all sin evokes it because we have loved another and jilted God. We've asked God to share our bed of lust and expect him not to react accordingly. Yeah, right...

Interacting with the text

Goal: To grasp propitiation's biblical meaning and see how Christianity differs from the pagan usage or the lesser context of expiation.

While paganism tries to solve the problem by placating or covering it (much like the old blood offering sacrificial system), Christ solves the problem forever and eternally satisfies the requirement. The debt/cost is paid in full, not replaced with a temporary fix.

1. Explain propitiation in your own words. Explain what the word means to you.

(pp. 180-182) The answer will be personal, but it will be similar to what was said earlier.

What it means to me is that I don't have to look over my shoulder. When Jesus takes care of my sin, it is gone ("as far as the east is from the west [infinite distance]." Psalm 132:12) It is not almost gone, so I have to look over my shoulder to see if it is catching up with me. Think about that for a moment. The devil tries to do something technically he cannot (he can only pretend, trying to deceive us), and that is resurrecting our forgiven sin and beating us with guilt. It is all an illusion because that confessed sin is gone, gone, forever gone.

We need to take God at his Word and tell the devil to bug off.

2. How is propitiation fundamentally different in Christianity from a similar concept in Paganism? Use [Ephesians 2:8](#) to illustrate this difference.

(p. 179-182) In paganism, we try to placate a god who is upset/mad at us for some reason. It could be something as simple as paying too much attention to another god or some other not truly sinful/immoral action. We have just upset a cruel and heartless being who demands a sacrifice to appease their upset. We will spend all of our lives in the "appeasing of celestial bad tempers" or responding to the fluctuating whims of petty anthropomorphic deities, going from one sacrifice to the next in a never-ending parade of temporary appeasement, not necessarily tied to any "sin" or moral failure.

The biblical God, on the other hand, is not arbitrary and abhors only moral evil (sin). He is not bad-tempered, capricious, vain, or ill-willed. He is truth, goodness, and love to His very core.

In Christianity, we have been saved (from God's anger and wrath over sin) by grace (a gift bought by the Blood of Christ). It is not something we can earn by any sacrifice we can offer. It comes only through faith (trusting the God who offers it) and is His gift. We cannot DO anything to earn it; save one thing, bow our hearts in submission before God, and accept the gift He offers if you could misconstrue the acceptance/giving up as a work you did to earn your way. It is not, but that said, it is the hardest thing to do in all eternity: giving up all the other gods (real and symbolic) in our life and allowing God to be God and accept His gift of grace and new life in Christ.

Remember what Packer says on p. 181 near the end. "Has the word propitiation any place in your Christianity? In the faith of the New Testament, it is central. The love of God, the taking of human form by the Son, the meaning of the cross, Christ's heavenly intercession, the way of salvation—all are to be explained in terms of it..."

This response is from one of my old student workbooks: paganism—you do it; Christianity—God does it.

3. What is at the heart of the argument made by those who want to change propitiation to expiation? Why is refuting this argument important, especially when you look back at the sections of our study (anger/wrath/jealousy) preceding this chapter?

(p. 181-184) On page 182, at the top, Packer says, "And a gospel without propitiation at its heart is another gospel than that which Paul preached. The implications of this must not be evaded." though many today do just that.

Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 1

The root of their argument is that “there is in God no such thing as anger occasioned by human sin.” No anger, no propitiation is needed.

Packer notes that expiation centers on dealing with sin only. That is necessary, but as he notes, it is only half of the issue. Propitiation extends that initial solution to dealing with God's anger and wrath over sin. It goes the whole way, while expiation only gets us half the way there.

Packer points out the need for propitiation in [Romans 1:18](#) and [2:5-6](#), where God's wrath over sin is explicitly stated. I like Romans 3:24-26 where that wrath is tied to propitiation in the Amplified, ASV, Douay-Rheims (Catholic), ESV, Holman, NAS, and KJV/NKJV. (Change the versions at the link to see what I am referencing.)

The significance is in the “FULL” Gospel, not a partially palatable rendition. You cannot deal with the God of Chapters 14-17 without propitiation. With expiation only, you are stuck with explaining away these aspects of God and, in my view, ending up with half of the Gospel, and let's be honest. ***This is heresy.***

The expiation gospel (lowercase on purpose) is more like the blind justice of the American legal system. It has Jesus paying for the sin itself but not the result of the sin, what it did to a holy God. Western legal justice has no anger or wrath, only an almost scientific tit-for-tat payment for breaking the rules, with the judge being outside, unconnected, and dispassionate. This is not the biblical view, nor does it reflect the judge of all the earth. Biblically, God's wrath over sin ***must*** be propitiated.

This is from one of my old workbooks: So many believe substandard understanding is acceptable. Expiation is a form of idolatry where I say I can deal with my sin myself. We forget that the recipient of a gift (grace) doesn't make the rules; the giver does.

4. How does Packer explain the nature of God's wrath poured out on Jesus at Calvary?

(p. 184-185) He explains it as a function of holiness and the demands of God's moral law and quotes [1 Peter 1:16](#), “Be holy, for I am holy.” God is the one who decides. [Hebrews 10:30](#) For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The Lord will judge His people.”

Justice, righteousness, and holiness, what do people think these attributes demand, if not propitiation? God is a consuming fire in both the OT and NT. [Deuteronomy 4:24](#), [Hebrews 12:29](#)

Those who shrink back from the cross, like Spong did, don't care for God and his honor despite how high-minded they sound. They care about themselves and their kingdom of self. They have adopted the modern hamburger slogan, “You can have it your way.” Their thinking is like Swiss cheese, riddled with holes. The universe itself, with its immutable laws that often exact deadly payments when broken (try jumping off a building and argue that it is beneath gravity to let you die), makes the orthodox view of wrath and propitiation logical and consistent.

5. Why is “representative substitution” an important concept in Christianity?

(p. 186-187) The Christian belief is that atonement can only be understood in terms of representative substitution—the innocent willingly taking the place of the guilty, innocent blood for guilty blood (the life is in the blood, [Leviticus 17:11](#)), an unblemished sacrifice that is worth the price that sin has cost God.

Remember this: it is God who pays the price for sin as it seeks to destroy everything he has created. We at least get some measure of enjoyment from it ([Hebrews 11:25](#)). For God, it meant the cross, the death of His Son, and a wrenching in the heart of God as the Son bore our sin and was, for a moment, forsaken. That is a great mystery, but also the essence of paying the unpayable debt by representative substitution.

6. How is God's forbearance tied to propitiation?

(p. 187-188) God passed over sin in his forbearance, and this “passing over” was not forgiveness but only the postponement of the inevitable judgment. [Romans 3:25](#) Paul's point is that the public spectacle of

propitiation at the cross was a public manifestation, not merely of justifying mercy on God's part, but of righteousness and justice as the basis of justifying mercy.

Packer reflects this when he says, "Such a manifestation was needed" because "the public spectacle of propitiation, at the cross, was a public manifestation, not merely of justifying mercy on God's part, but of righteousness and justice as the basis of justifying mercy" in that his forbearance, his continuous "showing kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy" (Act 14:17) would tempt us to believe, like the apostate (my judgment and I accept its weight for I will be measured with the same rod) Episcopal Bishop Spong for instance, that the retributive justice that requires propitiation was not really who God was. This, in essence, denies the cross as valid.

Packer sums it up: "It is vital to his argument to show that the truths of salvation and damnation manifest the essential, inherent retributive justice which belongs to the divine character. In each case—the salvation of those who are saved, and the damnation of those who are lost—retribution falls; punishment is inflicted; God is righteous, and justice is done."

Men like Spong, however, are so blind that they cannot see the centerpiece, the redeeming heart, of the Christian Gospel. Why? Then repentance over sin is not an option.

7. In what ways other than propitiation is the death of Christ depicted in the NT? Explain how you usually think of the death of Christ and its application to your life.

(p. 189-191) Packer notes that Christ's death is depicted as:

1. Reconciliation or peacemaking
2. Redemption or ransom
3. Sacrificial self-giving
4. Sin-bearing or blood-shedding

Propitiation is a multi-faceted picture of God's final solution to sin, whereby the death of Jesus the Son dealt with the threat of divine judgment. As Packer states, here is the key: "Not only does the truth of propitiation lead us to the heart of the New Testament gospel; it also leads us to a vantage point from which we can see to the heart of many other things." When you get this right, everything else in our spiritual life becomes so clear, and you can see into the very heart of God.

How one thinks of the death of Christ is highly personal, but should reflect what has been discussed so far. As to its personal application, most people have not thought much about that. So often, students only come to terms with the request during the discussion, and then only if effectively drawn out.

What to Do Next

Reread this chapter, considering what we discussed today, as you prepare to deal with the second half of the chapter. Remember, we are examining the heart of the Gospel. This engine drives everything else in God's plan of redemption, spreading the sanctifying grace of salvation throughout human history.

Think of it this way: The heart of the Gospel still beats, sending its redeeming blood coursing through the Body of Christ, giving all of God's children life, health, and peace.

Goal: To forever meld God's justice with his mercy without diminishing either's significance.

Remember, most of what we learn about God requires us to balance the seemingly disparate attributes of his nature, in this case, his perfect justice with his perfect mercy. We should also remember that most heresy can be traced to trying to simplify the faith and remove these tensions from our understanding of the nature of God and his relationship to us and his creation. Therefore, let us always be willing to live

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within that dynamic tension and leave the resolution of this problem to God, in whom we trust. It is not just obedience God seeks, but faith and trust, which are tested in the fire of not knowing everything we want. We, like Job, have this lesson to learn.

The dynamic tension of our Christian beliefs means that we hang between the two demands of each issue, as Christ hung between the two nailed hands. We must maintain the balance and tension for the joy that is set before us.

Meditation on Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 1

Section Three is where Dr. Packer begins icing the cake he has spent the last seventeen chapters baking. He takes the title for this section from Romans 8:31

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”

We will take two weeks to navigate this chapter. After all, the heart of the gospel cannot be rushed through, especially since this is where God’s redemptive sacrifice meets our sinful soul and transforms us into a new creation. That needs a bit of pondering, especially because the central theme and primary theological concept is unfamiliar to most Christians: the biblical doctrine of propitiation.

The apostle John hits the nail on the head concerning this chapter’s theme when he says in his first letter:

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice [propitiation] for our sins. 1 John 4:10 NIV

That insertion of propitiation, which is the word used in the English Standard and King James Versions, notes the classic meaning of the Greek word used here, *hilasmos*, and helps to separate the fundamental biblical meaning from the watered-down versions that substitute the idea of expiation. Modern men have sought a less demanding term that is more amenable to progressive theologians who want to distance themselves from the need to propitiate God’s wrath against sin, if not deny it altogether. Propitiation, you see, has a long history of use in pagan religions, where men attempted to mollify the anger of the gods by making offerings to them. Packer notes that this “appeasing of celestial bad tempers takes its place as a regular part of life...” As a result, some might think this idea would be foreign to Christianity, but instead, we see the opposite. The Bible’s central theme is the need to deal with God’s anger toward sin by making an offering.

Those who argue against God expressing wrath against human sin have existed throughout Judeo-Christian history. But we already dealt with that argument when we looked at Chapter 15: The Wrath of God. Therefore, the claim that God does not need propitiation, as if the mere thought denigrated him, is bogus. However, that doesn’t stop those who claim the mantle of Christ from rejecting the idea that God should need to be appeased or admitting that it is anathema to them. But the problem doesn’t stop there, since if the wrath of God is anathema, then so is the passion and the cross, as well as the whole process of atonement. If you don’t believe those claiming the mantle of Christ go this far, then let me introduce you to retired Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong and his view that this is a barbaric understanding of God. However, note how, at the end of the second paragraph, he admits, “It is clear, however, that this constitutes the frame of reference that underlies most of the Bible.” Hear, hear.

Those who take this road have forgotten to appreciate God’s complete and utter holiness. I don’t want to explain why they embrace such heresy here, but I will say that we need to remember that God’s holiness is what drives him to deal so radically with sin. To have a Full Gospel, we must have a God who can be no less holy than he is loving, and despite how hard that is for some to see, it is through propitiation that God uses his enduring love to reconcile his utter holiness, which kindled his wrath against sin in the first place.

“Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; their way I have brought upon their heads,” declares the Lord GOD.” Ezekiel 22:31

Those who attempt to sidestep this issue try to argue that all of this wrath and propitiation stuff is a holdover from the “primitive” Old Testament view of salvation. Not so. Paul is very explicit while giving counsel to the Colossians.

“Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience...” Colossians 3:5-6

Therefore, as we start this section, our goal is to forever meld God’s justice with his mercy without ever giving short shrift to either. We want to balance wrath with redemption and the demand for holiness with loving forgiveness. But to do that, we have to understand and accept propitiation.

Dr. Packer introduces four New Testament passages covering this pivotal idea that he believes are of “transcendent importance” in understanding the biblical doctrine of propitiation.

1. Romans 3:21-26. ***God’s justification of sinners.***

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness because, in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at present so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

2. Hebrews 2:17. ***Incarnation of God the Son.***

“Therefore, he had to be made like his brothers in every respect so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

3. 1 John 2:1-2. ***Heavenly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”

4. 1 John 4:8-10. ***Definition of the love of God.***

“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

If you need to, please reread the lesson on God’s wrath, but in this chapter, Packer uses John Murray to remind us that his wrath is “the holy revulsion of God’s being against that which is the contradiction of his holiness” and I might add, against his very nature as God. Those who would carve out his holiness and wrath at the behest of his love create a caricature of God, fashioned in an agreeable image (a real idol by definition) that lets them continue in their sin.

We will close this first half of chapter 18 with Packer’s description of propitiation, which he takes from Paul and divides into three elements.

1. ***It is the work of God himself.*** Contrary to pagan religions, where man was the agent of propitiation, in Christianity, God, through Christ and the cross, accomplishes the atonement and propitiates his wrath against sin.
2. ***Christ’s death accomplished it.*** There must be an offering, which was prefigured as far back as Abraham and Isaac. Without a sacrifice, the shedding of blood (for life is in the blood; Genesis 9:4), there is no atonement, propitiation, or forgiveness.

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3. ***It manifests God's righteousness.*** Justice must be served, and it is through Christ's substitutionary death that a just judgment is rendered, the penalty is paid, and the debt is freed. Righteousness is upheld.

In closing, propitiation is the demand rooted in God's holiness and immutable character. God is not a man that he should lie. He cannot deny himself, for he is God, and what propitiation demands, love found a solution to. But, without a full appreciation of propitiation and its place in the economy of creation and redemption, the love of God immediately degrades into mushy sentiments that evil men manipulate to excuse their sin. Like the blind leading the blind, they lead a long procession of souls into hell and damnation.

Harsh words? Yes, they are, but holiness and the character of God demand them. Remember the words of the author of Hebrews.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Hebrews 10:31

May God's grace and mercy always bind your forgiveness to his demand for righteousness within your life, and may the blood of Christ forever wash you free of the stain of sin and be your eternal propitiation, now and forever, amen.

Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 2

Today's theme: Jesus' death becomes the centerpiece of history.

You can think of Jesus' death, the cross, or the Blood of Christ; they all reference the same event, the crucifixion. My preferred term is "nexus point," a singular moment in history, but most people do not understand the idea of a nexus point. Here is a short writing on [Nexus Points and Other Significant Moments](#).

Scriptural background: [Romans 2:23-25](#) "...for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God..."

We are all in the same place and can only be rescued by the same man, Jesus Christ.

Quotes for the week

The famous painting of The Death of Socrates by Jacques-Louis David, if examined as a crucifixion picture, reveals how Socrates' death was quite unlike Christ's. While his disciples are in agonies of grief, Socrates himself remains calm and poised; his philosophy has saved him from pain and passion. Christ, on the contrary, dies after hours of torment and doubt. Socrates imperturbably takes the cup of hemlock: Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane cries, "Take this cup from me." Oliver Taplin, British classical scholar. "Ideas: The Uneasy Marriage of Minds," *Greek Fire: The Influence of Ancient Greece on the Modern World*, Atheneum (1990).

This reminds me of the famous question, "What Athens to do with Jerusalem?" said by Tertullian as a counter to Justinian's argument that Christianity should embrace whatever was true in Greek philosophy, which, by the way, was not the same thing as saying all truth is God's truth (truth is truth to the end of time), but a warning against Greek philosophy's endless speculation, which while providing no answers in the hands of heretics feeds their imaginings.

It also draws me back to the beginning of our study, when we dealt with the difference between Greek and Hebrew (and subsequently Christian) views of knowledge. The Greeks speculated without any sense of responsibility, while the Hebrews could not.

"...let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses." Nehemiah 1:6-7

Nehemiah embraced corporate guilt (Nehemiah 1:6-11), something few in the Church do today. The righteous churches and denominations cast down the fallen churches with almost Pharisaic glee but are reluctant to embrace their own corporate sin. We are all, like Nehemiah, part of a sinful people, which for us is the Church, one, holy (in principle), and apostolic and corporate guilt is broad and deep.

Alas! and did my Saviour bleed,
And did my Sovereign die?
Would he devote that sacred Head
For such a worm as I

Isaac Watts (1674–1748), British hymn-writer. *Godly Sorrow Arising from the Sufferings of Christ*, l. 1-4 (1709).

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Savior bleed and Sovereign die—for such a worm as I? “I am a worm, and no man,” Psalm 22:6 says. Though David’s lament is turned to Christ on the cross, we are the worms God dirtied his hands for and for whom He bled out upon the ground. We had no worth but what his blood gave and still gives us.

Concern: Centrality of Jesus’ Death

Even when we understand the importance of propitiation and God’s wrath over sin, we still will not understand the absolute centrality of Jesus’ death to everything he was and did.

Absolute centrality—nexus point—the axis on which all history turns—is where the Son’s eternal decision ends up, a seeming paradox in its apparent insignificance. This minor event on a small hill overlooking Jerusalem is seen at the time as a mere pimple on the great body of the Roman Empire. Instead, it completely flipped history on its head.

“The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may avoid the snares of death.” Proverbs 14:27

We all die. The Jewish author of this verse knew this. What did he mean by “avoiding the snares of death?” It was something beyond dying.

1. Do you fear death? If so, why? If not, why not? The best time to answer this is in the middle of the night after you have been awakened and are lying there in the dark.
“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law;” 1 Corinthians 15:56

I have always feared death, which without God/Christ/salvation is the great negation, the essence of non-being, non-meaning, the “as if you never were” moment. I fear the unknown/being alone/rejection. Death holds those possibilities without redemption in Christ, which means being known, not being alone, and being accepted—true friendship in an eternal family.

Sometimes, I struggle to hold onto the assurance of the reality of God and Christ and salvation. The purpose of [Philippians 4:7](#) and the peace of God is that it guards our hearts to assure our salvation. I love how the Amplified says it:

“...shall garrison and mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

2. Do you think our culture insulates itself from death? If yes, then how? If not, then how does it make itself intimate with it?

Absolutely. On the one hand, our culture glorifies it in games and movies, but on the other hand, it caricatures it rather than facing it. “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow I die,” or “He who dies with the most toys wins.”

In biblical times, families had to prepare their bodies for burial themselves. Death was real and in your face. We have sanitized it. That is why modern soldiers have such a hard time with it. To ancient armies, death was personal, often hand to hand, face to face, not hundreds of yards away through a rifle scope.

Interacting with the text

Goal: To understand the centrality of Jesus’ death and how it relates to man’s rejection of God, as well as God’s extension to us of his peace, love, and glory.

This was planned before creation—“... the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” [Revelation 13:8](#), and “He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.” 1 Peter 1:20

1. What kind of impressions do you get of Jesus by reading the New Testament? Are your impressions different than Packer’s observations? If so, how?

(p. 191-194) I agree with C.S. Lewis that the Christ of the Gospels is impossible to pin down. He surprises you at every turn.

