

Day 11
Commitment #1
God sees me

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight." Hebrews 4:13

A typical newscast is able to capture only a tiny percentage of each day's deaths and disasters. We are spared having to watch the total number of "if it bleeds, it leads" top stories that complete global news coverage would have to air.

Not God. He sees it all. *Nothing is hidden from God's sight.* Nothing!

How does He handle it?

Is He a "good old boy" God who shrugs His shoulders as He idly stands by?

Is He an "oh, no . . . don't do that" God who dejectedly averts His eyes as His planet bleeds?

Or is He more like a divine dictator God who calmly assesses the global carnage as He pensively considers His next campaign?

He is none of these. Each of these images has one thing in common . . . distance. God looking down on the planet from some remote vantage point. God keeping His distance.

God did not keep His distance. He chose to enter the planet the way we do, through a womb. Jesus Christ, God in human skin. He came into our world in order to see and feel it as we do: heat, cold, pain, pleasure, joy and grief.

God looked at life through our eyes.

God looked at death through our eyes as well.

One so big, became so small, came so close.

He doesn't just see everything, *He sees you and me.*

Day 12
Commitment #2

God sympathizes with me

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." Hebrews 4:15

Weakness.

You are attempting to lift a heavy object. It won't budge! This is a form of weakness. Weakness is the inability to influence something to do what you want it to do. The inability to influence a physical object is physical weakness.

We attempt to influence ourselves to do what is right . . . to not do what is wrong. We don't budge! Or we budge and then settle back into the same rut. This is another form of weakness. *The inability to influence ourselves is spiritual weakness.*

It is hard to admit that we are weak. It causes shame. We prefer blame over shame. We'd rather blame ourselves for being bad or blame others for being weak. We don't like to admit that we cannot influence ourselves, that we are weak.

Jesus Christ sympathizes with our weaknesses.

Jesus experienced life as we do, as a spiritual being within an earthly body. He experienced the tug-of-war that this living arrangement produces. *He successfully influenced Himself to do what God wanted . . . He never sinned.* However, He did feel the pull. He felt the strain.

Jesus understands our tug-of-war.

God doesn't look at you with frustration. No disappointment. No "I'm surprised at you!" or "Come back when you can do it well and say it right." *He looks at you with knowing understanding.* "I've been there." "I know that feeling."

In the light of His sympathy, both shame and blame begin to dissolve.

We can embrace our weakness when we believe He embraces us with His sympathy.

Day 13
Commitment #3

God deals gently with me

"He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray." Hebrews 5:2

God deals gently with us.

When leading the Israelites through the wilderness we read "God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert." 1 Corinthians 10:5

God deals *gently* with us? Bodies scattered all over the desert? I'd hate to see what harsh looks like!

Jesus Christ claimed to be God. His death appeared to prove otherwise . . . for three days anyway. When the weekend ended, any serious doubts about His being God vanished along with the body that vanished from the tomb.

It was hard for those who saw and heard Him to believe He was God. Sure there were miracles, but where were all the dead bodies? Jesus didn't "smite" anyone! He certainly didn't look like the God they had read about!

What is God really like?

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being"
Hebrews 1:3

Jesus is God in HD. Previous "analog" images of God were surpassed by the "digital" image provided by Jesus Christ. He is the "exact representation."

What is God really like?

Jesus gives us an answer . . . THE answer: *"I am gentle and humble in heart"*
Matthew 11:29

God deals gently with us!

Day 14
Commitment #4
God loves me

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need."
Hebrews 4:12

What should we say when we talk to God? How should we act?

Some of us approach God the way Dorothy and her friends approached the Wizard of OZ. Haltingly. Hesitantly.

How are we to approach "The Great and Powerful God"?

Don't pretend to be more "spiritual" than you are. *He sees you.* Hypocrisy is frowned upon. Be respectful, yet honest.

Don't turn your face away from Him in shame. *He sympathizes with you.* He knows that you haven't honored your commitments to Him. He wants to tell you about His commitments to you. Listen to Him.

Don't worry if you don't know what to say. You don't need to be afraid. You can be open, unguarded.

Don't omit problems you are facing. *He loves you.* He is not offended that you talk to Him when you are in trouble. In fact, a time of need is a perfect time to talk to Him. He will not always give you what you want. He will give you what you need.

Approach the God of the Universe with confidence.

He sees you. He sympathizes with you. He deals gently with you. *He loves you.*

Day 15
Commitment #5

God changes me

"I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts."
Hebrews 8:10

"I'm afraid that I have some bad news. It's your heart!"

