

GENESIS ROAD PRESENTS...



a look at the picture of God
in every chapter of
the 54th book of the Bible

Chapter 1

GOD REVEALS HIMSELF THROUGH RELATIONSHIP.

I was recently having a conversation with my husband about relationships, when it occurred to me that the only way a person can reveal himself is through interaction with others. Think about it. You have many private thoughts, beliefs, and ideas. You have a unique perspective on the world. And nobody will *ever* know about it unless you share it with them, either through conversation or activity.

Nobody can pry open your head and “find” your thoughts. Nobody can search your mind for the answers to what you believe, think, and feel. Only *you* can release that information in the course of relating to another person in some way. You reveal yourself through relationship.

It’s no wonder, then, that God *also* reveals Himself through relationship. I liked Paul’s description of that in this chapter: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy *so that in me*, the worst of sinners, *Christ Jesus might display his immense patience* as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.” (vs 15-16)

Ever wondered how God proves He is a patient person? According to Paul, the revelation only comes in the context of a relationship. As God encounters the worst of sinners (which, with all due respect to Paul, describes each one of us), He proves He is patient in the way He relates to us.

How would we ever know that otherwise?

And if it’s true for God’s patience, then it’s also true for all the other things that have been revealed about Him throughout eternity. This is why God makes free creatures who have the capacity for relationship—because God wants to be *known*, and the only way that is possible is if He is revealed through His relationship with us.

Chapter 2

GOD GIVES HIMSELF .

In this chapter of 1 Timothy, Paul makes a beautiful statement about God: “God wants everyone to be saved and to know the whole truth, which is, There is only one God, and Christ Jesus is the only one who can bring us to God. Jesus was truly human, and he gave himself to rescue all of us.” (vs 4-5)

At first blush, it may seem like the beautiful statement about God in that passage is that God wants everyone to be saved. (And that is true. And that is a beautiful statement about God.) But what I think is even *more* beautiful than that is the statement that “Jesus was truly human, and *he gave himself* to rescue all of us.”

Have you ever thought about what it means to give *yourself*? I’ve been sitting here thinking about it for quite some time, and I’m not even sure I could put into words what it means.

What I know it this: You can give your opinion without giving yourself. You can give your time and effort without giving yourself. You can give your money without giving yourself. Perhaps you can even give your life without giving yourself.

Truly giving yourself may certainly involve giving those other things as well, but I think you can give all those things *without* giving yourself, because giving yourself requires a certain attitude. It involves selflessness, thoughtfulness for others, and the

abandonment of the fight-for-your-rights, get-what-is-mine mentality that we’re so immersed in these days.

Surely, there could be no better news about God than that He gives Himself. This means that, no matter what, His first priority is *not* Himself, but His creation. His benefits and blessings are first and foremost for *others*, not for Himself.

I can’t imagine wanting to live with any other kind of God for eternity.

Chapter 3

GOD IS THE HEAD OF A FAMILY.

I was intrigued by the little verse that closed this chapter. In many translations, it reads like a poem or a song, and in fact, the great preacher Charles Spurgeon once said that the six little sentences “run with such regularity of measure in the original Greek, that some have supposed them to be an ancient hymn; and it is possible that they may have been used as such in the early church.”

As I studied it more, I zeroed in on two of the phrases that, to me, speak to the familial nature of what God is doing in His universe. “Without question, this is the great mystery of our faith: *Christ was revealed in a human body* and proven right in spirit. *He was seen by angels* and announced to the nations. He was believed in throughout the world and taken to heaven in glory.” (vs 16)

The first of these two phrases, *Christ was revealed in a human body*, is an indication that God actively works to include all of His creation in His personal sphere. He doesn't, as Creator, simply make things, set them in motion, and go about His business. On the contrary, He becomes personally, *intimately* involved with what He has made.

Just think of it: In the Garden of Eden, deity created humanity, but in Mary's womb, God added humanity to His deity, enveloping it with an embrace that was never to be broken again. Forevermore, Jesus would be known *both* as Son of God *and* Son of Man. Could God find any more personal way of identifying with us?

And the second of these two phrases, *He was seen by angels*, indicates that what God was doing in human history was of intense interest to the rest of God's heavenly family. Even though our planet is (quite literally) a speck of dust in a vast universe, the angels have also been involved in the events of Earth's history.

The Bible particularly records three crucial moments when angels played a role in the life of Christ:

- When He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. (Mk 1:13)
- When He was agonizing in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Lk 22:41-43)
- When He rose from the dead on Easter. (Matt 28:2-4)

What this suggests to me is that God is the head of a *family*, not a fragmented creation. If there's a problem in the family, then the *whole* family is involved in the problem. If there's a victory in the family, then the *whole* family rejoices.

There is no *us versus them* in God's universe. There is only a creatively diverse family where every member is personally accepted and included. God didn't leave Heaven to come to Earth. He brought Heaven to Earth in order to help us understand that, in His eyes, *Earth is* a part of Heaven.

God only has *one* family. And we've always been part of it.

Chapter 4

GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF AGE.

We place a lot of importance on *age*. In our society, many laws are based on an arbitrarily-set age. And in general, people who are older are viewed as more experienced, more wise, and more mature than younger people.

But that's not always necessarily the case.

Nor is age a factor of importance with God. As Paul said to Timothy, "Do not let anyone treat you as if you are unimportant because you are young. Instead, be an example to the believers with your words, your actions, your love, your faith, and your pure life." (vs 12)

It's clear from this verse that, to God, the most important consideration in one's life is *not* age, but spiritual maturity. Timothy might have been "young," but he was apparently mature enough to be an example to those around him—letting his words, actions, and faith (not his age) do the talking.