Packer talks of four things that drive Jesus and reveal him to those who want to know him.

1. ***Jesus is a man of action.*** Jesus did not sit around passively and wait for the lost to come to him. He went out and engaged sinners, the wandering and lost sheep of the house of Israel. He taught, preached, healed, and proclaimed the Kingdom of God.
2. ***Jesus knew himself to be the Son of God.*** Like the disciples, we learn that as we come to him, the more we deal with his divinity, the more we see him as our savior and God. We learn what Jesus knew: He was God's only begotten Son, who came for one purpose—to die for us and redeem us from our sins.
3. ***He knew he was to die to fulfill his messianic mission.*** He predicted his death and considered it the purpose for which he came. His blood was to be the covenantal ransom.
4. ***He considered his approaching sacrificial death a fearful ordeal.*** One way of coming to grips with the immensity of his sacrifice is to examine how difficult it was for him to face it. If nothing else, this should give you an idea of the absolute depravity of sin and how fundamentally God abhors it. The follow-on, of course, is our complete inability to deal with it using our efforts. We are fully impotent in this situation.

I don't disagree with any of these assessments. I would add that Jesus demonstrated many behaviors that, while not sinful when examined, are looked down on today. Three examples include:

- ***Braiding a whip and cleansing the Temple***—this “violence” was premeditated, righteously focused, yet many have a hard time dealing with it. John 2:15
- ***He was normal, except without sin***—His statement in Matthew 11:19 says that he drank wine and had frequent company with sinful people. He was a far cry from the expectations, especially when compared with the austerity of John the Baptist, but then he knew that these things, in and of themselves, did not defile him. Colossians 2:20-23
- ***He knew the difference between situational actions and situational ethics***—Most of us seem not to. Think of how he waited three days to console Mary and Martha so he could raise Lazarus, who was dead beyond a shadow of a doubt. John 11:1-44 He used the situation to great effect but never compromised his holiness.

2. How do you explain the necessity of Jesus' death? (e.g., Look at: Isaiah 53: 4ff, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:18ff, Luke 13:33)

(p. 193-194) One word: propitiation. If we were to be brought across the gap between us and God, someone must pay the debt and dissipate the wrath, and no son of Adam was capable.

- Isaiah 53: 4ff—“He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him...And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

He paid the debt for our iniquity and suffered the penalty for all our sins. More about that later.

- Mark 8:31—He knew but explained his necessary death and prophesied resurrection.
- Luke 9:18—Peter said he was “The Christ of God.” Little did they understand the true meaning of this statement, that he was the lamb slain for their sins.
- Luke 13:33—A prophet, and Jesus was the archetype of prophets, cannot die outside of Jerusalem. Despite the rumors of Herod's threats to kill him, Jesus knew once in Jerusalem, he would suffer the fate of many prophets before him and be killed for the convenience of the ruling elite. The High priest even makes an accidental prophetic utterance when he says, “Nor do you understand or reason out

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that it is expedient and better for your own welfare that one man should die on behalf of the people than that the whole nation should perish (be destroyed, ruined). “John 11:50

3. *New Question*—What do you think happens to those who reject God? Is Hell fair? Would a loving God do such a thing?

(p. 194-195) *They go to Hell.* Packer makes the point that to understand Hell, look at the cross and understand how God indeed reacts to sin by what he did to his own Son, who offered himself in payment for us. One thing I am sure about concerning Hell is that it means being absolutely and eternally forsaken. While bearing our sins, Jesus cries out in agony over being forsaken. Imagine that for eternity. Whatever Hell is, it is at least that.

Jesus also makes another statement about Hell that I want to use. When discussing Judas, he says, “The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.” Matthew 26:24 That is pretty drastic and hard to comprehend, but it points to the absolute seriousness of Hell.

When people ask me if I think Hell is fair and if a loving God would do such a thing, I say yes. Remember, Jesus is the judge, and he is also the one who bears the punishment (Hell) for every sin committed by those he judges. He is not sentencing anyone to anything he has not already endured in their place. Yet they still reject him, shutting the door of Hell from the inside and telling the only key to the lock that holds them in to bug off.

I will never presume to question God’s decision, for I say with Job, “He is God.” Remember, I am a worm. We focus on the wrong thing when, instead, we should look at the glory of our forgiveness, the extravagant cost that was paid, and the wondrous love that gave us eternal life. We should never, however, stand in judgment of God.

4. What does propitiation say to those who reject the sacrifice of Jesus?

(p. 194-195) Pay the debt yourself. From where will you draw the payment to assuage the holy wrath of a wronged God, wronged by your sin? When your life is examined in the bright light of God’s holiness, the true depth and depravity of your life of sin will be revealed, laid bare for all to see, and probably surprise even you. Go ahead; try and pay the debt yourself.

Packer is very explicit when he says, “Those who reject God face the prospect of losing all good, and the best way to form an idea of eternal death is to dwell on this thought...Calvary shows that under God's final judgment, nothing that one has valued or could value, nothing that one can call good, remains to you. Remember what Isaiah said, “...all my good works are filthy rags...” [Isaiah 64:6](#)

Think about that. There is no good left in me to offer God; even the good he freely gave me while I was alive is now gone. In the end, I am left with less than nothing.

5. What does it mean to be at peace with God? How are peace with God and propitiation intimately tied together?

(p. 195-197) It is not what so many think it is, of being in a state of tranquility. Packer argues that God’s peace brings us two things:

1. The power to face and to live with our badness and failings.
2. Contentment under “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (for which the Christian name is God’s wise providence.)

We can deal with what needs to be dealt with, and God is for us, not against us. Therefore, this peace with God is a “new relationship of forgiveness and acceptance.”

Where does this peace come from? It comes from Christ's propitiation. Upon his resurrection, when he appeared to his disciples, his first words were, "Peace be with you." Twice he said it. John 20:19, 21 The debt was paid, and peace was at hand.

Remember also what the angels sang at his birth (which once accomplished started him on the road to this moment), "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" Luke 2:14

Lastly, without the removal of sin and its penalty, you are at war with God—his enemy—propitiation stops the war and brings peace, everlasting peace with God—as his child.

6. How does the death of Jesus Christ serve God's love and glory?

(p 197-199) Note what Paul said to the Ephesians ([Eph 3:18-19a](#)), "[you] may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge." Greater love than the agape of God does not exist. He gives worth to the worthless, joy to the joyless, and a whole heart to the heartless. Where there was nothing, everything now is.

In [John 13:31-32](#) Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately." Packer notes that in heaven, where these things are better understood, all unite to praise "the lamb who was slain." [Revelation 5:12, 7:9-12](#)

There is a great cloud of witnesses ([Hebrews 12:1](#)) who marvel at God's sacrificial love and the perseverance of the saints (whom God takes pleasure in—remember the context of the Book of Job—God took pleasure in Job, and Satan argued he could bring him down).

In [Philippians 2:9](#), it says, "Therefore." God took pleasure in the humble sacrifice of his Son and "therefore" exalted and glorified him. In a smaller measure, he does the same with us, as the propitiating blood of Christ washes over the failures of our lives and cleanses them from all unrighteousness.

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Nineteen: Sons of God. This chapter will take two sessions to complete. We will investigate the very nature of what it means to be a Christian. Prepare yourself for some important insights as you interact with Packer's arguments.

We seldom consider what it means to be a Christian, but we will explore a balanced view over the next two lessons. Sometimes, we avoid looking too closely at things, lest they diminish us; not this; the more we look, the better it looks.

Goal: To never lose sight of the centrality of Jesus' death as an explanation of who he was and what he did.

Remember, what Jesus experienced was so horribly difficult that, as a man, he shrunk back from its difficulty while praying in the garden. Yet, he embraced his role in redemption despite its painful requirements. We, too, should accept the painful requirements of our redemption and sanctification and overcome any desire to shrink from God's discipline. You can't take your cross and follow Jesus if you are unwilling to bend down and pick it up.

I have never understood the prosperity crowd and their expectation of party, party, party for the King's Kids. I better relate to my athletic and academic years, where I learned the truth of no pain, no gain. Growth is **HARD** work, but the results justify it, just like Jesus, who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross. [Hebrews 12:2](#)

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Meditation on Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 2

In our last lesson, we asked, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” It is meant as a rhetorical question because there is no answer other than no one. No one can resist God. He who created all things and orders, even the minute functions of the universe, is supreme over everything. That does not mean that people and spiritual entities (Satan is an obvious example) do not try to act against us. Still, their efforts are doomed to failure, no matter how successful they might seem initially and how difficult our trials and tribulations might seem.

Right after the terrorism in London (July 2005), I wrote an article that included a prayer inspired by a famous chant from the main character in Dune's science fiction novel. Since some of you will not have read that posting, I will repeat the prayer here because I believe it is appropriate to the question of “who can be against us,” especially concerning the fear that opposition to the gospel can generate. The devil and his fellow travelers are not playing tiddlywinks by any means.

However, as Christians reborn in Christ Jesus, we have nothing to fear. Paul, the apostle, buoyed us with the knowledge that nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God. So inspired by [Romans 8:39](#), I offer this prayer, written as part of a response to the bombing of the London tube:

Fear Not
I will not fear
For fear diminishes my soul.
Though I walk through the valley of death
I will not fear.
Though all the forces of evil array against me
I will not fear.
Though my life is forfeit and my body destroyed
I will not fear.
For the peace that passes understanding comforts me.
The joy that is unspeakable consumes my soul.
The fire of the Spirit of the Living God resides within me.
Grace beyond measure is my birthright.
For I know that my Redeemer lives
And I absolutely know that I will see him on the last day.
Nothing in all of creation can change my eternal destiny.
So Christian, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees
And you will mount up with wings as eagles.
You will run and not be weary; walk and not be faint
For your God is the Lord, and your Savior is Christ Jesus.

Mankind's primary fear is death, including nonbeing and the death of self. Secondary to that fear is the pain and suffering associated with living in a fallen world driven by evil that operates within the limits set by the providence of God. Lastly, there is the overriding concern of judgment. While death is inevitable and pain and suffering are endemic to the human condition, the authors of Hebrews and Revelation make it very clear that we will all also be judged.

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment... [Hebrews 9:27](#)

I also saw all the dead people standing in front of that throne. Everyone was there, no matter who they had once been. [Revelation 20:12a](#)

In the second half of this chapter, Packer points out how looking from the vantage point of propitiation, the Bible comes into perspective and then proceeds to touch on five key matters illuminated by that truth.

1. ***The driving force in Jesus's life.*** Packer suggests reading the Gospel of Mark straight through. Four things about Jesus will become clear from that exercise.
 - ***Jesus is a man of action.*** Jesus did not wait for the lost to come to him but went out and engaged the wandering sheep of the house of Israel, teaching, preaching, healing, and proclaiming the kingdom.
 - ***Jesus knew himself to be the Son of God.*** The closer his disciples came to him, the more they had to deal with his divinity, and the more they came to see him as their savior and God.
- He knew he was to die to fulfill his messianic mission. He predicted his death and considered it the purpose for which he came. His blood was to be the covenantal ransom.
 - ***He considered his approaching sacrificial death a fearful ordeal.*** One way of coming to grips with the immensity of his sacrifice is to examine how difficult it was for him to face it. If nothing else, this should give you an idea of the absolute depravity of sin and how fundamentally God abhors it. The follow-up is our complete inability to deal with it with our efforts.
2. ***The destiny of those who reject God.*** To put it simply, we reap what we sow. There is no way to form an adequate understanding of hell except that it exists and encompasses the pain and grief Jesus experienced on the cross, including that soul-wrenching sense of loss (My God; my God; why have you forsaken me?).
3. ***God's gift of peace.*** In discussing the nature of peace, Packer makes an interesting observation: the right words do not guarantee the right thoughts. God's peace is not a mere inner tranquility, a sense of happiness, or any other emotionally centered things people claim to be. Instead, it is the power to live our Christian lives despite our failings and weaknesses. It is also, and this is primarily peace with God. As Packer notes, the state of God is for us, not against us. It is a new relationship with God, harkening back to the original purpose of our creation.
4. ***The dimensions of God's love.*** Like the Ephesians, we have a problem grasping the full extent of God's love. It is inexpressively great, yet we try to express its greatness. When we grasp the full dimension of God's love, we can see the cross and Christ's sacrifice as its centerpiece, freely given, freely received.
5. ***The meaning of God's glory.*** God's glory is centered on the act of redemption. Calvary exposes its heart, becoming a rising hymn to the Lamb who was slain.

The heart of the Gospel is the heart of sacrifice, the act of propitiation in which the unfathomable love of God gives worth to the worthless, freedom to the bound and life to the dead. Are you counted among the recipients? If not, open your heart and be counted and enter into the state of having no fear, being able to say, "I fear not, for God is for me; who can be against me?"

Chapter 18: The Heart of the Gospel – Part 2

Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 1

Today's theme: A Christian is... “the mystery of adoption.”

Note: Throughout this chapter, I want you to remember this important aspect of adoption: the adoptive parents choose the child. The child can only reject their choice. Adoptees cannot make adoption happen; they can only stop it from happening. Every Christian is an adoptee chosen by God.

I don't know what will if this image doesn't convey that you are God's child through his sovereign choice.

Scriptural background: [John 1:12-13](#) “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, *nor of the will of man*, but of God.”

A very important word in that verse often slips by our consideration, and it is “right”; God gave us the right to become his children. That is the great mystery: it starts with Him, not us (not blood nor will), but we have to exercise that right (rights are ours and cannot be taken away) he has given us. We have to believe in His name.

Quotes for the week

“Now, there is a sense in which all men are the sons of God, for it is to God that all men owe their life. And there is, further, as the New Testament has taught us, another and deeper sense in which men who are not may “*become*” the sons of God, through faith in Christ.” George Jackson (1864-1945). Methodist Pastor and Seminary Professor. *The Teaching of Jesus*, H & S 1903.

The failure in modern liberal theology is missing that oh-so-important distinction between being sons of God and Sons of God in Christ, the distinction between our initial life and our life eternal as adopted Children of God (caps on purpose).

“The first is that the Son of God became man. The second is why he became a man. That men might become the sons of God through him. Therefore, St. Paul says, “You are the sons of God. Not - you may be, if you are very good: but you are, so that you may become very good”. Charles Kingsley. English clergyman, university professor, historian, and novelist. *The Good News of God*, Macmillan and Co. 1887.

I love that statement's clarity because it cuts through so much false and broken theology and states the truth in simple terms that anyone can understand.

Concern: Will we define Christianity by standards other than biblical ones?

Isn't this what we have been fighting with this whole study? The beginning, the middle, and the end are found in the Word, “*sola scriptura*—by scripture alone,” which is the doctrine that the Bible alone contains all of the knowledge necessary for salvation and holiness. Anything else can lead us astray unless we are very careful, including all teachers and their writings, including this book and this study. I like Ronald Reagan's argument: “Trust, but verify.” That is also very Berean. ([Acts 17:10-11](#))

Jesus said in [Mark 12:29-30](#) “The most important one...is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’”

Heart (moral self-honor, ethics), soul (emotional self-feelings), mind (willful self-choices), and strength: love of God is exercised using the three parts that make up who we are and with *everything* we have in us.

Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 1

1. The mystery of the Trinity casts a new light on our interaction with and relationship to God compared to the Jews of the Old Testament. How is our relationship the same, and how is it different?

Same: God is God, and He (when thought of collectively) is the same God everyone in the OT dealt with. He is still King, Lord, Creator, Sustainer, and Covenant Maker.

Different: The Trinity models relationship, submission, sharing, and familial intimacy. The Son incarnate through Jesus makes the whole of God more approachable. Remember what Jesus said to the Apostles, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” [John 14:9](#) Our relationship with the Father is extensively developed with Jesus, our model through actions and teacher through Word and parables.

Paul said to the Athenians in [Acts 17:27-28](#) “God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”

Go back to the sense that everyone falls under [John 1:9](#), from Adam our father to God our creator; in that sense, we are his offspring.

2. How is this view of God different from the traditional Jewish view? (e.g., Think of the Holy Spirit)

It is a more intimate, connected, personal view than the traditional Jewish view, where God is more “other.” The question arises of whether Paul is talking about himself and other Christians here or mankind in general. He does say in verses 25-26:

“Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything since He *gives to all* life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.” [Acts 17:25-26](#)

It’s a little of both, I believe, since all mankind exists at his pleasure and he makes both vessels (for honor and dishonor—[Romans 9:21](#)), but to be indeed his offspring (be born again), that, sadly, is not everyone, but only the chosen among the many called. [Matthew 22:14](#)

Interacting with the text

Goal: To understand the centrality of the Fatherhood of God to our being Christian and then respond to how that requires us to act biblically.

There is a corollary to God’s Fatherhood: The Brotherhood of Jesus. If he knows us as brothers, then God is our father, and we have been born again by water and the Spirit.

1. What is unique about the Christian orthodox view of God as Father? How does this affect your relationship with Him?

(p. 200-202) A father is more than a creator; he nurtures, forgives, and always wants the best for his children. Packer begins this lesson by defining a Christian as someone with God for a father. Not like the unique only begotten Son, Jesus of Nazareth, but an adopted child, brought into the family by his (God’s) choice. That choice is the starting point and the central tenant upon which everything else turns, and Packer argues that we only understand Christianity as well as we grasp the meaning of our adoption as children of God. He says that this revelation of the Fatherhood of God is the climax of the Bible (top p. 202)

We have moved from the God we address as LORD, the great “I AM,” to the everlasting Father in whom we live and move and have our being and to whose throne of grace we boldly approach. [Hebrews 4:16](#)

2. How does the Old Testament name for God (Yahweh) fit into and interact with the concept of God as our Father?

(p. 202-203) Yahweh was holy, and in both testaments, holiness is emphasized. Still, in the OT, God's holiness emphasized his separateness, while in the NT, that holiness is looked at as what we are called to become because, as our Father, God expects us to be holy. [1 Peter 1:15-16](#)

For me, the attributes communicated by his revealed name (Yahweh) of eternal (past, present, future) self-existent sovereignty assure me that he knows and can bring to pass in me everything I need to become what he destined me to be. His arm is not too short, nor is his loving concern in accomplishing his will anything less than absolute. No matter how our earthly father may have failed us, God never will.

We are part of His whole family, given his name to carry ([Ephesians 3:14-15](#)); our lives are patterned after Jesus' relationship with His Father, who is our Father and God. [John 20:17](#)

3. How does the concept of "perfect ideal" confront the notion of "I can't deal with God as Father because my father was so dysfunctional/destructive/abusive/etc.?" What is the conceptual failure inherent in this argument for a person's claim to be unable to trust God as Father?

(p. 203-205) As the perfect Father, God gives hope to everyone, especially those with terrible or nonexistent fathers. As Packer points out, we could not judge our fathers as failures unless we had an ideal, an expectation of behavior and being we knew our fathers should live up to. That ideal comes from God, the perfectly loving Father to all his children.

So, anyone who claims their own father's failures prevent them from looking at God as a father is being disingenuous and looking for an excuse to avoid facing the demands that having God as a father and being a child of God places on their life. It's avoidance, pure and simple.

God's Fatherhood implies four things:

1. **Authority**—While God demands obedience, it is not arbitrary or authoritarian; that obedience is for our best. God's authority as our Father is never capricious or self-serving; indeed, *God does not need us*; it is *we who need him*.
2. **Affection**—Just as the Father has loved the Son, God loves us with an everlasting love, and He does that while we are still sinners. His fatherly affection is his gift to us.
3. **Fellowship**—If we are in Christ and reborn into the family of God, we are never wholly alone. God is always with us. Indeed, the Holy Spirit lives within us, for we are his temple built without human hands.
4. **Honor**—Just as he honors his only begotten Son, he honors us with the ultimate honor he can bestow an adopted child, being glorified as his children and spending eternity going from grace to grace. As he told Samuel, "For those who honor me, I will honor." [1 Samuel 2:30](#)

3. Why is adoption so significant to us as Christians? (See [John 15:15](#), [Galatians 4:7](#))

(p. 206-210) Our adoption is the highest privilege the Gospel offers a created being, higher than the angels. While justification has been traditionally considered a great gift by evangelicals since the time of the Reformation, it is just the vehicle to bring us to adoption. It is the forensic necessity to accomplish the familial desire of God. We are brought to friendship and sonship; those who were servants to the law are now sons to grace.

