



I Am

THE UNVEILING OF GOD

"This book renewed my hunger to know God."

- Steve Green

STEVE FRY

FOREWORD BY JACK HAYFORD

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OF GOD

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Multnomah Publishers' Sisters, Oregon

I AM
Published by Multnomah Publishers, Inc.
© 2000 by Steve Fry
International Standard Book Number 1-57673-690-3

Cover design by Chris Gilbert
Cover image by JD Marston Photography

The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV)
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Also quoted:

The Holy Bible, King James Version (KJV)
New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV)

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The Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version (TEV)
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For information:

MULTNOMAH PUBLISHERS, INC. • 601 N. LARCH ST. • SISTERS, OR 97759

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Fry, Steve.

I AM: The Unveiling of God/by Steve Fry.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-57673-690-3 (alk. paper)

1. Spiritual life—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4501.2.F787 2000

242 21; aa05 12-01—dc99

99-059105

06 07 08 09 10 - 7 6 5 4 3 2

I want to dedicate this to my mom, Peggy, under whose nurture I learned so many of the ways of God. Hers has been the hand that has steadied me through crisis after crisis; hers the words that have comforted me when it seemed my world was collapsing; hers the counsel that has spared me from more than one disaster.

Mine is a son's debt of never-ending joy to a mother of never-ending faith.

“I AM WHO I AM.”

EXODUS 3:14



“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”

JOHN 14:9



*“In the beginning you laid the
foundations of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of
your hands.*

*They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
Like clothing you will change them
and they will be discarded.*

*But you remain the same,
and your years will never end.”*

PSALM 102:25-27

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	9
Foreword: By Jack W. Hayford	13
Introduction	17
1. The Wonders of God	21
2. He Gives Eternal Life	27
3. The Boundless Grace of God	33
4. He's the Heartmender	39
5. Free to Change	44
6. He Frees Us from Guilt	51
7. A God of Forgiveness	57
8. A Giving God	62
9. God Was One of Us	67
10. When He Became Sin	73
11. A God Who Grieves	79
12. The Anger of God	87
13. Misunderstanding God	93
14. God: A True Friend	99
15. Our Righteous Judge	104
16. A God Who Struggles	109
17. Facing a Jealous God	114
18. A God of Holiness	119

19. He Calls Us “Holy”	129
20. The Bearer of Our Burdens	134
21. When God Is Silent	142
22. God: Our Great Contentment	148
23. The Redeemer of Our Pain	153
24. God Works through Our Weakness	159
25. Blessings in the Darkness	164
26. The Measure of His Power	171
27. He Restores Our Innocence	178
28. A God in Whom We May Rest	183
29. Joyous Obedience	190
30. He’s the Center of Our Lives	196
31. A God Who Celebrates	201
32. God at War—from a Seated Position	207
33. His Call to Worship	213
34. He’s Worthy of Glory	218
35. He Meets Our Needs—and More	224
36. God, Our Pleasure	233
37. He Pours Out His Mercy	237
38. A God Who Satisfies the Mind	243
39. God’s Call to Dependence	249
40. Face-to-Face with God	255
Notes	261

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book, in so many ways, represents the input of a variety of mentors. Perhaps one of the most profound influences on my life is a man by the name of Campbell McAlpine, whom I regard as one of the clearest prophetic voices of the latter half of the twentieth century. For me, as well as many of my comrades, this man has stood out as an uncompromising voice to a church that has often lost its singular vision of Jesus.

Others, too, have played significant roles in my life, whetting in me an appetite for God and awakening in me an understanding of how he works. I think of Albie Pearson, who tutored me in my early years of ministry; Joy Dawson, who showed me as a young buck that I could hear the voice of God and follow him wholeheartedly; Pastor Desmond Evans, a gifted Welsh Bible teacher, who believed in me when I didn't really believe in myself; Iverna Tompkins, another gifted Bible teacher, who, to me and many others, has been like a great aunt giving out incredible bits of wisdom at exactly the right moment; Rick Howard, who instilled in me a desire to communicate the Word of God; and David Reece-Thomas, who was there many times as a safe haven when I couldn't see my way.