You'll notice that I put quotation marks around the word *young* in the previous paragraph. That's because age is an extremely relative concept. To those of us who currently live in a place where the average lifespan is, say, 70 years old, 20 is perceived as being "young," while 65 is perceived as being "old." (That is, unless you're 65!)

But there are only 45 years separating those two ages. So, what happens to the concept of age when one is living in a place where the average lifespan is

eternity? All of a sudden, there doesn't seem to be much difference between an age of 63,232 and 63,277 (even though they are still separated by 45 years). In both cases, the person has an eternity left to live anyhow.

This is why God is no respecter of age. On the contrary, He looks for the open heart, the willing spirit, the listening ear.

He spoke to Samuel, who was 12. He made a covenant with Abraham, who was 100. He chose a teenage girl to be Jesus' mom. And He promised Simeon, an "old man," that he would see the Messiah before he died.

Just as in Christ there is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, perhaps there is no young or old either. God cares about how open you are to His Spirit, not how many candles you have on your cake when your birthday rolls around.

Chapter 5

GOD CONTENDS WITH REALITY.

I'll be honest, this chapter was a little shocking to me. Once again, even though I've read the entire Bible several times in the past, I would swear I had never seen this chapter before. And I must say, much of Paul's advice here seemed somehow different than what I would have expected.

In many places, the Bible specifically talks about caring for widows (and orphans, too). But here, Paul puts quite a few qualifiers on that command: "No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is *over sixty*, has been *faithful to her husband*, and is *well known for her good deeds*, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds." (vs 9-10) In addition to all of that, Paul added that those widows who have extended family or are already being cared for by someone else shouldn't look to the church for help. He says only those widows "who are really in need" (vs 3) should be supported by their Christian brothers and sisters.

At first, it all seemed a bit odd, but then I realized that greed must have been just as rampant in Paul's day as it is today, and there were likely a lot of people (not just widows) who were willing to take advantage of the resources and means of the church. People who really *weren't* in dire straits. People who, with a bit of effort, could find other means of support.

Someone once told me that they think heaven will function like a sort of socialist society—where

every person shares what they have and uses only what they need. Perhaps that will be the case, but although that is the socialist ideal, that is most certainly *not* how it works in this world at present. This means that socialist ideas, while noble, may not mesh so well with the reality of greed.

And that's one of the things I love most about God: He contends *with reality*. I would say He has gotten very little of what He would consider ideal in the history of this world, but that has not stopped Him from dealing with us. Instead of insisting on His ideal no matter what, He has moved right on to Plan B, C, D, E, *ad nauseum* in order to deal with the reality of things *as they are*, not as He wishes they were.

I'm sure Paul (and every other person who has since been in a financially-responsible administrative position) wished that, in a community of believers, only those who were truly in need would live off the largesse of others. But that apparently wasn't the case, and we know it's still not the case today.

In those situations, perhaps it's best to contend with reality as God does. We may wish the human heart wasn't greedy, but it is. And while it may seem like a good idea to ignore that reality and, instead, hope for more idealistic things, that usually only leads to a lot of dead ends.

If we want to follow God's example, we must start with things *as they are*, not as we wish they were.

Chapter 6

GOD CHANGES US.

This chapter began with yet another statement by Paul that now sounds outrageous to our 21st-century ears: “All who are slaves under a yoke should show full respect to their masters so no one will speak against God’s name and our teaching. The slaves whose masters are believers should not show their masters any less respect because they are believers. They should serve their masters even better, because they are helping believers they love. You must teach and preach these things.” (vs 1-2)

What seems even more incredible to me is that this was the same man who also wrote, “*There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” (Gal 3:28) At first, I thought that, perhaps, this was an example of Paul growing in his understanding of what it means to be a Christian. And that’s why I was even more shocked to discover that, in the chronological timeline of Paul’s letters, his letters to Timothy were among the *last* he wrote!

How could Paul say that in Christ there is no slave or free . . . and then turn around and tell slaves to do all they could to serve their masters? Doesn’t that text from Galatians mean that Paul was advocating for the abolition of slavery?

Apparently not.

I think we have long assumed that the Galatians verse indicated that, but if that were the principle behind the verse, then it would also mean that peo-

ple would no longer be male and female. And that certainly doesn’t make sense.

So, what I think Paul was driving at was that, in Christ, we no longer nurture an *us versus them* mentality. We no longer allow the divisions that society foists upon us to rule how we think about things. What that meant for the Gentiles—even though they were still Gentiles—was that they knew (and operated as if) they were equal with their Jewish counterparts. And what that meant for the slaves—even though they were still slaves—was that they knew (and operated as if) they were equal with their masters. And what that means for women—even though they are still women—is that they can know (and operate as if) they are equal with men.

It’s intriguing to note the implications of what Paul is suggesting in this passage—that what God’s work in our lives does *primarily* is change *us*. Our circumstances may *never* change, but the power of God is to change *us* in the midst of our circumstances. That’s how Paul could tell the Gentiles that they were saved without being circumcised. And that’s how Paul could tell the slaves to work for their masters as they would for God. And that’s how Paul could tell women to submit to their husbands.

We talk about freedom all the time, but Paul was touching on an entirely different kind of freedom. He realized that the freedom God brings is not

necessarily freedom from our circumstances, our suffering, or our position in life, but it's total freedom *within* those things—whether they ever change or not.

That's why it doesn't really matter who you are, where you've come from, where you're going, or where you are stuck today. Regardless of who you are, you are in the same boat as everyone else. Nobody is better than you, and nobody is worse than you. We are all one in Christ Jesus.

Understanding that truth may not change your circumstances, but it will change *you*.

And that, my friend, will change *everything*.