Adoption is also the basis for Christian life, and everything from our new birth onward must be understood with that in mind. It defines the expectations of our conduct.

4. Why is the sonship of the believer normative for the Christian? Examine the Sermon on the Mount in the light of this question.

Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 1

(pp. 211-213) Our sonship should control our lives, as it controlled Jesus's life. Packer calls the Sermon on the Mount the “Royal Family Code,” which deals with the basic issues of Christian obedience that sonship demands.

It demands our response in three areas, based on our adoption as sons:

3. **Christian Conduct**—Packer discusses three areas of expectation relating to our Christian conduct:
 - **Imitating the Father**—“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” [Matthew 5:48](#) “Be holy, for I am holy.” [1 Peter 1:16](#), [Leviticus 20:26](#) I especially like the Leviticus reference because it also includes [I, the LORD] “have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine” which points not only to covenant with Israel but our adoption as sons. We are separated and adopted into the family of God.
 - **Glorifying the Father**—We should be proud of our heavenly Father, and our primary prayer, given to us by Jesus, reminds us. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. [Matthew 6:9](#) We glorify him in many ways: [1 Corinthians 6:20](#), [2 Corinthians 9:13](#), [1 Peter 2:12](#), [1 Peter 4:16](#)
 - **Pleasing the Father**—We please not men but God. [Matthew 6:1](#) We are sons who seek to please our Father, just as Jesus, our brother, did. [John 8:29](#)

Christian Prayer—Our prayer is always prayed to God as Father. [Matthew 6:9](#) This prayer is never mechanical but always personal (son to Father). It is also bold and from the heart. We should not be afraid to ask God our Father for anything. [Matthew 7:7-11](#) He knows what is best for us, and what we may think as unanswered prayer is God answered what should have been asked. [2 Corinthians 12:7-9](#)

4. **A Life of Faith**—We live the Christian life trusting God, whatever the cost or consequences. “Do not worry...” should always be our motto, our guiding principle. [Matthew 6:25](#) We trust our heavenly Father.
5. What three words (a phrase) does Packer use to focus and summarize the New Testament message? Does his idea appear radical to you? Why or why not?

(p. 214) In “**Adoption through Propitiation**,” Packer notes five areas that adoption gives us the deepest insights into:

1. Greatness of God’s Love
2. Glory of the Christian Hope
3. Ministry of the Holy Spirit
4. Meaning and Motive of Gospel Holiness
5. Christian Assurance

These will be developed for the remainder of the chapter. I must admit that the first time I read this book, this idea appeared radical AND liberating. Each time I have studied it since, it hits home to my heart, reminding me of its significance.

6. How does YOUR adoption show you the greatness of God's grace? Who sustains this adoption? How?

(p. 214-216) While the title for this section is God’s Love, I have added “= Grace” to the heading for all the gifts of grace, with adoption being the greatest, come from God’s love. Packer correctly notes, “Adoption, by its very nature, is an act of *free kindness* to the person adopted. If you become a father by adopting a son or daughter, you do so *because you choose to*, not because you are bound to.”

But God’s love expressed through his grace does not stop with our adoption but sustains us throughout our lives and an eternity of love. [1 John 3:1](#)

7. Why does YOUR adoption demonstrate the hope at the center of the Christian faith? What is that hope?

(p. 216-218) Christianity is a religion of hope and faith, looking forward with joyful expectation. That hope is a promised inheritance that we will share in the glory of Christ with him. [Romans 8:17](#), [1 John 3:2](#) It looks forward to our redeemed bodies. [Romans 8:23](#) and the glorious freedom we will have as children of God [Romans 8:21](#) enriched by the family gathering we will have in heaven with God our Father and Jesus our Brother. I love Richard Baxter's words to his wife-to-be in the poem: *Lord, it belongs not to my care.*

My knowledge of that life is small;
The eye of faith is dim:
But it's enough that Christ knows all;
And I shall be with him

What to Do Next

Reread Chapter Nineteen: *Sons of God*. This chapter will take one more session to complete as we continue our investigation into the very nature of what it means to be a Christian. Think about the discussion we had during today's lesson and let those insights inform your thinking as you reread the text and address the next set of questions.

Let your adoption sink into the very marrow of your bones. You are God's child now. The arms that hold you are the *everlasting arms*, and they will never let you go.

Goal: To understand what it means to be an honest Christian

Begin to explore this week what it means to have God as Father, Savior (Jesus the Son), and Comforter (Holy Spirit). The Lord's Prayer focuses us on God as our Father. Think about why, when the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, he pointed them to the Father; why, of all the possible prayers he could have commanded, he commanded this one.

Many Christians miss the importance of this and the need to pray to the Father. Think about that this week in light of your adoption as a child of God.

Meditation on Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 1

Packer starts this chapter with a provocative question: "What is a Christian?" Admitting that there are many ways to answer that question, he states that the wealthiest answer is that a "Christian has God as Father." I love the progression of Packer's chapters. We have moved from settling the problem of sin through redemption by propitiation as *The Heart of the Gospel* to now arriving at the essence of redeemed souls being sons of God. While one cannot deny that historically and biblically, God has always been a father to his people, I have to agree that is not only the richest definition of a Christian but the wealthiest moment in anyone's existence: when we can call God our Father, we are rich beyond measuring.

Packer then addresses the fundamental problem: Those who say we are all children of God. The problem is that the position is not biblical. It is found nowhere in the Bible. Nada. Being created in the image of God and the fact that the light of Christ gives every man light does not make us his children; that comes either by birth, with him as a father (Christ alone), or adoption as an active decision and action by God. Being illuminated and having a good image only means having a good image. When people make a big deal over the ninth verse of [John 1](#), they then try to slide past verses [12 and 13](#):

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. [John 1:12-13](#)

Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 1

Packer boldly states that you can sum up the whole of the New Testament teaching in one phrase: the “revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator.” He further says that New Testament religion is “knowledge of God as one’s holy Father.” Packer hinges our successful understanding of Christianity on our knowledge of being God’s child and having God as our Father. That is a bold declaration. If you accept this, you can say, taking your cue from Packer, that the purpose of mankind is to become sons of God.

So, what is the problem? That is not how many who claim Christ define the heart of being Christian. Yet, everything else flows out from that. Why should we love God as defined by the foremost commandment? [Mark 12:30](#) Because he is our perfect loving Father and deserves all our love, encompassing our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

What makes this unique is that we are God’s children by adoption, not by right of birth (Jesus alone). We are sinners deserving of damnation, but God adopts us through Christ. How does he adopt us through Christ? Chapter 18 provides the foundation, the rock, for Chapter 19 by propitiating his sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. It is all interconnected; the one depends on the other.

A fundamental shift comes with the arrival of Jesus on the scene of human history. We go from an emphasis on our sinfulness and God’s holiness that drove the substance of the Old Testament to have our sinfulness fully dealt with by the cross and our lives being utterly changed by adoption as sons of God. We are new creations with a new and everlasting Father. No longer is the holy presence of God the thing that separates Him from mankind by veils and inner sanctums; instead, Christ makes us holy. The author of Hebrews tells us that:

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the *curtain*, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”
[Hebrews 10:19-22](#)

And earlier:

“Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. [Hebrews 4:16](#)

Into this glorious revelation comes the fallacious argument that while that is all well and good, it means nothing to those who have had bad human fathers. Packer rightly calls this silly. I will call it stupid. Most of what we learn in life is built on contrasts, and if our father was bad, someone else’s father was good, or we were exposed to good fathers through literature or stories in movies or television. The concept of a good father exists, and God is the supreme good father, the very archetype.

Packer points out four things that fatherhood implies:

1. **Authority**—While he demands obedience, that obedience is for our best. It is never capricious or self-serving.
2. **Affection**—God loves us with everlasting love, and he loved us while we were still sinners.
3. **Fellowship**—We are never entirely alone. God is always with us. Indeed, we have the Holy Spirit residing within us.
4. **Honor**—God honors us with the ultimate honor, being glorified as his children spending eternity going from grace to grace. As he told Samuel, “For those who honor me, I will honor.” [1 Samuel 2:30](#)

Packer argues that adoption is the highest of all the gospel blessings, including justification. While adoption depends on justification, the act of propitiation is only the means to the glorious end of

Meditation on Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 1

becoming a child of God. Adoption is God's excellent purpose; justification through Christ's sacrifice is his means to bring it about.

Packer summarizes the New Testament message with three words: "***adoption through propitiation,***" or we are God's children through Christ's sacrifice.

No wonder when the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, he began, "Our Father..." Amen to that.

May God grant you the grace to know and the peace to rest in your adoption into the family of God. When my daughter was growing up, she would rush to me for a hug whenever she had a crisis. What mattered most was that I was always there for her. In the same way, may you always know that God is there for you and that nothing, no, not anything, nada, can separate you from his love. [Romans 8:35-39](#)

Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 1

Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 2

Today's theme: A Christian is... continuing with the mystery of adoption.

Let's not forget how we ended last week: We know that God is there for us and that nothing, *no, not anything, nada*, can separate us from his love. [Romans 8:35-39](#)

Scriptural background: [1 John 3:1a](#) "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

"And that is what we are!" Indeed, it is what we are—not outsiders, but family. We are one blood with Christ Jesus.

[Romans 8:29-31a](#) "For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?"

Yes, who could be? Remember what Jesus says to those who come before him for judgment ([Matthew 7:23](#)) "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" He cannot say that to you *if He has ever known you*. Hallelujah!

Quotes for the week

"The spirit of prayer is the fruit and token of the Spirit of adoption." John Newton. English clergyman and former slave ship Captain who wrote *Amazing Grace*.

Token (representative of) and fruit (grows naturally from the tree of new life) and considering his hymn, the spirit of the amazing grace of adoption.

"The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of adoption" which God puts into our hearts, by which we know that we are His children. The Spirit bears witness to this great truth ([Galatians 4:6](#); [Romans 8:14, 16](#)). This sealing concerns the heart and the conscience—satisfying the settlement of the sin and sonship question." See next.

Note: God is the one who puts the Holy Spirit in our hearts...

"Just as the incarnation was foreordained, and yet took place in time; and just as the Lamb was slain from before the foundation of the world, and yet actually only on Calvary. Why then mention this eternal aspect of adoption? To exclude works and to show that our salvation had its origin solely in the grace of God ([Romans 9:11](#); [11:5, 6](#)). Just as if we should adopt a child, it would be a wholly gracious act on our part." Rev. William Evans. The first graduate of Moody Bible Institute. *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*, Copyright 1912, 1939, Moody Press Chicago, IL.

Our origin is solely in the grace of God, a loving Father who chose us as his children. Remember, it is the adoptive parents who choose to adopt, not the child. They can only reject the adoption, not cause it.

Concern: We will not grasp the importance of gospel holiness and joy.

Those two (holiness and joy) don't go together for some people. Many see holiness as dour and so demanding that they think it takes all of the delight and joy out of life. *Not true*. "Joy unspeakable and full of glory" ([1 Peter 1:8](#)) sounds delightful. It should be to you also.

Two important components of our Christian lives are the demand for gospel holiness and the joy of assurance.

1. What is holiness, and why is it so important?

Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 2

It is the command of God—“Be holy, for I am holy.” ([1 Peter 1:16](#)) It sanctifies unbelieving family members. ([1 Corinthians 7:14](#)) He, God, chose us to be holy. ([Ephesians 1:4](#)) Our prayers require it. ([1 Timothy 2:8](#)) He gave us a sacred calling. ([2 Timothy 1:9](#)) Because He who calls us is holy. ([1 Peter 1:15](#)) Since nothing unholy will remain in the end. ([2 Peter 3:11](#))

2. How is our blessed assurance tied to [Philippians 4:7](#)? “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds *in Christ Jesus*.”

What is guarded by the peace of God? It is that we are in Christ Jesus (saved) and that peace firmly plants our blessed assurance in our hearts and minds. This keeps our minds peaceful and settled since the only thing that matters in the end is our salvation.

Interacting with the text

Goal: To understand how the Holy Spirit, holiness, and our assurance in Christ are central to who we are as Christians, without falling into the traps of straining after experiences, slipping into antinomianism, or forgetting what the perfect Fatherhood of God means to our blessed assurance.

This is not an easy task, as witnessed by how few Christians who make the claim fully engage in their Christian life. Not only are the thorns by the wayside choking out some, but they have also invaded the field. This goes back to my early idea of the water in which we swim. Our modern world is inundated with the thorns of distraction and temptation: sports, media, and entertainment, which have taken over many churches and possessions, which we in the U.S. are tempted with constantly. Also, video games and so many other things fill our time and energy that could be better spent maturing in our Christian life.

1. How does YOUR adoption shed light on the ministry and purpose of the Holy Spirit's work in creation and your life?

(p. 219-220) Because it grounds the work of the Holy Spirit in the change God brings to our life from beginning to end (from new birth through sanctification—the working out of our salvation), not in the expectation that we have LSD-like transforming psychic events. The Holy Spirit is not there for us to have a magical, supernatural experience. As the Nicene Creed points out, He is the Lord and giver of life. He is also the comforter, counselor, and teacher sent by Christ who has three aspects to his work: I would also like to note that the Spirit is called he in the bible, not it or she.

1. *Focuses us* on our salvation by faith through grace in Jesus Christ.
2. *Reminds us* to trust and look to our heavenly Father
3. *Conforms us* to the family we belong to, making us like Christ.

2. How is YOUR adoption related to gospel holiness? With this in mind, how does [Hebrews 12](#) deal specifically with YOUR adoption?

(pp. 221-222) Our adoption reveals the meanings and motives of “gospel holiness,” Puritan shorthand for authentic Christian living.

Holiness means being “true to type,” that is, true to the Father, the Savior, and ourselves as children of God.

The motive of holiness is transformative, propelling us to purify ourselves to be like our elder brother and to submit to the training and discipline necessary to prepare us for the destiny that awaits us.

[Hebrews 12](#) reminds us that actual gain requires real pain but “produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

3. How is holiness related to God's law? How does adoption change our approach to that law and its demands for holiness?

(p. 222-223) It counters antinomian ideas and reminds us that while justification (salvation through the blood of Christ given to us by grace) frees us from the need to be justified by the law, it does not remove

the requirement for righteousness (right acting) as children of God. We have to look no further than Jesus, who, though holy and without sin AND not bound by the law, acted righteously in everything he did.

The law is now our guide and teacher, not our condemnation or judgment.

4. What does assurance mean to you? How are adoption and assurance intimately related?

(p. 223-225) Besides the personal answer, assurance is a problem that adoption addresses in complete confidence of our pardon and eternal life. We are the adopted ones, and in that lies our assurance—we are family, which is an abiding relationship. God, being a perfect parent, understands our need as adopted children to experience his love for us and the assurance that we belong.

5. According to Packer, what two sources witness our adoption as children of God? Why are both of these sources important?

(p. 225-227) Packer notes the importance of two passages in Romans 8:

1. *The work of the Father*—[Romans 8:29-30](#), our being predestined by God to be conformed to the likeness of our elder brother and using the past tense (called...justified...glorified), the emphasis is on its completed nature awaiting its final working out in real-time.
2. *The work of the Spirit*—[Romans 8:16](#), “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...if children, then heirs.” It is the nature of our adoption that, as children, we have an eternal inheritance witnessed by the Holy Spirit.

6. What question does Packer ask (in three forms) of each of us that can't be sidestepped and speaks volumes on the lack of appreciation of the principle of adoption in the Church now and throughout its history? How do you answer that question?

(p. 228) Do I, as a Christian:

1. Understand myself?
2. Know my real identity?
3. Know my real destiny?

Packer's answer is, “I am a child of God. God is my Father; heaven is my home; every day is one day nearer. My savior is my brother; every Christian is my brother too” and suggests we say it over and over and over again until we know it is wholly and utterly true.

7. Look at the 18 questions Packer asks on page 229. Ask each of these questions of yourself. What would happen if you asked yourself all 18 questions each evening for a month? Would that change your life? Why or why not?

(p. 229) This is very personal. I have created a printable checklist to assist you (at the end of this chapter).

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Twenty: *Thou our Guide*, and consider the importance of God having a plan for your life that fits within his more extensive plan for humanity and all of history. Think about why this knowledge is significant.

It means everything matters and that I belong. I am part of something extraordinary, something eternal, something grand beyond understanding. I have a place, a purpose, and a destiny.

Goal: To understand the significance of our assurance in God.

In the end, our grasp of our blessed assurance brings stability and unrelenting hope to our Christian Walk. Consider answering the eighteen questions every day for a month as an exercise. If you decide to

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do it, do it at the same hour each day so it will become a habit. Record your observations throughout the exercise, and note any differences as the exercise progresses.

Print and use the section at the end of this chapter.

Meditation on Chapter 19: Sons of God - Part 2

In Part I of this chapter, we began examining the significance of our adoption as sons of God. Dr. Packer argued that adoption is the highest and greatest blessing of all the blessings the gospel imparts to us, including justification. Indeed, the whole purpose of our existence is to become children of God, heirs of eternal life. Everything else is a means and facilitator to that end.

We have been examining the nature of being Christian, which has at its root the continuing mystery of adoption. As the Apostle John says in his first letter:

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” [1 John 3:1a](#)

Yes, we are children of God! But being part of that august family means there are expectations for each of us. God is a holy God, and he demands holiness from His children. As Packer notes, he demands “gospel holiness.” The term is borrowed from the Puritans as “shorthand for authentic Christian living.” This is distinct from “legal holiness,” which was the province of the Pharisees, centered on the religious forms, outward routines, and appearances that spring from self-centered motives. Gospel holiness is the natural desire of the child of God for authentic purity of life that flows out of our love and gratitude to our heavenly Father.

If we are to be transformed into the likeness of Christ and filled with the righteousness that comes by grace and submission to the will of the Father, then our goal is to be holy as he is holy. We are called to be blameless, pure, and set apart as Christ our Lord has been set apart, the firstborn of many brethren.

We don’t start holy. We start forgiven. Only throughout a life of ongoing discipleship do we grow into our holiness. Along the way, we will endure both corrections from our heavenly Father as he trains us up in righteousness and protection from the satanic assaults that go against our ongoing efforts.

The demand for holiness gives the law its proper place in our life. We are not antinomian, feeling free from the law, and sin has no meaning, and keeping the law has no purpose. Instead, we submit to what God demands. Jesus argued,

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” [John 15:10](#)

And John added:

“This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.” [2 John 1:6](#)

So, when we sin and fail to keep his commandments, we repent, confess our failures, and seek his forgiveness. After all, if you have been adopted, you are his children, which leads us to the other important aspect of our adoption, and that is our assurance, our understanding, and faith in the finality of what God has done. Jesus said:

“Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” [John 8:34-36](#)

This is one of the ongoing areas of dispute within the Christian faith, and it has been so since very early in the life of the Church. From the argument on one end of “once saved, always saved” to the other extreme of being a yo-yo between heaven and hell, going from saved to lost and from saved to lost as sin

and repentance twist us back and forth while we are praying all the while that the string connecting us to God doesn't break at the wrong time. Packer touches on the various positions that different elements in the Church have postured over the centuries.

While there appears to be no agreement on a final understanding of this on this side of heaven, there are some essential things to remember. Jesus never says to those sent to his left and damnation, "I no longer know you." No, he says, "***I never knew you.***" How can that be said to a member of the family of God? The son abides forever, and nothing can separate the child of God from the love of God, a love defined by an intimate knowing. Also, look at those sent to His left. They try to justify acceptance by their position and actions, not their adoption and love for Him.