But perhaps my greatest friend and mentor has been my own father, Gerry Fry, who showed me by example that humility is the grace that unlocks all other graces and taught me what it was like to hunger for God's presence more than anything else. A son couldn't have asked for a better dad. To these and so many more, I express deep appreciation.

I also want to thank all of my Messenger Fellowship colleagues

who have collaborated with me on many ventures around the globe; they have been an enriching source of friendship and support.

Over the years, many secretaries and associates have labored diligently on a wide variety of manuscripts that were never published; but they all said that maybe one day some of my random musings might just find their way into print. Lila Hedlund, Helen Lallo, Jeannie Russell, my sisters, Shannon Hoye and Candace Strubbar, Terry Wardley, Beverly Kaemmerling, Shari Hicks, and most importantly, Libby Whittaker, who has served my wife and me untiringly for the past seven years—to all of you who wrote pages and pages of copy that never saw the light of day—here's to you!

I want to express a deep sense of gratitude to my friend and editor, David Hazard, who more than anyone else has instilled in me the love of writing. He has been a welcome source of encouragement as well as a discerning instructor who has guided me through the sometimes exhausting process of producing a manuscript, always bringing to my disjointed thoughts a modicum of clarity.

I also want to thank Don Jacobson, president of Multnomah Publishers, and the rest of the crew at Multnomah for so enthusiastically believing in this book and giving it a broader voice. I especially want to thank Tracy Sumner for championing this project within Multnomah and for painstakingly crafting it in its final stages.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Nancy, who for twenty-three years now has been my biggest fan. She, too, has typed reams of copy for articles, books, and training manuals over the years. Far more than that, she has prayed me through numberless spiritual skirmishes, prodded me to believe God's promises in the face of countless challenges, and stood by me the many times I have felt

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

utterly alone. Her affections have often been the sweetest expressions of our Father's love to me this side of paradise.

Thanks, too, to my three kids, Cameron, Kelsey, and Caleigh, who have sacrificed time with their dad, but who have been as enthused as I in getting a book out that would help others discover God's love.

I can say with Paul, "Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him" (2 Corinthians 2:14). My life has been guided by this one overarching thought: As people see what God is like, they cannot help but fall in love with him. Nothing else satisfies me like communing with God, receiving by his grace glimpses of his nature, while spending time face-to-face with him. Mining the Scriptures for every gem of insight into his character is the kind of pursuit that is an ever expanding journey of joy—the more one knows, the more one wants to know. Everything flows from *him*, so it is with great ease and enthusiasm that I can say, "To God be the glory!"

FOREWORD

Nothing about this book—except *everything*—surprises me.

Those are carefully and sincerely chosen words, and not merely a cleverly constructed “hook” to catch your attention. Allow me for a moment to explain, and then “loose you” to stroll *through* (for refreshing) or to search *into* (for depth) this uncommonly enriching book.

Nothing in this book surprises me because...

It was about twenty years ago when I first met Steve Fry. There sat this teenage boy, seated at the piano as he began to lead a rather large gathering of pastors and spiritual leaders into the opening segment of the evening worship. To be honest, I was a little disappointed. At least, at first.

Now hear me, please. I’m neither snobbish nor condescending toward teenagers—indeed, to this day I’m still amazed and humbled to be invited to speak to large groups of them. But it did seem to me that the many hundreds of churchmen and churchwomen assembled should have recommended that the event planners engage a more seasoned leader for so significant a part of the gathering. So, I was dubious at the beginning. And it wasn’t because of the young leader’s skills (which were immediately obvious and remarkable), but because his young age seemed to predict a deficiency of adequate substance (spiritual clout, maturity, or weightiness) to warrant his leading such a group of spiritually experienced worshipers and warriors.

It was between the second and third song led by the teenager (whose name I later discovered was Steve Fry) that I found myself in a rather gratifyingly stunned state. *This kid really is something*, I

thought. *There's a meatiness to his remarks, a tangible something (better, Someone) verifiably present in his demeanor, and a studied quality of genuine passion for God in his music.* Entering in with more relaxed confidence in his leadership, I not only experienced God's goodness and presence along with the others present, but I was marked with a deep impression: This young man's *love* for God is born of a David-like passion to *know* God.