If you're in a doctor's office, he now has your undivided attention. You will do whatever he says. Specialist? "Make the appointment!" Prescription? "Call it in. I'll pick it up on the way home."

"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." Matthew 15:19

"It's your heart."

The evil thoughts. The anger that boils up inside. The resentment that is eating away at you. *It's your heart.*

The sexual immorality. The infidelity. The private internet "searches." It's your heart.

Specialist? "No need! I just need to try a little harder; be a bit more committed."

Prescription? "I think I'll be OK. My behavior is better than most."

It's your heart. *God will need to "write" His changes there.*

God changes hearts by shining the light of His commitments into them. Even as you read these words, His "prescription" is making its way to your heart, changing your heart. Keep up the good work.

Continue to mediate on God's commitments.

Your heart is changing!

Day 16
Commitment #6

God chooses me

"They will be my people, and I will be their God." Jeremiah 32:38

God can choose to have anything He wants. Anything!

As He scans the world, what is it that "catches His eye"? When God "makes a selection," what does He choose?

"The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession." Deuteronomy 7:6

God chooses people.

People matter to God. People "catch His eye." When God points out His most cherished, treasured possessions, He points to people.

What does God's "collection" of treasured possessions look like? What kind of people does God choose? Whether we survey His B.C. or A.D. collections, we find this distinguishing feature – they are *undistinguished!*

"The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples." Deuteronomy 7:7

"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." 1 Corinthians 1:26-27

God's collection is remarkably *unremarkable!* Not "to die for." Well . . . that's not really true, is it? According to Him, it is "to die for." God sent His Son to do just that. That is how precious people are to Him. That is how much He treasures them.

Well, what does He do with people once He chooses them?

Does He put them on display?

"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Psalm 16:11

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions . . . in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:4-5,7

Eternal pleasures. Incomparable riches. God has an inexhaustible supply of kindness that He wants to shower on those He chooses.

God does not choose you because of what He can get from you.

God chooses you because of what He can give to you . . . eternally!

Day 17
Commitment #7

Good is ahead of me

"I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them." Jeremiah 32:40

Good is ahead of you.

It would be nice to be able to believe this, but . . . we can point to circumstances in our lives that aren't "good"! Exactly what does God mean when He says, "I will never stop doing good"?

What does "good" mean to God?

To God, "good" applies to circumstances that promote short-term pain but produce long-term gain.

"God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." Hebrews 12:10-11

God uses "painful" experiences so that we might "share in His holiness." These unpleasant circumstances fall under the category of "discipline" and are "for our good."

When we experience trouble, it is not the result of God angrily punishing us for doing something wrong. God's punishment for sin is death, not difficulty! Jesus Christ endured God's punishment so that those who believe in Him would not have to.

God is a loving Father who uses difficult circumstances to make His children like Jesus. This is discipline though, not punishment. *Discipline is motivated by love, not anger! It is focused on future obedience, not past disobedience.*

God does not promise that we will get what we want or keep what we have. He does promise that in all things, even painful things, He will bring about a good end; that we will share in His holiness.

To God, "good" also applies to circumstances in which the short term sufferings of some result in the long-term welfare of many.

Do you remember the biblical story of Joseph? When his brothers sold Joseph into slavery, he would not have called that "good." Joseph experienced times of deep pain and grief due to the cruelty of his brothers. However, Joseph did come to see that God's "good" purposes trumped his brother's "bad" ones. God enabled Joseph to provide food for many people and a home for his family.

Late in his life he would say to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." Genesis 50:20

God's "good" purpose enabled many lives to be saved. In all things, even unfair, painful things, God orchestrates circumstances so the sufferings we experience enable us to both share in Christ's holiness and benefit the lives of others.

When the temporary suffering of one results in the eternal welfare of many, God calls that "good." *This is why we call that Friday . . .*

. . . "Good Friday."

Day 18
Commitment #8

Good is guaranteed to me

***"I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more."* Hebrews 8:12**

All of us deal with sin.

Before raising an objection, read this first. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." 1 John 1:8

So there we have it. *All of us deal with sin.*

We might imagine that when bad things happen to us, God is paying us back for sinning against Him. This is not true. "The wages of sin is death," not difficulty. If God is going to get back at us for sinning, we won't live to tell about it. A car accident, fractured marriage, health problem or demotion will not balance the scales of divine justice. Only death can. In God's courtroom sin is a capital offense.

God takes sin seriously. That is why He has taken action to deal with it.