Viewed in the light of our adoption into the family of God, assurance is not an idle part of the ongoing outworking of our sonship. As a perfect Father, he has sent his son to be the author and finisher of our faith, and he who has begun this good work in us is eternally faithful to complete it. He has told us so. Who or what can then separate us from the love of our heavenly Father? Indeed, who?

Packer closes with a discussion of "The Great Secret." How little regard within the history of the Church has been given to the truth of adoption. It is almost as if it is our secret identity, hidden in the corner of our faith and seldom talked about. As Packer says, this is the Christian's secret to—a happy life—yes, certainly, but we have something both higher and more profound to say. This is the Christian's secret of a Christian life and a God-honoring life; these aspects of the situation matter. May this secret become entirely yours and fully mine. Hallelujah and Amen!

Then, Dr. Packer closes the chapter with a series of seventeen questions designed to test how well we understand who we are and who we are called to be. I suggest you meditate on these questions every night for twenty-eight nights (the amount of time it takes for something to become a habit), and ***I guarantee*** you that your life will not be the same when you are done.

May God our Father bless you and keep you. May you fully grasp the significance of your adoption as his child, of Christ as your brother, and what that acceptance means for the rest of your life, both in how you live and the trust that guides your every step along the way. Hallelujah!

Check List for the 18 Questions of J.I. Packer testing our daily commitment to a God-honoring Christian life

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30-day listing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
1. Did I try to understand the meaning of my adoption today?																														
2. Do I value it above all else?																														
3. Did I remind myself of my privilege as a child of God today?																														
4. Did I seek full assurance of my adoption today?																														
5. Did I dwell today on the love that God has given to me?																														
6. Did I treat God with all the respect due to my Father in Heaven?																														
7. Did I see Jesus today as both brother and Savior/Lord?																														
8. Did I think today of his closeness and his caring?																														
9. Did I hate what God hates today?																														
10. Was I sensitive to evil today?																														
11. Did I seek to avoid it (evil) today, lest I grieve my Father?																														
12. Did I look forward today to the great family reunion?																														

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13. Did I feel the thrill of this hope today?																												
14. Did I love (agape) my Christian brethren today?																												
15. Am I proud of my Father & the family I belong to today?																												
16. Did I present the family likeness in my life today?																												
17. Where did I lack it (family likeness) today?																												
18. Did I confess my sin & ask forgiveness of my heavenly Father today?																												

Chapter 20: Thou Our Guide

We all need a little help finding our way from one who knows the way (His Way): the path, the dangers, and the solutions.

Today's theme: God always has a plan for us.

Now that's a plan—that God has a plan for us. He has a place for us, a path for us, a purpose for us. The almighty, omniscient Lord of all that is has a plan for you and me. How good is that?

Scriptural background: *Psalms 25:9* “He guides the *humble* in what is right and teaches them his way.”

A plan is useless unless you are willing to follow it; that is where humility comes in. Without it, God's plan for you is useless.

Quotes for the week

“A blocked path also offers guidance.” Mason Cooley, US aphorist. *The Columbia World of Quotations, City Aphorisms, Fourth Selection*, New York, 1987.

Knowing where not to go is almost as valuable as knowing where to go; it's just a matter of elimination. God cares about the consequences and sometimes protects us from where we shouldn't go.

“Where there is no vision, the people perish.” *Proverbs 29:18*.

In this case, vision = plan or purpose, if you will. We all need a reason to exist, a sense of purpose.

“I so love the Spanish proverb “God says, ‘Choose what you will and *pay for it*,“ which stresses that life holds no easy answers, that conscious choices are often costly ones. *We must live with and pay for their consequences*.” Marsha Sinetar. American author. *To Build the Life You Want, Create the Work You Love: The Spiritual Dimension of Entrepreneurship*. St. Martin's Press. 1996.

Many in the current generation don't seem to understand that everything has to be paid for by somebody, and there is **no free lunch**. If I am going to pay anyway, I would prefer it be in the service of my eternal destiny in Christ Jesus.

Concern: We would know what to do and do it.

Knowing doesn't guarantee doing, but at least it's a plan.

“I asked the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” He answered, “Do you not know what these are?” “No, my lord,” I replied. So, he said to me, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty. *Zechariah 4:4-6*”

Not by the way the world solves its problems: might and power, our abilities, but by the wisdom and guidance of God.

1. Looking at this scripture, how do we usually decide what to do?

We usually make decisions based on the options given by our skills, resources, and abilities. To be truthful, we typically give God lip service until something dramatic happens. He is not the first choice for most small things. We can handle those ourselves; that is what we tell ourselves, despite the admonition to be faithful in the little things. How can we be faithful if we leave God out of it? Honest, inquisitive, and listening prayer is not normal for most Christians.

2. What does this scripture say is the right way to make decisions?

We must balance our decision-making responsibility with God's guidance ([Philippians 2:12-13](#)). We need to pray, listen, and obey. Remember, disobedience is like witchcraft. We cannot expect to perform a ritual (rote prayer) and expect to get what we want. When we seek God for guidance, he expects us to be obedient.

Interacting with the text

Goal: Understanding God's plan (wisdom) for our life and accepting it (be obedient) is an obvious point of contention within our modern, self-actualized social conditioning. It is a real and legitimate question: *who owns our life, us or God?* If God owns our life, to mirror Paul's question in [Romans 9:19-20](#): "You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?"

We are not the maker but the thing made, formed for a purpose. Can you feel the resistance rising to that statement? I still feel it, even now. It is a fundamental part of our old man who is with us until we die.

1. Why do we have such a hard time figuring out what to do with our lives?

(p. 230) It is a chronic problem that we fear will miss God's guidance. Think about why Packer chose the word chronic (Lasting for a long time or marked by frequent recurrence, as certain diseases. It is also being subject to a habit or pattern of behavior for a long time)

We are not good listeners; God speaks so often in a still, small voice. Couple that with the sad fact that we don't know God well enough to separate his voice from the cacophony of others in our lives, and we have a hard time separating the wheat from the chaff.

We must also deal with the prevalent existential view captured in the poem *Invictus*: "I am the captain of my soul..." No, we are not.

2. Why do you think this problem of indecision is so chronic in our modern lives (almost like an ongoing illness)?

(p. 231) I know some people will resist the notion that they are infected by the *water in which we swim*. On one hand, the existentialism many of us grew up in, and on the other hand, the current climate of distrustful relativism. We don't want anyone to tell us what to do, but when left to ourselves, we tend to make decisions based on whims or the moment's emotions. When we do try to be seriously rational about it, when we engage God and others, we are:

- *Untrained and unprepared* (we find it hard to believe that God cares about us or would take the time to help little ole me, and I am left to figure it out myself).
- *We have too many choices*, voices, influences, and possible outcomes that we are often overwhelmed.

You should know that when push comes to shove, God generally simplifies things (think of the rich young ruler [so many options] vs. the disciples [so few choices] and Jesus' advice to reduce your options). That goes against our modern expectations of keeping your options open. This goes back to being the Captain of our soul and our decisions.

3. What two things do we depend on if we believe that God will eventually guide us?

(p. 231-232) We must believe in:

1. *The reality of God's plan for us*. Packer uses [Ephesians 3:11](#) (He has an eternal purpose) and [Ephesians 1:10-11](#) (He works in the fullness of time for our inheritance and our predestined purpose) to make his point.
2. *His ability to communicate that plan*. Packer uses Phillip, Peter, and Paul as examples of divine guidance. Remember [Psalm 32:8](#): "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" and [Isaiah 58:11](#): "The Lord will guide you continually, And satisfy your

Chapter 20: Thou Our Guide

soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.”

Without those two things, we are wasting our time. So, we must have a right heart and be ready to listen and act.

4. God explicitly says in the Scriptures that he will guide us. Give at least two examples.

(p. 231-233) There are numerous examples in the text and others in scripture. As a teacher, it is helpful to have people think about their choices of guidance examples and why students chose those examples. My favorite is Joseph in [Genesis 50:19-20](#): “Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? [I am not your judge—God is] But as for you, *you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good* to bring it about as it was meant to save many people alive.”

It all boils down to trusting God and his plan for our lives, no matter what happens.

5. Why do our attempts at receiving guidance from God usually fail? Do you have any personal examples of this?

(p. 233-235) We so often overlook the obvious and reach for the, as Packer says, the will-o'-the-wisp (a person or thing that is elusive or allures and misleads). As I noted before, God is usually pretty simple and straightforward, and we must be careful of depending too much on “inward promptings” at the expense of His already-revealed Word. While inward guidance of the Spirit is real, we should not rely on it for everything. Some decisions are simple and straightforward, guided by the wisdom of his Word (e.g., [Psalm 119:133, 169](#) “Direct my steps by Your word, And let no iniquity have dominion over me...Let my cry come before You, O Lord; Give me understanding according to Your word.”)

While we may “hear” or “feel” the choice, it is not something we can expect. It is God’s choice. Often, the problem is that we already know God’s will concerning our question, but we want another answer, so we wait for a “prompting” that will give us a different choice.

6. Packer argues for the reasonable and rational application of God's word as a legitimate form of guidance. Do you agree? Why or why not? What do you think about his six common pitfalls? Please explain how you agree or disagree with each of them.

(p. 236-238) I agree wholeheartedly. Too many of my Charismatic/Pentecostal friends have been brought to problems by expecting only overt prompting as the only legitimate form of guidance rather than the exceptional form, as scripture makes so abundantly clear. The six common pitfalls are our unwillingness to:

1. **Think** (it’s hard work to think things through)
2. **Think ahead** (not guess ahead, but weigh all of the factors and think ahead)
3. **Take advice** (we seem to forget the admonition to many counselors on the one hand, and the other, we are often easily swayed by a magnetic personality)
4. **Suspect oneself** (we are often too self-assured, or arrogant, or cocky, or <insert your favorite here>)
5. **Discount personal magnetism** (just because someone is famous or charismatic doesn’t make them right)
6. **Wait** (patience is a virtue when dealing with God)

We should ask ourselves what God seeks when he guides our lives—His Glory! Therefore, God’s guidance can never go against God’s Word. There are always biblical checks and balances to what we think God is saying to us.

7. Do you expect God's guidance to produce a trouble-free life for you? Packer says this is wrong. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

(p. 239-240) Many modern Christians believe (or did believe) that, especially those influenced by the prosperity gospel (lowercase on purpose).

I agree with Packer. We are called to follow Jesus, which means picking up our cross. He did not have a trouble-free life and warned us we wouldn't either ([Matthew 5:11](#) "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake." [Luke 6:22](#) "Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake.") Remember how Paul was warned of trials—[Acts 20:22-23](#).

Packer uses Elizabeth Elliot's life as an example of redeemed hardship (reminiscent of Joseph). I love her statement, "I simply had to bow in the knowledge that God was his own interpreter... We must allow God to do what he wants to do." So be it.

8. Why is [Joel 2:22-26](#) important to this guidance discussion? Explain.

(p. 241-242) Look at the passage:

- 22—**God will provide** (remember the Sermon on the Mount and God's provision)
- 23—**Provision through the former and latter rain** (faithful growth, increase)
- 24—**Abundance again** (God works in cycles)
- 25-26—**Fix the broken, fill up the empty** (note that the "locusts" that consume our lives are **God's army**).
- **Closes with "My people shall never be put to shame."** (Remember, that is shame by God's, not man's definition. How might that be different?)

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Twenty-one: *These Inward Trials*, and consider how you can believe the right doctrine yet go so wrong in your application that you destroy the very work you are trying to do.

Sometimes, there is a considerable difference between the letter and the spirit of the law, which is reflected in our doctrine and its everyday application down where the rubber of our beliefs meets the road of our actual life. We have an advantage in that God our Father will not let us ruin our souls (read [Hebrew 12](#)) unless we break through every closed door and resist every correction. The key, however, lies in the difficult areas of active ongoing humility and daily repentance.

Goal: To listen to God as he leads us along the path of righteousness and then act on that guidance.

It is one thing to know what God has called you to do and quite another thing **to do it**. Many say we would do it if we only knew what God wanted. Would we, or is that a convenient excuse to avoid dealing with what we already know we must be doing and aren't? I have some seminal advice: do what you know to do, and when you run out of those challenges, you can tell me that you wish God would say what you should do.

I love the Nike slogan, which is apt here: "Just do it!" Clear your plate of the obvious, and then you can ask God for more. A refrain is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, who says, "Do few things, but do them well; take your time; go slowly." Don't let what you know to do remain undone. If you do that, maybe God's guidance on the following things will become clear.

Meditation on Chapter 20: Thou Our Guide

Now that we know we are sons of God, what does this insight mean to our daily lives and the decisions that face us each day? Does God help us with these decisions? Does he have a desired outcome for how our life turns out and what we decide to do along the way, or are we on our own? If God is concerned, how detailed is that concern? Is it for the big picture only, or does our heavenly Father get into the little things, the minutia of our lives? We will look at these essential considerations, which go to the heart of our decision-making process and the responsibility inherent in our choices.

People often say, “If only I knew the right thing to do [what God wants me to do], I would do it.” I have even said the same thing myself, but I know that while this may sound good, it’s not true, and in the end is just a good excuse, and the “if only” is a way to get ourselves off the hook of responsibility. We try to transfer the accountability or blame to God. We get to save face and appear spiritual. That said, it is true that sometimes the frustration over what we should do is real, and it exposes the very genuine dissatisfaction with flying blind and not being sure what God wants from us.

With that problem (both our excuse and legitimate concern) as background, Packer begins this chapter by admitting that divine guidance is a chronic problem for Christians. While many don’t know God well enough to hear him clearly when He guides them, others don’t believe that God cares enough about their daily concerns to tell them what to do. While most Christians want God to guide them, so many are frustrated with their inability to be sure if God is speaking, they are being deceived, or they are just plain missing it.

The fundamental truth that Packer wants us to grasp in this chapter is that God has a plan for every one of us, and it begins with two essential truths:

1. ***God’s plan for each of us is real.*** Theologically, God’s plan is multifaceted. He has an eternal purpose, a plan for the ages that applies to all creation across the span of time (alpha-omega). It is his big-picture plan. But our heavenly Father also has specific destinies for each of us, just as a potter has a specific purpose for the vessel he is creating as he molds it on the wheel. This unique specificity goes so far. Jesus said that even the hairs on our heads are numbered, and God notes everything we do ([Matthew 10:29-31](#)). The Psalmist knew that from the moment of conception, God had been working out a plan for his life ([Psalm 139:13](#)). Isaiah noted that God had appointed all things (including the events of our lives) in their proper time ([Isaiah 44:7-8; 24-28](#)).
2. ***God’s ability to communicate that plan is actual.*** We can rightly admit that it is one thing to have a plan and another thing to make that plan known, which is a necessity if we are going to make decisions based on it. Packer argues that God communicates what he wants us to know about his plan in many ways: through biblical prophets, in his written Word, through miraculous or coincidental occurrences, in dreams and visions, by directly speaking to us both audibly and through that still small voice that nudges us along or turns us away, and in the circumstances and events that constantly confront us. Put simply, doors open, doors close.

So why do we fail to see or correctly interpret God’s guidance? This is an important question, and Packer argues the problem is that we distort the evidence, overlooking the obvious and demanding the esoteric or miraculous, thereby opening ourselves to easy delusion—how often do you test the “spirits” when you think God is “guiding” you? We start with the Word. There is no other option. Everything we think God may be saying ***must*** be assessed against what we know he has said before. ***God does not contradict himself.*** He will not tell you to leave your wife for another woman who is your “soul mate” because he forbids that in his Word. When examined properly, it is remarkable how many “leadings” people get are biblically unacceptable.

Packer notes one major area that seems consistently problematic, especially for younger Christians: vocational choices. This area is extensive and encompasses things as diverse as choosing a school,

choosing a wife, and everything in between. Packer states that these kinds of choices have two essential features:

1. **Scripture.** A problem develops because scripture may not directly apply to our decision but only circumscribe the lawful possibilities facing us, leaving us with many possible correct or acceptable choices. What are we to do? David was a shepherd because his father wanted that until God changed it. We do the acceptable until God shuts that door and opens another.
2. **God's prompting.** Without specific, but with only general scriptural direction, we can discern God's definitive direction through promptings and inclinations, open and closed doors, about which we seek a settled peace that says *go this way*. However, God's prompting is special, not the primary process, and requires an intense prayer undergirding to break through the clutter of our lives. Even then, God doesn't steer a parked car. He can correct our course, but we have to move to do it. He will adjust your direction as necessary if you are moving and not stuck motionless.

Packer admonishes that all choices are not of this type or do they have these two characteristics. He sees a serious problem with our proclivity in treating all of life as if it fits into these simplistic categories.

It is too easy to see everything in this prompting context, which invariably leads to Scripture, rather than being studied and applied with wisdom and grace, developing our character and setting the context of our decisions, being used instead as a talisman or dousing tool since what we want is to get right onto direct impressions from God. That is pretty dangerous stuff when we actively do that. I am not talking about the legitimate voice of our conscience and the counsel of wisdom and common sense extolled in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, but an "internal prompting" read as the Holy Spirit leading us by inward promptings. That may happen, but not because we demand or expect it. That is abrogating our responsibility.

I must be very careful to say that God leads us with a still, small voice speaking to our hearts and prompting us. Still, rather than the rule, being the moment-by-moment steering gear of our lives, it is the exception, the only as-needed and sometimes not even then rare occurrence. The very real danger is making this the normative form of decision-making. It is not for naught that Paul warns us to test every spirit to see if it is of God since these still small voices are spiritual and not always from our heavenly Father, and He admonishes us to study to show ourselves approved.

Even Paul, who was among the most significant and most sensitive of saints to the guidance of God, could say to the Philippians:

"I don't know what to choose. I could keep on living and doing something useful. It is a hard choice to make. I want to die and be with Christ because that would be much better. But I know that all of you still need me." [Philippians 2:22-24](#)

Let's be honest: Jesus never said this would be easy. However, I believe that because we live in a culture that exemplifies 10 ways to succeed in life and five things you need to know to do anything, we want everything to be spelled out in a few easy steps that reduce the thinking load to the absolute minimum and make the decisions automatic. We want everything 1, 2, and 3 so that we can also check off our compliance and cover ourselves by arguing that we did what we were told to do. That path eventually leads to either legalistic compliance or magical expectations. It becomes either I did it, why are you upset, or I did it, so why didn't it work out like it was supposed to?

Packer discusses the six common pitfalls we fall into when making decisions and admits that there are no easy answers to the questions in the end, noting that sometimes God's true guidance leads us into trouble, not out of it, which for many seems paradoxical. While I will not cover all six of those pitfalls, I want to look at the first one: unwillingness to think. Noting [Deuteronomy 32:28-29](#), Packer reminds us that God wants us to have good sense and consider whether we are going astray. We need to think, and Paul tells us in Romans 12:1-2 that we must be transformed by renewing our mind, which includes all of our

Chapter 20: Thou Our Guide

thinking, reasoning, and discernment faculties. We do this, Paul says, to know God's good and perfect will for us. Walla!

Conclusion: The processes of a renewed mind are essential to ascertaining God's will and his essential guidance for our lives. Hey, our heavenly Father did not call us to come and reason with him for no purpose. ([Isaiah 1:18](#)).

This brings us to what, for me, is the real issue: trust. Sometimes, we must choose based on everything available and trust God to care for what follows. At that moment, when we work through our decision, we are tested, not for the accuracy of our decision, but on the submission of our hearts. Our motives are weighed in the balance since they are the ones who most greatly influence our decision points. We could make the right decision but for the wrong reasons or the wrong decision for the right reasons. In either case, God looks upon and judges our hearts, and at these moments, we should be looking at what is really at the center of our decision process.

Packer closes with an important point, one that we should hold dear.

Thus, it appears that the right context for discussing guidance is confidence in God, who will not let us ruin our souls.