Suffice it to say, my disappointment was not only dissolved, but that night I felt I had found a full partner, a full generation younger than I, in that passionate pursuit of God that presses beyond form and fashion and cries out to know the one who awaits us in the inner place behind the veil. That "boy" taught us one of his own compositions that night (without mentioning it was his or making a self-serving reference to God having "given me this song"). That lyric says all of the above better than any words of my own:

Abba, Father! Abba, Father!
Deep within my heart I cry.
Abba, Father! Abba, Father!
I will never cease to love You!

The countenance of that youthful leader and the abiding content of his character and songs that I came to discover in Steve have made it impossible for me to ever again be surprised by the richness of his ministry. So it is that I have begun to peruse this enormous small book with a sense of renewed awe—awe over the Holy Spirit's ability to make mere human words produce heart-searchings, soul-awakenings, and mind-stretchings all through a fresh look at the wonders of our almighty and all-loving Father God.

Thus, *everything* in this book surprises me because...

Steve continues to do here what I “caught” him doing that night long ago, but what he has been doing with integrity through his faithful ministry for over two decades. Whether ministering the Word of God, composing to lead us in the worship of God, or—as here—writing to invite us deeper into the wonder of God, his extraordinary gift for drawing us to hunger more for God brings us to blessing.

In reading these pages, I have been stirred to yet another dimension of hunger for God and a desire to seek him yet more deeply. And, of course, it is always exactly this order of pursuit that results in any of us coming to glimpse more of God himself—where *everything* is a new surprise! But this is no casual matter, and these pages are not casually written. They awake a hunger because they have been born of it. And hunger is the key. Not information. Not curiosity. Not short-termed dallying into the supernatural.

To read this book is to discover a summons to such hunger—that which stirs a deeper, more passionate quest for God. And it is thereby we find ourselves being led to *his* place of eventual, certain satisfaction. Jesus said so: In calling us to acknowledge our own emptiness apart from God, our Savior guaranteed the reward for all who come in such honesty, saying, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6, NKJV).

It is there we find certainty and wholeness, there that peace and healing begin to overflow the soul, and there that we begin to drink at the only true fountain of joy. To be drawn to hunger to know God more fully—and to pursue that attraction—is to be drawn to discovery, to find a new unveiling of his loving purpose for each of

us, and to find a new unfolding of his life and power in us.

So, receive this book's invitation: Open up—yourself as well as these pages. Come and see more of the wonder of God—and find your hunger for him increasing. He's the God of everything you or I can ever yearn for—from being a healer of our hearts to becoming a Friend we can know face-to-face.

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INTRODUCTION

My wife, Nancy, and I have three delightful children. Like most parents, some of our dearest memories are those times when we were anticipating their arrival: buying baby clothes, painting the nursery, and...attending birthing classes together.

We were on pins and needles the first time we attended the birthing class. *What was labor really going to be like?* we wondered. Nancy was well into her first pregnancy the day she and I first traipsed into the hospital room where we were instructed on how to deliver this child with a minimum amount of pain. Over the course of several weeks, we learned how to breathe during labor and how to “ride” contractions. We were even told when *not* to show up at the hospital.

The first few sessions were fun. But one night the instructor began to talk to us about “transition,” that point in labor when the woman dilates seven to ten centimeters, bringing her right to the point of delivery. As all mothers know, this is the most painful time of labor. Our instructor told us that at this critical moment, it was imperative that we establish a *focal point*. A focal point was necessary, she said, in order to manage the labor well.

“Pick a picture on the wall to focus on, or a flower in the vase—anything to help you get your mind off the contractions,” she told us. As I recall, the instructor was quite serious about all this.

The moment came when our son Cameron announced his immediate readiness to enter this world. Hours later, transition hit Nancy like a freight train. *Focal point*, I said to myself. *We’ve got to have a focal point!* I had been coaching Nancy throughout her labor, but now the whole ordeal shifted up in intensity. As I frantically

searched for an appropriate focal point that would see her through her pain, she grabbed my arm and whispered, “You know, honey, I think I just want to look at your face while I’m going through this. I want your face to be my focal point.”

Throughout our lives we will experience the joy of “birthing” many things—starting families, launching careers, founding ministries. We will also endure seasons of pain. Not every question will be answered; not every wound assuaged. But there is a focal point that will see us through. It is the wonder of God himself!

Understanding and delighting in God is the headwater of life. Everything flows from a relationship with God. Today, there is a great deal of attention being given to prayer, reaching the unreached, and the church’s desperate need for revival. But it is only a passionate relationship with God that will fuel our prayer campaigns when we bear little fruit; only a passionate relationship with God that can protect our worship from becoming mere emotional release; only a passionate relationship with God that will guard us from executing lifeless strategies; only a passionate relationship with God that will lace our ministry with joy for a lifetime.

Richard Rolle, the great fourteenth-century mystic, put it this way: “God is of infinite greatness, more than we can think. . . . whenever the heart begins to burn with the desire for God, she is made able to receive the uncreated light and, inspired and fulfilled by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, she tastes the joys of Heaven.”

God is birthing new things in and through his church, and many of us are feeling the contractions: We feel it in the rapid, moral deterioration of our society; we feel it in the accelerated velocity of technological change; we feel it in a certain loss of intimacy and community with those around us. Some feel like the

INTRODUCTION

swirl of events is snatching them from their comfort zones; others feel pinched between the safe and predictable images of yesteryear and the unavoidable certainty of constant flux in a chaotic future. In the midst of it all, God is doing new things: giving us creative ways to impact our world, new angles from which to explore timeless truths, and fresh vigor to pursue unity with one another. But the only constant that will nourish our desire to walk faithfully in all of this is an intense focus on God.

I've had the privilege of being involved in theatrical productions from time to time. During one of these productions, a ballerina told me that when a ballet dancer pirouettes, she must have a focal point; she must fasten her gaze on something while she turns her body, lest she spin out of control. I have often watched the graceful movements of a ballet company performing *Swan Lake* or the *Nutcracker*. There is just something special when a prima ballerina flawlessly pirouettes, spinning with such form and balance. What is her secret? The focal point. Fixing her eyes on someone in the audience or a prop on the stage, she twirls with abandon, turning her head only at the last moment of each graceful spin in order to maintain her poise.

Unless we focus on God, our lives, our families, the broad national coalitions we attempt to create, and the international mission initiatives we so eagerly pursue will ultimately spin out of control. It is only as we gaze intensely upon the wonder of who God is that we will be able to walk with a sense of balance and poise in a crazy world.

Centuries ago, an unknown writer wrote what has become a classic in Christian literature, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. His language to the modern ear sounds a bit strange, so I'll paraphrase: "Lift up

your heart unto God,” he said, “with a meek stirring of love; and seek Him for Himself, not for the Good He would give you. And look you! Be loathful to think on anything but God Himself, so that you will not trust in your own wits nor in the strength of your own will; but will work only out of pleasure you take in God himself.”

Long ago, a man saw a burning bush from afar. As he gingerly stepped toward that bush, he heard a voice—the voice of the matchless Creator of the universe. As Moses gazed on that sight, the brilliant glow of the divine glory caught him in its beam. The I AM was present! It was glory so comforting he could divulge his deepest misgivings, yet so compelling he knew nothing would ever satisfy him again. As another faithful saint, Thomas à Kempis was to exclaim hundreds of years later, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, except to love God, and him only to serve.”

As you reflect on the beauty and majesty of God through these pages, may you find him to be as comforting and compelling as have millions throughout the ages. For once you see him as he is, you cannot help but fall in love with him.

Chapter 1



THE WONDERS OF GOD

*“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.”*

REVELATION 4:8

*S*ome years ago, a pastor in whose church I was to speak met me at the local airport. As we pulled away from the terminal, he began talking a mile a minute, waving his hands and tapping my arm. Clearly he was excited about something. His sense of enthusiasm was contagious. What had captivated him were some recent spiritual discoveries. It was refreshing to listen to someone who was excited—not about his plans, or his church programs, but by what he’d learned about God.

“Over the past year, I have been transformed,” he said. “I never

knew God could be so fascinating. Yet it seems the more I discover about him, the more I realize I *don't* know. Have you ever felt that way, Steve?"