Isn't that the real issue? If, in the end, we do the best and most honest thing we can do with a humble and submitted heart, if we make our decision with principled thought and discernment and openness to whatever way God may choose to lead us, can we trust God to make it right, to work out everything for our good? Absolutely! He is our **FATHER**, and he has promised to do just that. ([Romans 8:28](#))

My closing prayer for you is this: "May God's grace and wisdom and discernment guide everything you do and say today and for the rest of your life, and may your trust in his everlasting arms never fail as you boldly step out from the Throne of Grace to do his good and perfect will to the best of your ability. Amen."

Chapter 21: These Inward Trials

Remember the focus for this chapter: inward, inward, inward. It is all about our reaction to things and our subsequent decisions, not the things themselves.

Today's theme: How easily we go off the narrow path and misapply the truth we have learned.

It appears to be very easy to lose focus and forget that steering our lives requires constant attention. We don't have an effective autopilot, though some seem to think allowing their lives to drift amounts to the same thing. Falling into the trap of relying on habits can simplify our daily decision-making, but it can be both dangerous and spiritually destructive. Our moral responsibility as we pursue righteousness means we must ALWAYS, wherever possible, have our hands on the wheel.

Scriptural background: [Matthew 7:13-14](#) “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Narrow is one thing, but the problematic admonition gets us—it is more work. Why is there always more work? That question could take its own book to answer. I think the short answer is that God worked/labored/created (think that didn't take real effort—just because you are almighty doesn't mean it isn't work) for six days and then “rested” for one. Creation itself is founded on the principle that work is the norm and rest the exception and then only after the work is done... Couple that with God's command to Adam in Genesis

Truth has a specific/narrow meaning, while a lie is wide, malleable, and generally follows some form of you can have/do what you want.

[1 Corinthians 3:9-13](#) “For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God, which was given to me as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear, for the Day will declare it because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.”

I love the phrase, *fellow workers*. One way to look at the beginning of verse 9 is in the “work” of the Kingdom, we work alongside God (fellow workers), but when we look at ourselves, we are God's field (to be plowed, seed planted, growth cultivated, and fruit reaped) or his building (designed, foundation laid, walls erected, and roofed over). The seed and foundation is Jesus Christ. He produces good fruit and a sound structure unless thwarted by the “fellow workers,” which can include us when we thwart our own building or field/garden.

We need true, honest theology. Remember, in the end, there will be no place to hide, nowhere to run—we **WILL** be exposed for what we really are.

Quotes for the week

“Partisanship is our great curse. We too readily assume that everything has two sides and that it is our duty to be on one or the other.” James Harvey Robinson, American Historian.

I read this admonition as addressing the idea of having two possibly acceptable sides. I do not believe he is talking about the problem of good and evil being at odds with each other. The problem arises when ideas (capitalism/socialism/communism) that have limitations are applied as if they are universal truths. Biblically, the problem arises when counter-evidence to a position is dismissed (baptism is a good example

Concern: We would want to stay children in the faith, protected and pampered.

since there is evidence for pouring that those who accept only immersion refuse to deal with). Paul dealt with this tendency in [1 Corinthians 1:10-17](#). Whether we call it sectarian or partisan, it is wrong.

Remember, contrary to what many people say, you do not have to give the Devil his due.

“I believe there are more instances of the abridgment of the freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations.” James Madison, 4th President of the US.

Secret encroachments are insidious and hidden from the light (truth, correction) because the deeds are dark. That is why transparency in everything is so important. Little lies, shadings of the truth, and calculated deceptions lead us away from the truth and broaden the way to our destruction.

“You sell a company twice. First of all, you sell them the product, then you sell them the service.” Richard Brock, founder, chairman, and CEO of Brock Control Systems.

You could say we are sold by God on salvation and then on sanctification. The process has two parts, a second decision set. We choose Christ, and then we choose righteousness, which is an ongoing, lifelong, repetitive process (a decision set).

Concern: We would want to stay children in the faith, protected and pampered.

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.” [Hebrews 5:12](#)

Children: Fed by others, not thinking for ourselves or taking on our responsibilities, staying weak and unprepared to meet the hard moments.

1. Why is it so hard to grow up?

It takes work, acceptance of failure, and a willingness to be corrected. I believe the last item is the hardest, and most people fail. A more common parlance would be that we need to be teachable since our lives are filled with “teachable moments” that God uses to mature us in the faith.

Our society fosters a perpetual adolescence.

2. What is the best antidote against becoming Peter Pan (unable to leave childhood)?

The mirror—take an honest look at yourself each day. Be willing to adjust your dreams to your new circumstances. The dreams of a 30-year-old should have matured from those of a 12-year-old. Likewise, for the dreams of a 50- or 70-year-old.

Interacting with the text

Goal: To become mature in the faith, leaving behind the milk of our childhood and embracing the responsibility of Christian adulthood. “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” [1 Corinthians 13:11](#)

We need to remind ourselves that putting away “childish” things (think about what childish things are) does not mean losing the good things that a child-like heart brings to our Christian life. While Jesus did say, “Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” ([Matthew 18:2-4](#)) We need the child-like trust in God to ENTER the kingdom (salvation). We need the humility of a child to GROW in the kingdom (sanctification).

1. What overall problem does this chapter deal with? Have you experienced this problem yourself? If so, give an example.

Chapter 21: These Inward Trials

(p. 243-244) Short beds and narrow blankets (Isaiah 28:20). Magnifying grace and diminishing the problem of sin creates a serious problem of inadequate resources because when confronted with reality (the real problem with sin), we find our distorted view of grace inadequate to the task. This distortion starts out true but falls prey to the wrong use of the right tool (inaccurate application).

We shouldn't stress that becoming a Christian will make a difference in your life. For example, it is common to hear, "Through the power of the indwelling Spirit, we will be able to overcome the sins that previously mastered us, and the light and leading that God will give us will enable us to find a way through problems of guidance, self-fulfillment, personal relationships, heart's desire, and such like, which had hitherto defeated us completely."

While in a sense, these statements are biblical and true, presented this way, they distort our conversion to be a trade, a bargain for a better life as if God is offering us a bribe. No, we are enjoined to come to God because he is God instead of what we will get from the commitment. This twist throws our souls entirely out of balance.

2. Packer says, "False hopes are a greater evil than false fears." Do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?

(p. 245-246) Yes, I agree wholeheartedly. It attempts to minimize the pain and difficulty living the Christian life will bring to us and falsely asserts the problems we face will be solved by our conversion. Packer notes they

"...are still there—sometimes, indeed, intensified. God does not make their circumstances notably easier; rather the reverse...the trouble-free life which they were promised has not materialized. Things which got them down before they were Christians are threatening to get them down again."

Packer argues it is not unusual for God to protect new believers, as parents protect a newborn, but as we grow and mature, we are expected to deal with the testing that comes. We are promised that it will not be more than we can bear ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#)), but we need to remember that the road will not be easy. ([Acts 14:22](#))

If our Lord and Savior learned his obedience through suffering, how can we expect any less of a teacher? ([Hebrews 5:8](#))

We should note Packer's statement: "There is nothing unnatural, therefore, in an increase of temptations, conflicts and pressures as the Christian goes on with God—indeed, something would be wrong if it did not happen."

3. Have you ever thought, "It isn't working anymore!" and went looking for someone to help you make it "work" again? Explain. How is this problem related to church/congregation hopping?

(p. 246-247) I began my Christian life like that and knew a lot of people who went from fix to fix to fix, like spiritual junkies looking for the next mountaintop experience. In some ways, we were like serial philanderers, seeking the next "perfect" relationship/experience with God. In a sense, we end up like dogs chasing our tails.

Much of our problems in this area come from the precedent established by the Holiness movement of the 1800s, which expected to "pray through" to victory as if that brought them to a new level of spiritual consciousness and banished the old problems. As Packer notes, this approach

"It insists on diagnosing the "struggle," which it equates with "defeat," as a relapse caused by failure to maintain "consecration" and "faith." At first (so it is suggested), the convert was fully surrendered to his newfound Savior, hence his joy, but since then, he has grown cold or careless, or compromised his obedience in some way, or ceased to sustain moment-by-moment trust in the Lord Jesus, and that is why his experience is now as it is."

You have to ask yourself, is sanctification a process, a struggle to learn obedience, or is it a “breakthrough” that we can only fall away from? By now, you know my answer as well as Packer’s. It is a lifelong process, for we are all like Paul, who said, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” ([Philippians 3:12](#))

4. Packer states that “Backsliding Christians are always miserable.” How is backsliding different from the problem this chapter is attempting to address?

(p. 247-248) Using [Isaiah 57:17](#), Packer notes that God does not let us get away with backsliding, of holding onto unrepented and unconfessed sin. We are corrected, sometimes harshly ([Hebrews 12:4-7](#)), but always lovingly, with the compassion of a true Father always working toward “the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it [discipline].” ([Hebrews 12:11](#), see also [Job 5:17](#))

Rather than hunting for non-existent failures in the consecration of our lives, we should accept the normal course of growth and correction, of success and failure, that every child goes through, and be thankful that our Father God corrects us, demonstrating his unfailing love for us as his children.

5. What, according to Packer, does God, our heavenly Father, want from us?

(p. 248-249) God wants us to grow into maturity in Christ, to be conformed to the image of his Son. While there is a childlike trust in our Father that we should never lose, we must move beyond being babes in Christ. Remember Paul’s admonition in [1 Corinthians 13:11](#), “When I was a child, I spoke as a child; I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

Christians sometimes forget that Jesus’ admonition in [Matthew 18:1-5](#) was for us to possess childlike humility, not to remain like little children, weak and immature. Jesus and Paul are not at odds; they are emphasizing different concerns. Jesus reminds us of our limits and our need to willingly accept from God (like a child) what we cannot provide for ourselves, while Paul reminds us of our responsibility, which we cannot shirk by acting like children who need to grow up.

6. Why is an adequate understanding of grace so important to our living the Christian life, especially with the issues raised in this chapter?

(p. 249) Understanding Grace (God’s unmerited yet freely given love in action) and its work in the fullness of our lives, both saving and sustaining us, is essential to knowing God as he works in our lives. Grace has both a will and a work—the will is God’s eternal plan of salvation, and the work is God perfecting us in Christ through our sanctification unto holiness.

Understanding grace restores balance to our Christian living. As we come to understand the purpose of grace, we gain perspective on our relationship with God.

Packer notes there is no break between God’s attitude and action, and both make up the reality of grace; grace gives us life, and grace sustains us as we “work out our salvation in fear and trembling because God is at work in us both to will and to do his good pleasure.” ([Philippians 2:12-13](#)) Grace is at work as the Holy Spirit, whom I love to call the Holy Discomforter, convicts us of our sins and failures, driving us to repentance and correction. It is all God’s gift, his grace given to us as we are revealed to all creation as sons of God. ([Romans 8:19](#))

7. How is our learning to lean on God so dependent on grace?

(p. 250) We are tempted to lean on our own resources when things are going well. Only when we are overwhelmed with our sense of inadequacy do we usually turn to God for help (grace), so it is not surprising that God lets us stumble and fall. To lean on God, we need patience and accept that we often have to wait for what we want (sometimes even to deal with a particular sin we are struggling with). That doesn’t come naturally, and we need a hefty dose of grace to let God’s timing be our timing, too.

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I believe it is accurate to say that without grace, we cannot accomplish what we came to this study to do: to know God. Grace is God's hook set firmly in our soul, whereby he reels us into himself, helping us to know him.

8. What can we learn from God's chosen people like Abraham and David? Why is it important that the Bible did not gloss over their failures but exposed their weaknesses?

(p. 250-251) It shows us that even the giants of the faith had the same problems and needs that we do. We are all dependent on God's grace to sustain us and rescue us from our failures. The Bible's realistic portrayal of the great saints of the faith helps to keep everything in proper perspective—our failures are not unique, and like them, we can depend on God not to give up on us when we fall down. His restoring grace will lift us up.

9. What can we learn from John Newton's Hymn *I asked the Lord*? (Remember, it was written in the late 1700s)

(p. 251-252) We ask for what we want (I asked the Lord, that I might grow, In faith, and love, and every grace; Might more of His salvation know, And seek more earnestly His face.), and God gives us what we need (Instead of this, He made me feel the hidden evils of my heart; And let the angry powers of hell assault my soul in every part) so that in the end we will succeed (These inward trials I employ from self and pride to set thee free; And break thy schemes of earthly joy, that thou may'st seek thy all in me" John Newton).

We need to trust that what we get is what we need and, with patience, let everything work itself out—or, to put it another way, "God knows best."

What to Do Next

Read Chapter Twenty-two: *The Adequacy of God*, which centers on Paul's letter to the Romans. We will deal with this chapter in three parts. The popular 1980s book *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People* postulated **a limited God** who could not intervene in or control everything that happened to his children. Packer will have none of that, and neither should you.

Think about the premise of a book that implies *good people* (we probably think "innocent" instead) getting something they don't deserve. The only person I know who fit that category was Jesus, who took the bad things on by choice. All of the rest of us, no matter how bad things get, never get anything near what we deserve. A relative innocence in childhood brings out some hard questions that people avoid by choosing to see God as limited. They substitute one problem for another and dishonor God...dangerously so.

Goal: To put away childish things and become men before the Lord.

It is one thing to say we will move from milk to meat, to progress from childhood to adulthood in our Christian faith, but it is altogether another thing to actually accomplish that fact. The chief deterrent to our maturity is a lack of accountability. Not one moment of accountability or a single decision, such as in salvation, but a daily, hourly, even moment-by-moment accountability in which all decisions, even every idle word, are brought into account. That takes a real man with a spine who understands to his core that all gain comes with real pain. So, share the analgesic, and let's have at it.

We can expect no less than to be like our elder brother and suffer with him. If we know him, we must walk in his steps (pain, suffering, rejection, unjust accusations—the whole ball of wax). Remember what Paul said: our goal should be "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." ([2 Corinthians 10:5b](#))

Meditation on Chapter 21: These Inward Trials

Packer opens this chapter with an indictment of those who magnify grace and deemphasize sin and judgment in the name of love and kindness. He says instead of being kind, they are actually cruel. Now,

let's be perfectly clear: he is not talking about radical liberalism, which constantly attacks the historical view of sin and redemption and the uniqueness and the need for Christ's sacrifice. No, he is talking about otherwise doctrinally sound evangelical ministries, and with that in mind, we need to consider his presentation with a discerning heart.

First, let me remind you that the book was initially written in 1973, and what Packer is focusing on in this chapter was a form of Christian triumphalism that argues those who held to their true faith would enter the Promised Land here and now where they would overcome every problem, including the world, the flesh, and the devil by living out their Christian faith. Those of us who lived through those years as new Christians can well remember what eventually came to be called the "prosperity" gospel. It was a faith-driven premise that said if you were not triumphant, it was because you lacked the required faith to live as a King's Kid and had failed to claim your birthright as a son of God. That was bad enough, but then you were put down for being deceived by false teaching and the tricks of the devil who had made you believe you had to suffer, be sick, or lack any need, especially financial. They did, as Packer noted ...leading young Christians to regard all experiences of frustration and perplexity as signs of substandard Christianity. It insists on diagnosing the struggle, which it equates with defeat, as a relapse caused by failure to maintain consecration and faith.

The question we need to address is not whether this chapter was important for that specific moment in the life of the Church; it was, but now, do its arguments still address a need for correction in the contemporary life of the Church? Is God's grace, at times, a difficult correction he applies to our lives, and is his ongoing restitution of our lives under distortion and attack today as it was then? Remember, we are not talking about those heretics who are obviously aberrant to everyone, such as the liberals supporting homosexuality and abortion while claiming to be within the banner of Christ. We are talking about those whose doctrine is otherwise apparently sound.

I would argue that we do have similar problems in the Church today. Still, rather than the issue being the prosperity gospel, it is the opposite that while God loves you, he is not in total control of everything that happens in the world, so you might just be blindsided by something from which God has no resources to protect you. I speak of the "[Open Theism](#)" movement within the Evangelical Church. For a beginning critique of this movement, I suggest you check out Tektonics and Parableman, starting with [this post](#).

Interestingly, both of these problematic approaches to otherwise sound Christian doctrine find their primary inspiration within Pentecostalism. While it is true that the prosperity people found inspiration in Finney and other aspects of the Holiness movement, they applied a unique Pentecostal twist to those underpinnings. Open Theism's Pinnock subtitled his instructive offering as *How the Pentecostal Theology of Experience is Changing Our Understanding of God*. So there we have it: experience versus the Word, subjective understanding versus revelation, and the written record. The root of the Pentecostal experience of God, no matter what anyone in this context wants to argue, is the "Rhema," called by Pentecostals God's living current word to us, coming in the form of prophecy, words of knowledge, and glossolalia (tongues) which give us immediate access to God in context. That is the key argument: access to God in context.

In this argument, direct access to God in real-time is not considered something that is special and rare (as we see biblically) but normative and constant. It is expected, and if you don't live that way, something is wrong with your faith. I must state here that I became a Christian and grew up early in my Christian life within this Pentecostal and later charismatic milieu. I can personally attest to undeniable physical miracles. I have personally experienced visions and transcendent moments that went well beyond anything my previous experiences in the drug culture or occult could duplicate. That said, I am now always skeptical, and I attribute that skepticism to one thing: God's gracious gift of discernment. When I went through the "Life in the Spirit" class at my church, a necessity for joining the congregation and, as such, a necessity for my being married in the church instead of asking for tongues or any of the other

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gifts when hands were laid on me for such an impartation, I asked for discernment. Having come out of the drug and occult world, what was paramount to me was knowing what was the truth and what was error and deception. And to be honest, I got what I asked for. God undeniably touched me at that exact moment with a transcendent experience that forever made me call into question all later experiences, both of mine and others. God, in essence, “told” me all my past experiences had been a fraud, a substitute for the real thing, and this moment was the reality I had sought. It was also evident that I was to question everything from that moment on since most of what was happening in the world was fraudulent. That he was “speaking “about inside and outside the Church was self-evident.

That was a seminal moment in my Christian existence. It was as if scales fell away from my eyes, and what had once been an incredible psychedelic landscape of Christian Godness became a pockmarked Christian landscape filled with black holes, bear traps, and con artists residing beside the undeniable light of Christ and real charismata. It is not without reason Paul says to test every spirit to see if it is from God. It is also significant that the most noble of men were the Bereans, *who searched the scriptures to authenticate Paul’s words and teachings.*

We live in dangerous times, both physically and spiritually. Christianity is under attack both from without (secular humanism, Islam, materialism, etc.) and from within (liberal Christianity and its embrace of homosexuality and abortion, scandal and moral turpitude in public and popular leaders, doctrinal drift, and cliff diving from the likes of Open Theism). What Packer has to say to us in this chapter is that the correct doctrine in the basics of the faith does not mean the correct doctrine in other areas, areas that can undermine the faith once delivered unto the saints in substantive ways. We all need Berean hearts that practice judicious discernment. We need to be willing to step out and actively judge those who claim the faith (See my [Judge Not Is For Cowards](#)) while holding fast to compassionate righteousness and loving discernment ([Philippians 1:9-11](#)).

May God bless your day and grant you grace, peace, and help in your time of need.

Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 1

This last chapter is the longest in the book, and Packer works very hard to summarize everything that brought us to this point because, in the end, what we should know about God is that he is always adequate. It will take us three lessons to complete our investigation of this insight.

Today's theme: It is in Him that we have hope.

We must never forget that *all of our hope* is centered in/begins in God.

Scriptural background: [2 Corinthians 3:5](#) “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God.”

We are dependent (“note that we are sufficient in ourselves). Whatever makes us enough (our sufficiency), either for the situation (the moment) or the long term (future), comes from God.

Quotes for the week

“We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution is designed only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for any other.” John Adams (1735 - 1826). Second President of the US.

Note that even man's good motives or best efforts are seen as inadequate. God's sufficiency forms the foundation of a sustainable government/country. Nothing else sustains.

Of all the needs (there are none imaginary) a lonely child has, the one that must be satisfied, if there is going to be hope and a hope of wholeness, is the unshaking need for an unshakable God. Maya Angelou (1928-2014), U.S. author and poet. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Ch. 4 1969.

True hope must be grounded in something unshakable and that alone is God.

“Likewise, I find myself relying upon my own strength and will before lifting up life's issues to God. This type of attitude not only forsakes the adequacy of God but also exposes my ‘halfway Christian’ unbelief.” Justin Sung Ho Kim. Justin Kim's Devotional. *The journey from my head to my heart.*” (<http://justinsunghokim.wordpress.com/2007/09/25/esther-41-17/>)

“But also exposes my HALFWAY Christian unbelief?”—powerful indictment with pointed words. Who or in what do we trust?

Concern: We would forget God's omnipotence, sovereignty, and power to accomplish his will.

The 1981 bestseller [When Bad Things Happen To Good People](#), by Rabbi Harold Kushner, postulates a limited God who cannot intervene in or control everything that happens to his children. Packer will have none of that, and neither should you.

10. If Kushner were right, what would that mean for how we live our lives? How would we know when God was not able to intervene?

We would never know. We could never be sure if we could depend on God. We could never know that He would prevail in anything. In essence, He would be reduced to a demi-god (maybe the most potent demi-god in existence, but only a demi-god), limited and, at crucial times, ineffectual.

As a result, we would have no assurance about anything that comes up in our lives, and we would be in a war (with Satan and evil) that we could easily lose.

11. Isn't our faith and trust directly related to God's trustworthiness in every situation? How does Kushner's view strike at the heart of that faith and trust?

Yes, absolutely. If Kushner were right, we could only trust that God would try—provided he knew something was happening. I would argue that Kushner represents an anthropomorphic god, essentially pagan, who is limited and unreliable regarding the outcome. Kushner substitutes the idea of God's failure to explain the biblical argument of God's sovereign choice/will. Part of the problem is that his worldview is rooted in the Holocaust, and he cannot accept the possibility that what happened to European Jewry during WWII was part of God's judgment (similar to what happened to Ancient Judah when Babylon invaded or Israel when Assyria destroyed them). Therefore, from his perspective, the God of Abraham and Moses must be limited in his ability to act in the world and is often ineffectual at best. His god (lowercase on purpose) tries, but he can only do so much. Kushner breaks the first commandment. He has created another god and puts that deity before the God of the Bible.

Interacting with the text

Goal: There is an old Christian aphorism that reflects our goal for this chapter: "Let go and let God." While that sounds nice, it is easier said than done. You could argue that one way to look at the Christian life is that *it is a life of becoming*, and our earthly goal is to strive to become what God has designed us to be. However, accomplishing that is another matter, especially when we fall prey to depending on our efforts.

"Becoming "what God has designed us to be." That is the question from the last chapter: what does God want from me? I will offer you this poem I wrote many years ago that expresses that question.

There are many things that I could have been
Many things that I could yet be
Yet one thing lies beyond my keen.
God, what would you have of me?

These questions have no easy answer when we demand "specific" responses tailored to our path, our life. There is a two-edged sword here. On one hand, we want to know so we can be obedient. Yet, on the other, we demand to know because we want to be special, so we fluctuate between humility and trust in our heavenly Father's plan for our lives, and since Jesus said that every hair on our head was numbered, demanding that God tell us every little thing we want to know because if we matter to Him, He will guide us openly and explicitly.

So, we come to the crux of the study and the questions we all have, no matter how deep we have buried them: Do I know you, God? Do you care what happens to me? How can I see that you love me and that I matter to you?

Ultimately, it always comes down to the same thing: by faith, we trust God our Father, and we do the best we can with what we know. ([Hebrews 11](#)) Sometimes, that's a lot, and sometimes, it's precious little, but if we truly trust the one with whom we have to do, it should always be enough. (1 Corinthians 10:13) Remember, it's not about us (that is the real issue, isn't it?); it's about Him.

1. Throughout the history of the Church, the Book of Romans has been seen as the key that unlocks the whole of Scripture for the Christian believer. What is it about Romans that engenders this view?

(p. 253-255) Romans covers all of the important biblical themes and doctrines (book of doctrine); it tells us how to live (book of life) and about the Church/God's people (book of the church). Finally, it explains God's care and concern for us as individuals (God's personal letter).

As Packer notes, "All roads in the Bible lead to Romans," and even more importantly, "when the message of Romans gets into a person's heart, there is no telling what may happen." The epistle changes people,

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and throughout history, its riches have changed the course of history (re: Luther, Wesley, Edwards, and many others).

It has been said that mastering Romans is like climbing Everest. After making the supreme effort, the view from the “top” is spectacular. The whole of the Christian faith is spread out before you.

2. What is unique about Chapter 8 of Romans?

(p. 255-256) While Romans is filled with significant insights into the faith once delivered unto the saints ([Jude 3](#)), chapter 8 has always been notable for its comfort and assurance grounded in the saving grace of Jesus Christ that overcomes everything that is arrayed against us. We are chosen in Him, which is the foundation of our complete trust in the Father, who assures us that nothing in existence can separate us from His eternal love. In a very real and significant way, Romans 8 makes the love of God personal and familial in a way that no other place in Scripture comes close to doing.

3. What is the difference between the modern view of comfort and the older view, which was more attuned to assurance? How is this difference important in living the Christian life?

(p. 256) The old view was of encouragement, not the more modern tranquilizing view. Packer uses a play on words that are lost to most contemporary readers. He says that old-time comfort nerves (tr.v. nerved, nerving, nerves: To give strength or courage to.), while modern comfort enervates (tr.v. enervated, enervating, enervates: To weaken or destroy the strength or vitality of, to deplete.)

You could say modern comfort looks inward for pain relief and is concerned with what is in it for me; it is sentimental and self-indulgent, while the old view looks outward, enabling and encouraging us to go and do.

4. What does Packer say is why Paul wrote [Romans 8](#)? Why is it important that the content of Chapter 8 follows Paul’s revelations in Chapter 7?

(p. 256-257) Chapter 8 is an answer to Chapter 7. It takes the accepted failures demonstrated in Chapter 7 (our inability to do the good we seek to do) and answers Paul's question in 7:24: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

Packer argues that the question is rhetorical since Paul knows the answer (as should we), but it must be stated for the record. The argument shifts from the abject failure we all experience in our own strength, the admission of failure and our inability to save ourselves, to the adequacy of God's grace to deal with what sin has wrought and finally to the adequacy of the God who offers that grace to bring us through all that assails us.

5. What four gifts has God given all who, by faith, are in Christ Jesus? How does the fourth gift relate to this chapter?

(p. 258) The four gifts are:

1. **Righteousness**—by faith in Christ Jesus, there is “no condemnation.” We are forgiven
2. **Holy Spirit**—who contends for us with groanings too deep for words. He supplies all our needs.
3. **Sonship**—our adoption is sure, and all creation waits for the unveiling. We are family.
4. **Security**—now and forever, nothing can separate us from the love of our heavenly Father. We have eternal love in the family of God.

Security, now and eternal, shows us the “adequacy of the God of grace” and moves us “from the *gift to the giver*” so that with all of the redeemed, we can say:

Whom have I in heaven but You?

And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

My flesh and my heart fail;
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ([Psalm 73:25-26](#))

6. Who is the “we” of [Romans 8:31](#), and why is understanding the meaning of that important?

(p. 258-259) We = we who believe (all of the redeemed, from throughout all human history), the adopted ones, his children, Christ’s brothers. As Packer says, it is the “*hortatory (encouraging) we* of Christian preaching.” It seeks an Amen! It seeks participation from the larger we.

It explains the object of this chapter and who it is speaking assurance to: the redeemed, us, and all who have put their faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. This is the pivot point in Romans. All that has gone before has led up to here, and all that will follow will remain anchored in this truth. We are not abandoned. God will move heaven and earth for us, for nothing can get between us and our Father—**NOTHING!**

I have to say: “Take that, Rabbi Kushner. My Father’s arm is not too short.”

7. What does Packer argue is a Christian’s birthright? What does he mean by “possess our possessions”? How is this summed up in “I am convinced that...” and following?

(p. 260) A Christian’s birthright is “peace, hope, and joy in God’s love.” These are our “unprocessed possessions.” These are the things we lay claim to and are explained in the remainder of the chapter, as well as how we need to live our Christian lives.

“I am convinced” means that we have possessed our possessions and claimed our birthright in Jesus Christ. Once we have done that, the assurances of Romans 8 fall into place.

8. according to Packer, what is the secret of the “more than conquerors” experience?

(p. 260) The secret is in our response to God’s assurances where we take hold of our faith and make it real, make it a Hallelujah! We have the victory that overcomes everything arrayed against us. Paul addresses it as four questions:

5. “If God is for us, who is against us? . . .—**God is for us.**
6. Will he not also give us all things with him [Christ]?—**The Son was sacrificed for us.**
7. Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? . . .—**Christ intercedes for us.**
8. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?—**Nothing, nada, nothing in heaven or earth or under the earth.**

What to Do Next

Reread Chapter 22 and apply what you have learned today as you work through the text. Think about the comfort and assurance of God in your life and what that means to your daily living.

It means when I get hit by Romans 7 during my day when I fail, I can get back up and continue on because Romans 8 gives me the support and assurances I need to press on.

Goal: To put our complete trust in the sufficiency of the Lord our God.

Some will argue it is foolhardy to put your complete trust in anything, much less God. Isn’t that what separates the true believer from the want-a-be posers? This week’s goal is to step out in faith and put our WHOLE trust in God, in His providence, in His will for our life, and to be able to say with Job, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.” ([Job 13:15](#)) That is Christian trust in the adequacy of God.

I often wonder if Rabbi Kushner ever really studied Job. That book has been a comfort to me many times over the years, especially [Job 13:15](#). I could paraphrase God’s later statement to Job: “**Where were you when I was laying out the intricacies of your life, your person, your destiny in my will? Can you make everything work together to the end I have decreed?**”

Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 1

No, I can't. So, in the end, it is either to trust God or rebel against Him. I, like Joshua, choose to trust you. For me and my house, we will serve the Lord. ([Joshua 24:15](#))

Meditation on Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 1

The book [When Bad Things Happen To Good People](#), by Rabbi Harold Kushner, basically postulates a limited God who cannot intervene in or control everything that happens to his children. It was written from a liberal Jewish perspective. Recently, leaders have been arguing for something very similar in the Emergent Church movement. Since God cannot see the future (according to them), he is often just as surprised by what happens as we are and frequently cannot protect us from sudden unexpected events. Packer will have none of that, and neither should you. In the current chapter, *The Adequacy Of God*, he uses Paul's Epistle to the Romans to drive home that God is sufficient for all our past, present, and future needs.

Packer begins this final chapter with an assumption, stated clearly in the title: God is adequate. He bases his supporting arguments on the book of Romans. He starts by asking, "What do you look for in the Bible?" Is it doctrine, life, the meaning of the Church, or God's personal word to you? Whatever you are looking for, he says, you will find it in Romans. Packer asserts (I want to use a slight variation on a famous aphorism of the first century) that all roads lead to Romans, and further in Romans, all views of our faith can be most clearly seen. While I think that could be argued is a little too pat, Romans does illustrate Packer's overriding hypothesis that God is adequate and sufficient in every way.

The good Dr. Packer wants us to consider that Paul's letter to the Romans is the high point of the Bible. If you accept that possibility, the next logical question would be, "Is there any place within Romans that is the book's high point?" He says yes and considers it to be Romans chapter 8. It is fair to say that everyone who studies the book considers this section of Romans the epitome of spiritual comfort and contains the foundational assertions of God's adequacy. [Romans 8](#) is the place where believers experiencing trial and tribulation return again and again to be comforted by its sweet assurances.

However, before we work through this chapter and deal with God's adequacy, we must admit that there is a movement within the Church to recast this unalterable foundation with another view. This movement is collectively known as the Emergent or Emerging Church. Some noble desires spurred the beginning of this movement.

The emerging church originated in reaction to many perceived problems of the late 20th century Church: the declining attendance of Protestant churches, particularly amongst Generation X, **concern over how the Church would adapt to post-modernity**, and increasing suspicion of the missiology of the market-driven mega-church and institutionalized Christianity. [Wikipedia](#) emphasis added

A genuine concern is mixed within the mostly laudable goals. However, you immediately place yourself on dangerous ground when you ask how the Church will adapt to something rather than how it will address, deal with, or approach something. Adapting implies change, and while changing one's clothes (the outward presentation) is sometimes good (think of Hudson Taylor learning immaculate Chinese and then dressing and grooming himself as Chinese to present the Gospel directly to his audience without the initial problem of appearing to be a Westerner lording over the locals), changing the meaning of the message is not biblical or acceptable.

While I am far from an expert on postmodernism and the Emergent/Emerging Church, I have been extensively researching the issue and have some informed opinions. From my perspective, the problem is that change and adaptation, especially to the postmodern mindset, hold innumerable avenues of possible compromise, primarily related to the accuracy, reliability, and overarching authority of the Scriptures, as well as the same issues associated with all historical theology, doctrine, and dogma. This is because, in the postmodern context, the narrative becomes the driving focus of Scripture, where the story of the faith, especially a self-interpreted version of that story, completely overshadows the faith (doctrines,

creedal assertions, settled theology, and so forth) of the faith (see [Jude 3](#)). Postmodernism is also a move away from the systematic theology ushered in wholesale by the Reformation to narrative-based faith and not just in personal interaction or personal evangelism but as the root of understanding of the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

To use a slight pun, one problem with postmodernism is that it is still emerging, considering itself an ongoing critique of modernism, which it believes it is/has superseded, beginning that rise in the 1960s 's (I find the concurrent rise of the counter-culture, free thought, free love, and drug-induced discovery of "who I am" not inconsequential or incidental). However, within this ongoing critique, "postmodernity" is characterized as "incredulity toward metanarratives," which would include the Bible, a fundamental metanarrative on the nature of God, man, and our ongoing relationship.

Metanarratives, by definition, overarch all human understanding (a metanarrative is a grand overarching account, an all-encompassing story, which gives structure and order to history—at its root, a narrative). In contrast, in the postmodern world, local and subcultural narratives (ideologies, myths, and stories) are given precedence over any external "truth." They are expected to override and define the former metanarratives. It is a reversal of the historic biblical understanding of itself because it sits in judgment of everything else. In postmodernism, everything else judges the metanarrative (read here the Bible). It is allowed, even required, to critique, reinterpret, recast, even strip, and change the original in any way deemed fit by the local or subcultural group. So, in postmodernism, the homosexual subculture's redefining of the historic Christian metanarrative is valid and expected because "their understanding is true for them."

It doesn't take long to see that going even a few steps down this road means no absolutes, inalienable rights, or overarching anything. Everything is subjective, local, and up for grabs by whoever wants to claim a narrative insight. Enter the Emerging/Emergent Church, whose initial mission was to find ways to evangelize the emerging postmodern world, the first fruits of which were seen as the Gen X generation. The following has been quoted as the foundation of the emerging church's self-identity.

"Our faith is ancient. our faith is future. we're old-fashioned. we're new-fangled. we're orthodox. we're innovators. we're postmodern Christians." (Note: usually attributed to Leonard Sweet, this reference is no longer available through normal online channels and cannot be connected with Sweet, even by a denial. The [emergingchurch.org](#) is closed down, so much of what used to be used for critique is gone, but for the industrious is still available on the [WaybackMachine](#)—Internet Archive.)

The lack of caps is more than stylistic; it is philosophical since, in postmodernism, everything is equal/on the same level/equally valid, and caps show "artificial" distinctions. This site goes on to explain:

...because the church is organic (the living body of Christ), it needs evolution or re-formation to stay healthy and vibrant.

The traditions of the church are treasure... we are not starting from scratch... we can build upon the learnings of the first reformation as we surf the wild wave into the second.

Today's mission context provides the church with a chance to:

1. shake off any residual "leave it to beaver" orientation and begin swimming (even with a paddleboard) within the postmodern culture.
2. really trust the power of the gospel and learn to communicate it with authenticity because, for postmodern people, authenticity is primary.

The church should not fear Postmodernity, as it provides us with a new context, and thus a fresh opportunity to get real, to drink deep from our own wells, and **go back to our own future...** (emphasis added)

Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 1

The fundamental problem with postmodern authenticity is that it *is individually decided*. The postmodern mind is essentially its own god, defining what is authentic. That means it is based on one's own life experiences, where one, to use the now almost trite example from Campus Crusade, sits on the throne of one's life and authenticates what meets the narrative demands of one's own experience. Does this remind you of the problem in the [Book of Judges](#)?

Where does this lead those who in the Church have begun to “swim” in the postmodern culture? A simple example can be taken from the journey of Charles Pinnock, a person I relied heavily on in the 70's and early 80's to address the distortion of the prosperity movement. He became a proponent of Open Theism. One example of the change that Open Theism brings to the historic Christian understanding of our relationship with God and directly impacts this chapter's premise is God's omniscience and control of the future.

Decisions not yet made do not exist anywhere to be known, even by God. They are potential—yet to be realized but not yet actual. God can predict a great deal of what we will choose to do, *but not all of it*, because some remains *hidden in the mystery of human freedom*... The God of the Bible displays an openness to the future (i.e. ignorance of the future) that the *traditional view of omniscience simply cannot accommodate*.” Pinnock, *Augustine to Arminius*, p. 25-26 (*emphasis added*)

This “open” God is, in many ways, limited. As such, there will occur situations where God will be surprised and unable to protect us from “the mystery of human freedom.” (reminiscent of Rabbi Harold Kushner) While he can assist us afterward, he will not be able to prevent evil from sometimes overtaking us. He is not entirely adequate, and we may suffer and be beyond his ability to intercede on our behalf. He may be the first responder, but according to this belief system, that is often the best he can do.

That is the beginning of the postmodern, emergent, Open Theism trap. Like a labyrinth of subtle invitations, it assaults us at every turn and challenges us at every truth. So, in the coming weeks, we will look at chapter 22 and the adequacy of God as over and against this new postmodern siren call. This is no shallow exercise but goes to the *heart of knowing God*. Is he suddenly less than we thought? Are these new assertions correct? Where does this leave “the faith once delivered unto the saints?” [Jude 3](#)

With this in mind, I pray that God grants you grace and the peace that passes understanding as we wade into these deep and troubling waters. May you take solace in Paul's admonition that we “can do all things in him who gives us strength.” ([Philippians 4:13](#))

Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 2

Today's theme: When God is for us, nothing can succeed against us.

“Nothing can succeed against us, “is pretty all-encompassing and goes against the post-modern, limited god so many adhere to. God is [Almighty](#) fifty-seven times in the New King James and three hundred thirty-three times in the [NIV](#).

Scriptural background: [Psalm 55:18](#) “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

“What can man do to me?” That is spoken from an eternal perspective, not a temporal one. Yes, men can take my life, but when that single act is weighed against eternity, it is insignificant. Remember what Jesus told his disciples, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will.” ([Matthew 10:28-29](#)) If you believe in God and eternity, then that statement makes sense.

[Psalm 46:1-3](#) “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.”

“Our refuge,” or as [Corrie ten Boom](#) held on to, “Our hiding place.” Before her sister died in a Nazi concentration camp, she told Corrie, "There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still."

“Very present help” means God is there, right there. These verses point toward [Romans 8:38-39](#).

Quotes for the week

“I admire the serene assurance of those who have religious faith. It is wonderful to observe the calm confidence of a Christian with four aces. Mark Twain. Samuel Clemmons, author, newspaperman (1835-1910).

“Four aces” for me = God on my side. A Christian always has four aces (winning poker hand for those who do not play cards). While Mark Twain had a sharp wit, he had a dull perception of the spiritual reality of life and, like most atheists, had to denigrate that which challenged his presuppositions continually.