I assured him I had.

"For months and months now, I've just been riveted to this whole pursuit of knowing God. The funny thing is that as I have shared some of my most exciting discoveries with my colleagues, their responses have been so casual, almost flippant. I would tell them things I was finding out about God, and they would say, 'Oh, we learned that in seminary.' Here I am pressing into God for all I'm worth—and they seem so indifferent."

Sadly, such tepid responses are all too common, I thought.

"Well, I went to God the other day," he went on, "and said, 'God, here I am pressing right into your heart, and I hardly feel that I know you at all. And these other guys seem to have you all figured out, but they're so complacent about it.' Then this thought popped into my head—I believe it was God—*Anyone can think they see all of me—from a distance.*"

His statement hit me like the jolt of a stun gun. How true it was! Sometimes our spiritual placidity is mere smugness. We coast along, and over time we lose that sense of wonder that would surely grip us if we spent time looking into the depths of God, especially at his love toward us and his healing touch for those whom life has harmed.

For many of us, getting to know God sounds like tedious business—the domain of dour theologians pouring over dusty manuscripts. For others of us, time seems to slip so quickly through our fingers that we never quite get around to spending it with God, reading his Word, and reflecting on his goodness. This sounds rather

boring to a lot of people. Quiet time with God often runs a distant second to an exciting movie on TV. Then again, many of us want quality time with God, but are uneasy with the solitude, for there we face our unanswered questions, our unresolved hurts, our unbridled drivenness, and, yes, our unconfessed sin. To us God is not the source of delightful fascination, but the reminder of our faults.

The book of Revelation is a keyhole through which we can peek at the wonders to come. Angelic hosts surround heaven's regal throne, exclaiming the majesty of God:

- sounds never heard by human ear reverberating through eternity,
- peel after peel of praise thundering God's majesty;
- the hushed whispers of reverent awe;
- the crescendo of song,
- each melody building on the last;
- chords colliding in ecstatic harmonies,
- intensifying with each modulation,
- moving from the serene to the sublime;
- every note resonating the wonder of God!

These creatures are permanently caught in a transfiguration, utterly mesmerized by the one they worship. For time beyond time, they have been worshipping God with no apparent concern for their own existence, enraptured in the pull of divine fascination. That these beings never seem to think of themselves, but are singularly focused in their adoration of God, says something about God.

What kind of a God do we serve who can so totally empty these angels of all self-interest and hold them in rapt attention? He must

be so incredibly absorbing, so uniquely satisfying that they give no thought to themselves, but are content to ceaselessly praise him.

How embarrassing, by comparison, is my self-centeredness.

As I reflected on my own worship experiences, I doubted that I could have repeated “Holy, Holy, Holy” for more than an hour. I would consider myself extremely spiritual if I could keep it up for two hours. Yet these creatures have never *ceased* to praise him—for millennia beyond counting! *How can they possess that capacity?* I wondered.

Reflecting on this Scripture makes me wonder if each time these creatures cry “Holy,” God is moved to reveal a facet of his character they have never seen. For as the apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 3:10, God’s wisdom is manifold. And every revelation of God makes them shout “Holy” all the more—which moves God to reveal even *more* of himself. And this has been going on for millennia—this amazing interplay of worship and revelation.

Imagine exploring the wonders of undersea mountains, volcanic fissures, and coral reefs of the Pacific. Or the autumnal colors of a New England wood. Or the vast Serengeti in Africa. Or the immensity of China’s Great Wall. God is wonderful beyond all this.

God is inexhaustible in his wonder!

There is a restlessness in all of us that prods us to seek God. We try to sedate that restlessness with a myriad of pleasures; we try to silence that restlessness through hours of labor; we try to ignore that restlessness and pretend that we are in fact quite at home in this material world. C. S. Lewis once asked this question:

Do fish complain at the sea for being wet? If they did, would the fact not strongly suggest that they had not

always been, or would not always be, purely aquatic creatures? If you are really a product of the material universe, how is it that you don't feel at home here?¹

The sea creatures don't complain, for they are in their element. The fact that we complain—the fact that we're restless—betrays just how ill at ease we are in a material universe apart from a relationship with the God who made it.