“It is not so much our friend's help that helps us as the confidence of their help.” Epicurus (341 BC - 270 BC). Greek philosopher and poet.

Confidence affects everything we do: our choices, our ability to think and act, and our demeanor. Confidence aids us long before rescue arrives (think Job).

“Never mistake knowledge for wisdom. One helps you make a living; the other helps you make a life.” Sandra Carey. Author.

This insight is similar to what drives this study: knowing about God versus knowing God. The first is knowledge, and the second is wisdom.

Concern: We will not believe God is for us based on how we respond to the situation.

While we often *say* we trust in God, our actions and our emotions often say differently.

Saying something and then living it are vastly different, or to put it another way, “Our actions reveal our heart.” Stress reveals the cracks. It is under stress that our weaknesses take center stage. That is why I like Job; he was proven to be refined gold under the most difficult stress imaginable.

1. What does the modern scourge of anxiety say about our protestations of belief? Is anxiety a problem for you? Why?

Anxiety argues that our beliefs are shallow, our trust in God is weak, and we lack assurance of his care. True belief calms the soul and soothes the intensity of the upset. We fear the unknown, and the future is the great unknown. Without faith in an adequate God, what is there to combat that fear?

Anxiety has been a problem at different times. We all go through periods of trial, and sometimes, for various reasons, our faith is weak. I think the issue boils down to the failure of our prayer life to sustain us. Martin Luther said it all.

“If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the Devil gets the victory through the day...I have so much business, I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.”

I have never met anyone so committed, but I can imagine what might happen if one were to commit oneself to such a regimen.

2. Do you have anyone you truly trust? What might cause them to betray you?

Other than God, I trust my wife and my sister.

I can think of nothing that would cause either of them to betray me.

Interacting with the text

Goal: To give God his unique due, never forgetting that “God is not man, that he should lie... [or] change his mind.”

That is an important point. “God is not a man,” and we, often without even realizing it, anthropomorphically attribute some aspects of our weakness to him, even though we are specifically warned against it.

1. Who is the God with whom we have to do, the one who is “for” us?

(p.262) He is the God who has pledged himself in covenant relationship to us, and as Packer notes, “This covenant relationship is the basis of all biblical religion...” That is our starting point—our covenantal relationship with God. It is the foundation of our faith.

2. What does it mean for God to be “for” us?

(p. 262) Packer turns to [Psalm 56](#) for the answer, often called the “Prayer for Relief from Tormentors.” It is the “hinge on which everything turns.” The psalmist argues that God knows everything happening to us, from our enemies to our tears and our fears, culminating in [verses 3-4](#), “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word). In God, I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?”

“What can flesh do to me?” That confidence is what God is “for” us means and comes out of how well we “know” God since it is from that knowledge that our persevering trust comes.

3. What three qualities does the psalmist say mark the true believer? How do you measure up to each of these attributes?

(p. 362-363) The “us” in “for us” has three qualities that mark the true believer:

9. **Praise**—We praise the **Word**, attending to God’s revelation, His Word written, to hold our theological wanderings in check (re: Bereans). We look to God, not our imaginings.
10. **Prayer**—We pray to connect with God, whom we treat as our life’s goal and end (re: knowing God). Communion with God is our daily objective (re: Luther).
11. **Payment**—We pay our vows, keep our promises, and honor our commitments. We are faithful to our

Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 2

inheritance as a child of God. We never give up (re: Job).

God is with us. Remember what Hezekiah said to Judah, “Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him. *With him is an arm of flesh*; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” [2 Chronicles 32:7-8](#)

“There are more with us than with him.” Know the truth of that.

4. What does it mean that God will withhold no good thing from us?

(p. 264-266) If he did not withhold his own Son, “but gave him up for us all...[within the Son’s own choice, God will]...graciously give us all things.” He is our sovereign benefactor and decisive redeemer. Three things bring out the force of Paul’s argument in [Romans 8:32](#). Our redemption was:

12. **Costly**—The price was the life of His Son, but that life was for the undeserving. “...while we were yet sinners, he died for us.” [Romans 5:8](#)
13. **Effective**—The greatness of God’s (and the Son’s) initial gift makes everything else “natural and likely.” The effectiveness of the cross (the “focal point in God’s plan to save his elect) is rooted in the resurrection as the proof of the power of the sacrifice to bring life “to us all” since our hope is in his resurrection. [1 Corinthians 15:12-24](#)
14. **Consequential**—With Christ, He will give us “all things,” which covers a long list of biblical promises that can be summed up as meaning “all the good, not that we can think of, but that God can think of, as infinite wisdom and power guide his generosity.” Those are some seriously good consequences.

5. How is faith different psychologically and theologically? Why is this important?

(p. 265) The difference is:

1. **Psychologically**—Our action, our response.
2. **Theologically**—God’s work in us where the cross, rather than being an isolated event, is the focal point of all history, of “God’s eternal plan to save his elect.”

This is important because we cannot depend on the psychological. It is subject to the whims of circumstance. It has to be rooted in the theological understanding of and knowing of God. Our experience of him will vary from very high to very low, but the wisdom of our knowledge is the foundational rock on which we build our house of faith, what we cling to in difficult moments (re: David and Job).

6. How does the adequacy of God expressed in Romans 8 relate to the first commandment of the OT Decalogue?

(p. 266-267) God’s adequacy is directly correlated to his exclusivity, which is expressed by the first commandment. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.” [Exodus 20:2-3](#)

God is only adequate for those who are his and his alone. We must let go of anything else that has become a “god” in our lives and give Yahweh the exclusive and preeminent place in our existence.

7. How does God deal with divided allegiance, and how does that apply to this chapter? Think about [Hebrews 12](#) and the Father who did not spare His own Son. Think about the demands that loyalty places on us.

(pp. 267-270) The flip side of God not sparing his own Son to give us all things is that if he did not spare his own Son, we should not expect him to spare us. The question goes to the heart of loyalty and family.

He is our only eternal Father—there can be no other. He protects, provides, and gives us everything that makes up an authentic life. He claims us as he claimed his own Son, not removing the cup from us either, but correcting us as much and as often as necessary. [Hebrew 12:5-11](#)

Packer notes that contrary to the first-century Christians we have in the Bible, we think of “safety first.” The reason: “In our hearts of hearts, we are afraid of the consequences of going the whole way into the Christian life.”

The problem: “unbelief, pure and simple.”

Packer challenges us to “Hold back no longer. Your God is faithful to you, and he is adequate for you. You will never need more than he can supply, and what he supplies, materially and spiritually, will always be enough for the present moment. “No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly” ([Psalm 84:11](#)). “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#)). “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” ([2 Corinthians 12:9](#)). Think on these things!—and let your thoughts drive out your inhibitions about serving your Master.

As Packer says at the bottom of page 269, *we must stop being halfway Christians.*

What to Do Next

Read Chapter 22 again, and as you approach the last section, think about the God with whom you have to do it. Think about what He offers you and what, as a result, you should expect of yourself.

We must have expectations of ourselves to have a reason to rise above the mundane. The only reason to be in this study is because you have high expectations of your relationship with God your Father. If not, then this study is an exercise in futility and frustration.

Goal: To become a whole and complete Christian for whom the Greatest Commandment is a living guide to every moment of our lives.

God seeks real commitment, a true heart sold out for Him. This week, let the Holy Spirit speak to you about the places in your life where you hold back from God. Based on this chapter, consider why you are holding back and what you can do about it.

There is an oxymoron in saying we believe in God as our God but not in what chooses to do with us. Here is the question: are we willing to be Job and accept anything (good or ill) from the hand of God? Or do we look for excuses and ways around God’s demands on our lives?

Meditation on Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 2

In Part I of our lesson on The Adequacy of God, we looked at issues not central to the cultural milieu when Dr. Packer wrote *Knowing God*. What confronts us today are issues such as Postmodernism in the larger world and the Emerging or Emerging Church in the Christian world, with its aligned theology of Open Theism, where we used Clark Pinnock as an illustrative example. In this lesson, we will address how these issues affect Packer’s claim of a wholly adequate God.

One problem with the presentation of Scripture for the modern mind is that it was not written with us in mind. We, who come to the text with a scientifically preconditioned mindset, see things radically differently from the audience to whom the biblical authors were writing.

In my Bible studies, I often have heard the refrain, “Why didn’t <insert biblical author here> just come out and say it?” He did, but his context and method of presentation were directed at his contemporary audience, not us.

Being reared in the age of science and technology (*the water in which we swim*), we are used to detailed questions and detailed answers, coupled with the formality of the scientific method of proving our thesis

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by objective testing and viewable and reproducible results. We expect repeatability, reliability, and measurability. So, if God is <insert godly attribute>, prove it.

That brings us to an unmistakable and fundamental question: Is God testable? If I postulate a premise about God, say that he is all-knowing, which would include his knowing the future (directly related to our chapter assertion), how would I test that premise? In historic Christianity, you would search the Scriptures to see what they said about God's all-knowingness. For post-enlightenment, modern scientific minds, that is not how things are done. You create an experiment to test and verify the claim.

Thinking this way encounters a fundamental theological problem: Who are we to question or test God? A whole book of the Bible was written about this very issue: the Book of Job. When responding to such an approach, God answers the questions about his actions or lack of them this way.

“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” [Job 38:2](#)

And

“Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.” [Job 40:2](#)

God then goes on to put our questions in their place.

“Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right? Have you an arm like God, and can you thunder with a voice like his? Adorn yourself with majesty and dignity; clothe yourself with glory and splendor. Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on everyone who is proud and abase him. Look on everyone who is proud, bring him low, and tread down the wicked where they stand. Hide them all in the dust together; bind their faces in the world below. Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you.” [Job 40:8-14](#)

Job's response is instructive.

“I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.” [Job 42:2](#)

Yet, we all want God to respond to us. I think it is because we want him to demonstrate that we matter to Him. This hidden agenda is more fundamental than wanting an answer to prayer. It wants to know that we are known and being known, cared for, and loved. We measure that caring and loving by demonstrable interaction, and that is where the rub comes in. It is often difficult to see God acting demonstrably.

For Job (and his wife and friends), the problem was how a loving God could subject him to such trials if he were righteous. For Paul, after all I have been through, why doesn't God remove this thorn that causes me such suffering? Job got no honest answer other than “I am God.” Paul was told his thorn was a gift to keep him humble. The relevant texts that address this are found in two places in Romans, in chapters 8 and 9.

“And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ...What, then, shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ...For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [Romans 8:28, 31, 38-39](#)

“But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?” [Romans 9:20-24](#)

Meditation on Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 2

There is a difficult balance addressed here. On the one hand, we have the clay—Job. His wife, believing God had abandoned him, gave him what for, and Job responded the way clay should respond.

“Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.’ But he wisely answered her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips.” [Job 2:9-10](#)

On the other hand, we have Paul, who, when his thorn is not taken away and he realizes it was given to him to protect him from sinning through pride, learns something fundamental. That is, when he is weak, he is really strong since, in his weakness, he turns to God for help, and it is God who sustains him. Everything happening to him is working for his good, and nothing, not this thorn or any of the other trials he has endured or will endure in the future, can separate him from the love or purpose of God in Christ Jesus.

In all things, God is sufficient; he is adequate in both circumstances, whether we walk the path of Job or the way of Paul. The tricky thing to grasp is that the issue is not God; it is us. It is how we respond to what happens. We can be like Job and Paul, Job’s wife and his counselors, or those who elevated themselves and belittled Paul because God allowed those trials to happen to him, claiming he was no apostle and not their equal. Sounds like a modern prosperity teacher.

The Old Testament saints knew the answer:

“God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” [Numbers 23:19](#)

God is reliable, trustworthy, and more than adequate, but he is also God. *He decides*, not us, what is best, not just for the moment but for the entire sweep of history. A famous aphorism is taken from the work of the 16th-century Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto (Orlando Furioso Ch. XLVI, 35): “Man proposes, and God disposes.” A similar thought came from the 8th-century scholar and theologian Alcuin, who said, “Man thinks, God directs.”

So, I will say it again: We all want God to respond to us, to demonstrate that we matter to him. We are like children seeking the consolation of our parents. You must understand that God is not without compassion, but he wants something fundamental to our eternal relationship: He wants us to trust him, to respond to what Jesus told Thomas, the apostle, who needed to see to believe.

“Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” [John 20:29](#)

So, remember Job, Paul, and Thomas as you think about God’s adequacy. Remember all the saints of God who have trod this path before you, trusting in their heavenly Father to meet all their needs. We need to learn, as Paul learned, to be content in all things or take to heart the more difficult lesson of Job that we may not know why, but we are still expected to respond correctly.

May God grant you strength to meet your trials and tribulations, peace amid your anguish, and grace to help in your time of need.

Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 3

Today's theme: When God is for us, who will accuse us?

Since we are all sinners (saved or not), we could be accused by everyone. The Scripture is more selective than the above statement. It says, "Who shall bring a charge against *God's elect*? It is God who justifies." [Romans 8:33](#)

Scriptural background: [Revelation 12:10](#) "Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.'"

This accuser is Satan, and a clear example of his accusations against the saints is demonstrated in [Job 1:7-12](#).

Quotes for the week

"My spirit looks to God alone, My rock and refuge is His throne, In all my fears, in all my straits, My soul on His salvation waits. Isaac Watts (1674–1748), British hymn-writer. "*My spirit looks to God alone*," l. 1-4, *Psalms of David* (1719).

As we all know, our emotions may look anywhere and tend to be driven by every wind that blows through our lives. But our spirit should only look to God.

The obligation of proof; as, "The *onus probandi* rests with the accuser." E. Cobham Brewer 1810–1897. *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. 1898.

The legal term for "onus probandi" is "burden of proof," and it always rests with the accuser (innocent until **proven** guilty).

"From thence to heaven's bribeless hall, Where no corrupted voices brawl; No conscience molten into gold, No forged accuser bought or sold, No cause deferred, no vain-spent journey, For there Christ is the king's Attorney, Who pleads for all without degrees..." Sir Walter Raleigh (1552(?)–1618), *His Pilgrimage*, *English Poetry I: From Chaucer to Gray*. *The Harvard Classics*. 1909–14.

The idea is that the court of heaven is an honest court with an honest judge and advocate, where Christ gives everyone equal representation, no matter their birth or station. Remember [Galatians 3:11](#), "...where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all."

Concern: We will succumb to the accuser's accusations despite having received forgiveness from and in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Remembering [Revelation 12:10](#), Satan accuses us and tempts us to despair, to doubt our forgiveness.

We confess our sins and say we are forgiven, but our old man still feels the rebuke of conscience and won't let go ([Romans 7](#)).

1. Have you *confessed and forgiven* sins that still plague your conscience? Why?

Yes, because I cannot make amends for what I did. Though forgiven by God in Christ, the consequences in life, here and now, remain, and sometimes that is a burden. It can be hard to move my past sins to them, becoming object lessons against future sins. Failure is a burden, even in non-sinful things.

2. Do you think God will take back the forgiveness he has already given you? What makes you so sure? (Hint: See [1 John 1:9](#))

“Never, not ever.” [Psalm 103:12](#)

“God is not a man, that he should lie, and by faith, I believe.” [Numbers 23:19](#)

“As far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” [Psalm 103:12](#)

Interacting with the text

Goal: To accept forgiveness, lay hold of our birthright, and pull it all together into knowing God in Christ.

1. What, according to Packer, can never disinherit us? Why is this realization important?

(p. 271) No accusation can ever disinherit us, whether it comes from man or Satan. Remember, Job was accused by both.

This is important because it counters our fear of being rejected by God. I really like Packer's point about the two broken consciences, especially the one suffering from a weak sense of pardon. If I have a problem, it is in that area.

2. Are you afraid (ever?) that God has or will reject you? Explain.

This will be a personal response. It is my question. Packer doesn't note this but for me, it is the most important verse in the Bible ([Matthew 7:23](#)): “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

It is the “*never knew you*” part since if I have ever been known of Christ (and I absolutely believe I have been), he can never say that to me. In addition, I do not “practice” sin (meaning work at it to perfect it). Hallelujah!

3. What does Paul, according to Packer, argue about our justified status before God?

(p. 272) No lapse on our part can endanger it. Who will be the accuser of the *elect*? We were chosen from eternity and the loss of our justification, Packer argues, is inconceivable.

4. Who is it that justifies us? Why is that understanding so important?

(p. 272-273) It is God who justifies us (not us by our actions—we are saved by grace) in Christ. Who is left to condemn? There is no one for the accuser to appeal to. As Packer notes, “He knew the worst about you at the time when he accepted you for Jesus’ sake; and the verdict which he passed then was, and is, final.” He has exercised his royal prerogative.

That should free us, not to sin, but from fear (see [Romans 6:1-2](#)). It should empower us to try great things for God.

5. What is wrong with the children’s flower petal plucking rhyme: “He loves me; he loves me not?”

(p. 275-276) It turns God’s immutable love (on which everything turns) into a capricious gift that he might take back at the slightest provocation. If nothing can separate us from his love, then it means just that: **NOTHING!**

God is not maybe, maybe not. That is a lie from the pit of hell. Its sole purpose is to sow doubt in our hearts and goes back to Satan’s chief technique, the same one he used on Eve. You cannot trust God, feeding, as Packer notes, “the Christian version of the existentialist angst at the prospect of personal destruction.” Well, yes I can trust him. Completely and absolutely!

6. What outweighs everything else in life? Why?

(p. 276) Knowing God in Christ Jesus my Lord ([Philippians 3:8](#)). It is our purpose, our reason for being; it completes us and makes us whole. This is the climax of the book as well as the climax of our existence: knowing God in Christ.

Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 3

7. What, according to Packer, is the heart of biblical religion?

(p. 278) The adequacy of God, who preserves me through everything so that I cannot be moved from his hand (re: [John 10:28-29](#)).

Packer uses [Habakkuk 3:17-19](#) to illustrate the “Sovereign Lord is my strength.”

8. Packer argues that the essence of Christianity is found in what link?

(p. 278-279) The essence of Christianity is in the link between the knowledge of God and human fulfillment. We can only become what we are meant to be by *knowing God*, thereby gaining “true freedom” and our “true humanity.”

9. What are distractions and what is the true priority for every one of us?

(p. 279) Packer argues that “church union, or social witness, or dialogue with other Christians and other faiths, or refuting this or that ism, or developing a Christian philosophy and culture, or what have you” are all distractions from the true priority of learning to know God in Christ. These things are all secondary if we are called to them at all, to knowing God in Christ.

“When You said, “Seek My face,” My heart said to You, “Your face, Lord, I will seek.”” ([Psalm 27:8](#))

After going this long in this study, what does your heart say?

What to Do Next

Think back on this section: *If God Be For Us...* and how Packer ended this study. What part of that phrase do you focus on? Too many people get mired in the “If” and lose their hope and trust, when they should be focusing on the last “God Be for Us,” an exclamation of primary significance.

Remember, this is a rhetorical question. It is a learning statement, not a fear to be embraced. *God is for us.* Remember THAT!

Goal: To apprehend what it means to have God at our back, with our eternal well-being as His faithful concern.

There is nothing more empowering than knowing God has your back. Think about it; revel in it; live up to it. Never forget: You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek." [Psalm 27:8](#).

That is a verse to live by from this moment on.

Meditation on Chapter 22: The Adequacy of God - Part 3

As we wind down this study, after a long journey through two introductions and twenty-two chapters, we come to the end of Packer’s argument, what he has been building toward since we took the first steps along our journey as travelers, leaving behind the balconcers. We have been a little like Bunyan’s Pilgrim, leaving the doubters behind and stepping out on our voyage of discovery, our goal of knowing God himself. In order to reach that goal, we have had to deal with numerous obstacles along the way, but none more significant than our own need for fundamental transformation, without which our efforts will digress into an academic exercise, having the form of true religion and godliness while lacking its inherent power.