If you have lost your desire to worship God, perhaps you need to meet him in new facets of his personality and nature. Have you lost peace, happiness, and meaning? Allowing the wonder of God to flood your soul can restore to you the essence of life itself and give you strength for your spiritual journey.

Having eternal life means more than living forever: Jesus said eternal life is *knowing God*. It is what G. K. Chesterton called life's practical romance—the view of things that combines “an idea of wonder and an idea of welcome.” That's the *romance* we can know of God—awed by his wonder and secure in his welcome! That is why again and again, the apostle Paul prayed that the churches would be blessed with the Spirit of revelation, wisdom, and understanding (Ephesians 1:17, 18).

Angela of Foligna, a disciple of St. Francis of Assisi, once said, “The first step to be taken by the soul who desires to draw near to God, is to learn to know God in very truth, and not only outwardly as though by the color of the writing. *For as we know, so do we love*; therefore if we know but little and darkly, if we reflect and meditate on Him only superficially and pleadingly, we shall in consequence love Him but little.”



Lord, my heart does not always sing out in praise, for it is often choked with disappointment. My heart is not always tender to your overtures of love because it is often hardened by angers big and small. My heart is not always turned toward you, for I fear that to really embrace you is to see not your glory, but my destitution. Oh, God, restore to me the joy of knowing you. I open my heart to you now. Create in me a hunger for you like I've never known, so that my heart can sing, can listen, and can embrace you once again.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. Have you ever thought of God as fascinating?
2. Have you found your wonder at the person of God waning? Why or why not?
3. What factors could distract you in your pursuit of God?
4. What steps could you take to reignite your love for and wonder of God?

Chapter 2



HE GIVES
ETERNAL LIFE

*“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you,
the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”*

JOHN 17:3

*I*n the Hollywood musical *Scrooge*, the Ghost of Christmas Present invites the old miser to a sumptuous Christmas feast. As Scrooge imbibes and gorges himself, the ghost, appearing as a jovial Father Christmas, sings a rousing song:

I like life; Life likes me;
Life and I fairly fully agree.

For a brief moment, Scrooge is transformed from the humbug curmudgeon to a rollicking merryman, caught up in

the celebration of life as it was meant to be lived.

Life. The thrill of skiing down a freshly powdered slope. The sweetness of a summer snooze in a hammock. The laughter of friends. The satisfaction of a job well done. Life:

- where reality lives up to our expectations;
- where we find a satisfying rhythm between what we are and what we do;
- where we find a sense of fulfillment and genuine happiness;
- where integrity is enjoyable and relationships are satisfying.

We all want a good life. But John took note of the way Jesus defined real living—and what our Lord promises is something more than we can imagine. The most satisfying images we could conjure up don't begin to compare with what God has given us, and that is eternal life. That's far more than simply living forever—it's living a *fulfilled* forever. The emphasis here is not just eternity, but *life*—a life that begins the moment you and I meet Jesus.

Life is all that death is not. Death suggests isolation and loneliness, something that is cold and unfeeling, cut off from all that is energetic and vibrant, where anxiety robs us of peace, and anger robs us of joy. Life is goodness in abundance.

At least that was what God intended.

Sadly, many people live large parts of their lives in a state of death—lonely, feeling rejected and uncared for, suspicious of intimacy, even hardened in their hearts. Death in this context is not the cessation of biological functions; it is the loss of joy and innocence. When we place our trust in a close friend, and that person betrays us, something in us dies. Or when it becomes apparent that we will

never realize the dream to which we aspired, again, something in us dies. Death is the promotion never received, the confidence betrayed, the callousness of a son or daughter, or the agony of a missed opportunity that causes us to die a hundred times inside.

If offered a chance to escape from the misery of a meaningless existence, most of us would jump at it and ask, “What can I do? How much can I pay? Where can I sign on the dotted line? How can I really live?” The answer is not found in a sense of liberated personhood, in human friendship, in personal accomplishment, in retreating to some exotic vacation spot, or in receiving a lavish inheritance.

When asked the question “Do you really want to live?” we race to the counter with all our hidden desires of wealth, pleasure, and prestige—only to hear Jesus’ response: “This is life—*that you know God.*” When we hear this, we stop dead in our tracks. Somehow God and life don’t seem to belong together; they’re not part of the same song. “God” suggests everything that is wrong with me; even worse, “God” sometimes suggests why I’m so miserable.

We want life, but sometimes we are not willing to make the journey that will get us to real life. The truth is that many of us don’t really want to get that close to God. For some, it is because they are afraid of him. They remember all their broken promises to him to do better and the times they failed over and over again. Or perhaps they recall images of a vindictive God scoping the earth for someone to judge, and that stirs uneasy feelings of shame lurking in the shadows of their souls. Uncertain about where they stand with God, they keep a healthy distance between themselves and him. To suggest that knowing God is synonymous with satisfying living is beyond their comprehension. *How can one who evokes such*

feelings of dread be the source of my fulfillment? they wonder. To them God may be a Father, but he is a stern one who must always be appeased.

For others, the problem isn't fear, but anger—some unanswered prayer, unresolved hurt, or the loss of someone they held dear. They hold God responsible for these things and become resentful, even bitter—bitter at the injustice they have suffered, bitter at the opportunities they feel they've never had, bitter at the seemingly unrelenting hardships they go through without receiving a satisfying answer from God. Again, to suggest that knowing God is life in its most fulfilled form only irritates them more. *How can a God who has allowed me to go through so much pain be the source of my happiness?* they fume.

There are still others who know enough of God to be secure in his Fatherhood and in the knowledge that they have eternal life, but who simply have grown weary with life here and now. Those who have labored for fruit still unseen; those who have persevered without reward; those who are subject to the harassment of the enemy and the rejection of people; those who have learned the art of enduring, but have not known the thrill of overcoming—to them the idea that knowing God is the key to a deeply satisfying life *now* sounds good, but it is no longer believable. They endeavor to *serve* him, but have lost their ability to *enjoy* him. *How can I return to the place where the joy of the Lord is my strength?* they ask.

It is these people—the fearful, the angry, the weary—to whom I want to speak: to those riddled with disappointment; to those who love God, but have lost the passion for his purpose; and to those whose lives are simply out of focus.

It is not so much that Jesus Christ gives us the answers—he is

the answer. We who believe that life will be wonderful if we can just solve our problems and eliminate our hassles may not realize that cultivating friendship with God is actually the way to have the kind of life we crave.

Only when we set aside our fears, resentments, and even fatigue and strive to *know* him and seek him simply for the wonder of who he is—not to get answers, or meet our needs, or receive strength—will we suddenly find our fears, anger, and weariness subsumed by the deluge of joy that comes from discovering God.

Nicholas of Cusa, a church leader who lived many centuries ago in a time very different from our own, spoke words that are as relevant today as they were in his time. Caught up in the exhilaration of God's love for him, he wrote, "Life eternal is none other than that blessed focus where You never cease to behold me, yes, in secret places of my soul. With You, to behold is to give life, to unceasingly impart the sweetest love of You, and inflame me to love You by love's imparting...."

Let's ask the Holy Spirit to give us some fresh glimpses of what God is like, remembering what the Lord said through a prophet centuries ago:

"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me...,” declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 9:24)

How about you? Are you weary and disappointed with life? Then try to find appropriate Scriptures that reaffirm the goodness

of God's character. We've all endured times when we've been frustrated with life and have blamed God. What steps can we take to keep our hearts tender to his voice? How can we maintain that calm assurance in the Father's grace that sees us through life's pressing challenges?



*Lord, bring me to the place where I can truly enjoy you.
Grant me a heart that longs to know you, the kind of heart
that King David had when he pined for your presence in the
desert—"Your love is better than life" (Psalm 63:3).*

*I know I may rush about looking for all kinds of things
to satisfy my deepest yearnings, but I realize that
at the end of the day, all I really need is you.*

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. By and large, do you enjoy life? Why or why not?
2. Do you tend to see God more as a loving Father or a stern ruler? Why do you see him that way?
3. Where or to whom do you turn in times of disappointment and distress?
4. How can striving to know God help you deal with life's problems?