[Hebrews 10:31](#) warns us “It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God!” Our journey has never been a walk in the park, an idle adventure with no consequences. I said at the beginning that everyone who had completed this study with me had been changed by the end. It is unavoidable. There are too many decision points along the way, too many demands on our comfortable assumptions, and too many challenges to our half-thought-through understandings to allow us to be unaffected.

We now reach the final nexus point of our journey. Toward the end of this chapter, Dr. Packer makes the following difficult assertion:

Now, if you are a Christian, you know that you, too, are being claimed in the same way [as Israel was in the greatest commandment [Matthew 22:37-38](#)]. . . The claim rests both on the right of creation and redemption, and it cannot be evaded. You know what kind of life it is that Christ calls you, as his disciple, to live. . . You can be called to go through this life as a pilgrim, a mere temporary resident, traveling light, and willing, as Christ directs, to do what the rich young ruler refused to do: give up material wealth and the security it provides and live in a way that involves you in poverty and loss of possession. Having your treasure in heaven, you are not to budget for treasure on earth, or for a high standard of living. You may well be required to forgo both. You are called to follow Christ, carrying your cross.

Tough words are words that demand being in the world but not of the world; words that demand us not to be like the rest of humanity but instead to be like Christ. Ultimately, the possessions, accomplishments, and glory of this world are unimportant, and if we are not careful, they can be a dangerous trap. As Paul said to the Philippians:

“But Christ has shown me that what I once thought was valuable is worthless. Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have given up everything else and count it all as garbage. All I want is Christ and to know that I belong to him. . .” [Philippians 3:7-9a](#)

Further on in Philippians, Paul discusses his ability to meet every circumstance, whether high or low, in the power of Christ, who sustains him. That is because his current state in this world is not the end all and be all of who he is; Christ is. Packer amplifies this thought using Paul’s statement in [Romans 8:32](#), “...will also freely give us all things.”

Paul is telling us that there is no ultimate loss or irreparable impoverishment to be feared; if God denies us something, it is only in order to make room for one or other of the things he has in mind. Perhaps we still assume that a person’s life consists, partly at any rate, of the things he possesses. The meaning of “he will give us all things” can be put thus: one day, we shall see that nothing, literally nothing, that could have increased our eternal happiness, has been denied us and that nothing, literally nothing that could have reduced that happiness has been left to us. What higher assurance do we want than that?

That is our nexus point. After going through this study, after this long journey of discovery and challenge, we come to the final question: what do we want? Do we want what God in Christ wants for us? Is that good enough for us? Are we willing to say what Job said?

“I am unworthy how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth.” [Job 40:4](#)

That requires total submission, bending the knee of our heart in total allegiance to God. It is interesting how, in the end, it comes back to the beginning and that all decisions boil down to one decision: Will you submit to God; will you keep the first commandment as Jesus said?

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” [Matthew 22:37](#)

I want to close this study mirroring the words that Joshua spoke on the bank of the Jordan River, at the end of one journey and the beginning of the next. We are ending this journey through the book **Knowing God**, and everyone who has reached this point is beginning their next journey as a continuing traveler on the path of discipleship. I have only one request: choose who you will serve today. As for me and my family, we will serve the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Grace and peace be with you, now and forever more.

Review of Section Three: If God be for us...!

Today's theme: God alone is always reliable enough for any need.

The heart of the Gospel is that we are sons of God and that through all the trials of our life, both inward and outward, God our Father is there for us, more than adequate for every need.

Scriptural background: [Psalm 91:2](#) “I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.”

He is where we go, and like children rushing into the arms of a protective father, he is a fortress of strength and help in our times of need.

Quotes for the week

“God, if this were enough, that I see things bare to the buff. Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894), Scottish author. *Songs of Travel: If This Were Faith* (l. 1–2).

Off with the masks, the costumes that try to hide us. When we “see things bare to the buff,” there is nothing left to hide, and the real begins to come out.

“A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.” Martin Luther. (1483–1546). Central figure of the Reformation. Hymn: *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*.

One of the best-known lines of any hymn speaks of the solace we feel in the midst of life's trials. Our Father God is a bulwark (figuratively referring to something regarded as a safeguard or a source of protection) that will never fail us.

Concern: That we will have the grit to complete the task.

So, now we know what we need to know. Will we embrace this knowledge with love and submission and offer ourselves to our Father in Heaven? The ball is in our court.

We have now completed the journey we started together. Toward the end of this study, Dr. Packer makes the following difficult assertion:

“Now, if you are a Christian, you know that you, too, are being claimed in the same way [as Israel was in the greatest commandment [Matthew 22:37-38](#)]... The claim rests both on the right of creation and redemption, and it cannot be evaded. You know what kind of life it is that Christ calls you, as his disciple, to live... You are called to go through this life as a pilgrim, a mere temporary resident, traveling light, and willing, as Christ directs, to do what the rich young ruler refused to do: give up material wealth and the security it provides and live in a way that involves you in poverty and loss of possessions. Having your treasure in heaven, you are not to budget for treasure on earth, nor for a high standard of living—you may be required to forgo both. You are called to follow Christ, carrying your cross.”

1. Do you agree with Packer's assessment? Explain.

Absolutely. It is the sum of all we have studied, the “so now what?” that we have arrived at. The cross lies at our feet—heavy, demanding, calling us onto the *Via Dela Rosa* (the way of suffering), onto His path, after his footsteps. What kind of son/brother/sister are we going to be?

2. Does that sound like the call of Christ you hear preached in churches today?

Not generally, though I can say that I do hear it in my current church. Can you fill a church today calling for sacrifice and walking the hard road? I doubt it unless God works a miracle for his purpose, and you get to go along for the ride.

In Review of Chapters 18-22

We have now completed our journey. On the last page of the book, Dr. Packer gives us this challenge:

Finally: we have been brought to the point where we both can and must get our life's priorities straight. From current Christian publications, you might think that the most vital issue for any real or would-be Christian in the world today is church union, or social witness, or dialogue with other Christians and other faiths, or refuting this or that ism, or developing a Christian philosophy and culture, or what have you. But our line of study makes the present-day concentration on these things look like a gigantic conspiracy of misdirection. Of course, it is not that; the issues themselves are real and must be dealt with in their place. But it is tragic that, in paying attention to them, so many in our day seem to have been distracted from what was, is, and always will be the true priority for every human being—that is, *learning to know God in Christ*.

This primary concern *never* disappears from our ongoing life in God in Christ. It must be renewed daily because we easily forget what is essential. Without our foundation in our knowing relationship with our God, our other efforts will lose their direction, forfeit their primary source of energy and direction, and we will be left in our strength alone. We may pray for this or that concern (and we should), but like our own children who only come to us to solve their problems and never to just “be with us,” something fundamental is lost. After all the effort you spent getting this far, *do not* let that happen to you.

“Thou hast said, ‘Seek ye my face.’ My heart says to thee, ‘Thy face, Lord, do I seek’” (Ps 27:8). If this book moves any of its readers to identify more closely with the psalmist at this point, it will not have been written in vain.

Add this statement to the previous insight, and you may conclude that to know God in Christ truly, you must take up your cross; without doing that, you cannot succeed in your task.

1. Do you agree with my conclusion? Explain.

This answer will be highly personal, but for those who are reticent to embrace the idea that knowing God comes through taking up our cross and following in Christ's footsteps, try to help them express what they think the path to knowing God is. If they got this far, they know the answer; they just need to embrace it.

2. How is propitiation important to Packer's premise stated above?

It permanently removes the barrier between us and God. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, please tell me which of our sins has his blood propitiated—when he was on the cross, which of your sins was he dealing with? Answer: **All of them**—the ones you had committed up to that point and all of the ones you would commit—all of the sins for your life. Once you are firmly in his hand, you are also in the Father's hand (John 10:27-29), and nothing can separate you from God. With that at your back, turn and face your God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and come to know Him in every way possible.

3. If God is your Father, your eternal and most authentic Father, how does that bear on Packer's premise?

While specific nuances of this answer will be highly personal, we can never forget that the definition of father and fatherhood, like the definition of love and loving, comes from God and is only secondarily and often improperly exemplified in this world. To honestly know the nature of being a father, we must look to our eternal Father God for its most profound understanding.

4. How is does the failure of the Rich Young Ruler touch on our desire for God's guidance? Think about his question, Jesus' demand, and Packer's premise.

Review of Section Three: If God be for us...!

It graphically illustrates Jesus' statement in [Matthew 22:14](#), "For many are called, but few are chosen." We must respond to God's call on our lives and take that step, doing what he has asked us to do. While similar in context, the step will be specific for each of us. Remember, since nothing can separate us from God in Christ ([Romans 8:39](#)), that works both ways; nothing can come between us and God. For the Rich Young Ruler, his possession came between. What comes between you and your God?

If you have removed that barrier, then by knowing God, you will know his will. Read, mark, and inwardly digest [Romans 12:1-2](#). To be that living sacrifice removes anything that separates us from God and allows that radical transformation of our understanding of who God is and what he expects from us.

5. What inward trials do you think the Rich Young Ruler was going through for him to approach Jesus the way he did? What do you feel you need to meet your inward trials?

While this question finishes with a personal revelation, the Rich Young Ruler clearly told Jesus that he felt he was missing something in his life. He knew God but sought the key to eternal life. Jesus challenged him to step away from doing the outward things and do the one thing that would change his heart (see [Matthew 6:21](#)) from the concerns of this world and fulfill the Great Commandment ([Luke 10:27](#)).

Our treasure is to be God our Father, Jesus our brother, and the Holy Spirit our comforter and teacher and not anything else.

6. What danger do you face responding to the call of Christ? What will it take for you to overcome that danger?

Remember what Packer said in Chapter 22, page 263:

Think! Is what Paul says in effect. God is for you; you see what that means; now reckon up who is against you, and ask yourself how the two sides compare. (Note, the translation "who can be against us" is wrong, and misses Paul's point: ***what he asks for is a realistic review of the opposition, human and demonic, not a romantic pretense that it does not exist. Opposition is a fact: the Christian who is not conscious of being opposed had better watch himself, for he is in danger.*** Such unrealism is no requirement of Christian discipleship, but is rather a mark of failure in it.)

We should remember Paul's warnings in ([2 Corinthians 2:10-11](#), [Ephesians 6:10-12](#)) that part of overcoming the danger is to accept its reality and then properly prepare our defenses, one of which is to know our God so that we can separate his call/leading in our lives from the tricks and subterfuges of the evil one. Remember, we are called to test every spirit, including every call/leading ([1 John 4:1](#)).

7. How is trust important in meeting Christ's call? What isn't dependent on trust?

In Chapter 22, the section "If God Is for Us," Packer makes the important point that our trust in Christ quells our panic about what might happen to us.

"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?" [Psalm 56:3-4](#)

This Psalm and Romans 8, in general, speak to our trust in God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) to see us through whatever confronts us.

Jesus warned his disciples (and us) not to fear him, who could kill the body (the Devil and his human agents), but to fear God (the one who can send a soul to hell). [Matthew 10:28](#)

What isn't dependent on trust is God. God was, is, and will be entirely independent of us and our trust. When we fail and fall, he picks us up. The will of God is not dependent on us or our trust. Our trust is for us, not God; it brings our lives into decency and order.

In the end, remember what Packer says on page 238, “We can never distrust ourselves too much.” And I would add, “Or God too much!”

8. Have you made the heart of biblical religion a part of your heart? Explain.

While the explanation will be highly personal, it is based on the fact that our covenantal relationship with God is the heart of biblical religion and that covenant is expressed in our lives by the Great Commandment.

‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’ [Luke 10:27](#)

We must accept Christ’s propitiation for our sins, the Father’s adoption of our born-again selves, and the Holy Spirit’s guidance in and empowerment of our lives.

What to Do Next

To borrow a well-known Nike commercial phrase, “Just do it!”

“To this end, we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power...” *2 Thessalonians 1:11*

I also look to [Philippians 2:12-13](#) to guide this *just doing it*. We must work it out with all the effort we can muster while God is at work, willing, doing, and taking pleasure in us. This is where the rubber of our belief meets the road of our lives in the shared responsibility of living out our adoption as sons. It is the great mystery of our responsibility and God’s sovereignty, one of God’s great secrets, that demands our explicit trust.

Our Final Goal: To know God and His Son, Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit to keep our course straight and true to the end.

May the grace of God empower you, may the joy of God fill you, and may the peace of God give you rest for your soul. Amen. So be it.

Go forth and proclaim the glory of God.

Meditation on Section Three (Chapters 18-22)

As we finish our journey through *Knowing God* with J. I. Packer, we have taken the “road less traveled.” This phrase comes from a poem by Robert Frost (*Mountain Interval*. 1920. *The Road Not Taken*).

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Yes, that has made all the difference. In his 1973 Preface to *Knowing God*, Packer discussed two diverging “roads” that people must choose between when they engage in the Christian faith, which then divides them into two types of people. The first type Packer calls *balconiers* since they tend to keep their distance from those whom Packer calls *travelers* or to paraphrase one of the early preachers to whom I am indebted, J. Vernon McGee, from those whose personal rubber has met the demands of the challenging Christian Road, the narrow road that Jesus talked of. These *spectators*, as I like to refer to them, are also on a road. It’s just not the one less traveled by. It is the one that is short and sweet, makes limited personal demands, is politically correct and non-judgmental, and allows the weeds of compromise to grow throughout its spiritual ecology. It absolutely refuses to allow any absolute demands (how’s that for an inherent oxymoron?) since, on this road, everything is relative.

The second group, the travelers previously referenced, is on the road less traveled by. Both its demands and possibilities are eternally endless. But it is the road we, who have engaged this study, have chosen. This road has been and will continue to be long and sometimes bitter, where one has and will continue to

Review of Section Three: If God be for us...!

encounter judgment and correction, and while love and joy populate its miles, it abhors compromise. It absolutely makes all sorts of absolute demands. That is not an oxymoron.

As a result, those who work their way through a study of Knowing God accept becoming part of the second group and throughout their journey encounter a few bumps and bruises along the way as they judged their beliefs against God's demands, accepted correction where due, and refused to compromise the truth that God revealed to them and what that truth now requires from them. They know that not only have they learned about the God in whom they live and move and have their being, but they have also learned so much about themselves, some of which has not been pretty.

But no matter, for their Father loves them with an everlasting love, their brother has saved them for all eternity, and the Spirit of Truth most Holy guides them and corrects them to make them holy and blameless before their God.

As we have finished this singular journey, ***ALWAYS*** remember that God loves you, has saved you through His Son Jesus Christ, and has brought you to this point, this moment, for a reason. Embrace everything He has taught you about Him and yourself and take that next step with us—of forever working to know our God in Christ.

Grace, peace, and blessings be to you, now and in the coming days.

Knowing God: In Closing...

Closing theme: I have become a new creation. May my life (my heart and actions) reflect my new life in Christ Jesus my Lord.

It is good to get your study group together again after they have had some time to recover from the demands of this study. How long to wait is your decision, but several months is usually the minimum time for everything they have experienced to sink in and make this reflection worthwhile.

Scriptural background:

[2 Corinthians 5:17](#) “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

This scripture is the basis of our efforts. As adopted children of God, we are different; the past is behind us (no matter how hard it clings to us), and the future holds endless possibilities in God in Christ.

[Deuteronomy 30:14](#) “But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.”

God is always there. The Holy Spirit resides in our heart ([1 Corinthians 6:19](#)) and while your actions may grieve him, he will never leave you or forsake you and Jesus promised that wherever two or more gathered in his name, he was in their midst. [Matthew 18:20](#)

[2 Chronicles 6:30](#) “You know what is in everyone’s heart. So from your home in heaven, answer their prayers, according to what they do and what is in their hearts.”

We cannot hide from God. There are no secrets. He knows more about us than we even know about ourselves. We cannot shock, surprise, or drive him away because he already knows it all.

Closing Quotes

“Aeternitas vitae resonat tamquam imago”—“What we do in life echoes in eternity.” Russell Crow’s character Maximus.

I have always ascribed to the argument that “All Truth is God’s Truth.” Everything we do and say echoes in eternity. We can take nothing back, which should often give us pause. It is better not to do the wrong thing than to try and clean up the mess afterward. That said, we also need to be bold in doing what we believe (after prayerful consideration) is right.

“It is what you do that defines you.” Christian Bale, as Batman, speaks to Rachel Dawes in *Batman Begins*.

When I heard that line come from Batman’s lips, my heart witnessed its truth. Jesus said, “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.” ([Matthew 15:8](#)) While what you say is important, what you do shows what’s in your heart.

“What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say.” Ralph Waldo Emerson.

We witness more with our actions than our words. If the two are not in sync, our words betray us and fall on deaf ears.

“All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy, for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter another.” Anatole France, French poet and journalist.

This is an excellent commentary on leaving the old man behind and embracing our new creation.

Closing Concern: We will not grasp the changes God has made in us using this study

We have to act upon the changes that God makes in us as we struggle through this study.

We do not want to waste the effort we put into this study and the work God has been working to accomplish within us. ***Each of these answers will be very personal*** while adhering to some basic principles, as noted in the question.

1. Why do you think it is so hard to put into practice (act upon) the changes God has called us to embrace in our lives?

The fight with the old man and temptation never ends in this lifetime. That can be tiring and sometimes disheartening, but [Philippians 2:12-13](#) is my hope—God is at work in me—while [Philippians 1:6](#) sustains me—He who has begun this good work in me will keep at it until it is completed.

2. Do you sometimes know what you must do, but something seems to stop you? Why do you think this happens? (hint: see [Romans 7](#))

I know that the old man and my fallen nature are still at work in my flesh, which will be part of me until I die and shed it forever. It is only when we admit we are weak that we begin to approach our true strength. [2 Corinthians 12:10](#)

3. What do you think is the most important thing you must do to make what you learned in this study become part of who you are (ingrained in your heart and expressed in what you do)?

I have to admit my failures and, as Paul cautions, do not think more highly of myself than I should ([Romans 12:3](#)). That way, I can confess my sins and move on with the commitment to change and grow in Christ. The most dangerous delusion is self-delusion and the twisting of pride into humility. As C. S. Lewis rightly noted, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less” and “The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a big step, too. At least nothing can be done before it. If you think you're not conceited, it means you are very conceited.” And lastly, Lewis noted that when we begin to approach any semblance of humility, the devil destroys it by calling our attention to it, and it is lost in the pride of accomplishment.

4. What, for you, were the three most important things you learned during this study? Prioritize and explain their importance to you.

Entirely personal.

5. Would it be helpful to study this book again? Why or why not?

I have studied the book over ten times, and each time, I learn more than the last.

6. Where do you go from here?

I want to know better the one in whom I live, move, and have my being.

In closing

In the end, as noted in our last study, Nike’s “Just do it!” statement says it best. So, I will reiterate, “Just do it!”

Meditation on Knowing God: In Closing...

Christians take knowing and being known for granted, opposing the existential and deconstructionist worldview. Every Christian makes a fundamental assumption: God is knowable. He has revealed Himself both by revelation, as recorded in the sacred Biblical text, and in the flesh of His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. And if God is knowable, so is his creation, including we ourselves.

There is a problem, however, with that religious assumption. Rarely do Christians make the required effort to know the God who has made Himself known. There are many reasons, not the least of which is

Knowing God: In Closing...

the effort involved. Couple that with the awesome responsibility of coming that close to the creator of not just the universe but of one's self, the One who knows even the number of hairs on my head (a constantly diminishing number in my case...), and you can understand at least some of our reticence.

However, since God has always demanded that His people love Him with all their hearts, souls, strength, and minds, failure to "know" Him is, in essence, a failure to love Him, since how can one truly love what one does not know?

So, where do we go from here? We strive to know God today better than we knew him yesterday.

Grace and peace be unto you today, tomorrow, and for all eternity, and the blessings of God be yours now and forever.