Perhaps you have heard that God "took His Son's life" in order to deal with sin. It is true that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to deal with our sin problem by dying on the cross. However, God "gave" His Son's life; He did not "take" it.

According to God, "the life of a creature is in the blood." When we see blood, we think of death. *God sees life.* It might seem like "splitting hairs" but there is something important here.

God the Father did not beat His Son to death in order to exhaust His hatred of sin. This is a pagan understanding of what "the gods" require. According to the pagan view, the gods are angry and vindictive. People are forced to pacify the angry gods by killing an animal or a human being. Men and women are forced to act in order to change the gods' attitude, to give them reason to get past being offended.

Jesus Christ did not die in order to deal with "the offended God."

Jesus Christ did die in order to deal with "the offending act." He died to deal with sin.

The Father sent the Son to sever the link between sin and death. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 3:23 Sin pays wages. It pays death. God gives gifts. He gives life, eternal life. God sent Jesus into the world so that sin's wages could be taken away from us and God's gift could be given to us.

Because there is "life in the blood," Jesus' death is the source of the blood that severs this "sin-death chain." His blood is to be understood as life given in love, not life taken in anger.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever

believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” Romans 8:32

God broke the link between sin and death.

God forged a link between you and good.

Believe it!

Day 19
Commitment #9

God gives me the power to persevere

"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak." Isaiah 40:30

Dismissed and disregarded!

When the prophet Isaiah opened his mouth to speak, he was addressing people who felt abandoned by God. Tough crowd!

"My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God." Isaiah 40:27 Either God is unaware of our plight or He knows about it but doesn't care enough to do anything about it. This is what they thought . . . and they were tired of His lack of responsiveness to their needs.

The "Red Sea days" were distant memories. Miraculous crossings had been replaced by foreign invasions. "Water" experiences in which God's power was visible had been replaced by "wilderness" experiences in which it was invisible.

Dismissed. Disregarded. Tired. Weary.

What does God say to people who feel this way? What does God say to people who feel forgotten?

"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak . . . those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles." Isaiah 40:29, 31

God encouraged them. He did not scold them for being tired. Neither did He excuse them from needing to persevere. He encouraged them to "hope" in Him so that they might "renew their strength." Strength would cause them to "soar on wings like eagles."

Weariness is the problem.

Strength is the need.

Hope is the solution.

Great! So if we feel dismissed, disregarded, tired, and weary, all we need to do is add "Hope in God" to our "to do" list. That seems like adding another bag of groceries to someone whose arms are already full. Like giving someone who is already tired something else to do. Where exactly are we to find this hope? How do we "hope in God"?

God has to teach us how to hope in Him.

Learning to hope in God takes time.

Learning to hope in God is like learning to fly.

When God teaches us to hope in Him, He is, “. . . like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.” Deuteronomy 32:11

When an eagle “stirs up the nest,” it causes stones and sticks to poke through the fur that blankets the nest. The eaglet is disturbed, uncomfortable. The eagle creates a commotion and tips the nest. Since the nest is located on a cliff, the eaglet is now air-born. The eagle “hovers over its young” watching it fall, but not rushing in right away. When the time is right, the eagle swoops down, “spreads its wings” and carries the eaglet to safety . . . until the next “flying lesson.” This process continues until the eaglet’s wings are strong enough to enable it to “soar.”

God stirs up our nest. The sticks and stones of uncomfortable days disturb us. We encounter turbulent circumstances. We feel dismissed by Him, disregarded by Him. God hovers over us as we pass through these circumstances. He swoops in and carries us, all the while teaching us to trust Him. Teaching us to use hope to renew strength.

God has not abandoned you.

He is “hovering” over you.

Day 20
Commitment #10

God gives me the power to be content

"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:12-13

"The secret of being content."

If we could patent and sell this secret, we could ask whatever we wanted for it. Everyone is looking for "the secret of contentment."

There is no shortage of demand.

There is a shortage of supply.

We experience enough of contentment to whet our appetite, but not enough to satisfy it.

Contentment is elusive. We get what we want. We feel content. We step outside and see something else we want. We feel discontent. We do what we want. Here contentment is. We are prevented from doing what we want. There contentment goes.

Paul discovered a remarkable type of contentment. He discovered a "non-elusive" variety. It was there whether he was "well fed or hungry." It didn't matter if he was "living in plenty or in want." Contentment didn't budge. What's better than getting what we want and being content? Not getting what we want and being content! This is what Paul found.

"I can do everything through him who gives me strength." This seems like an appeal to "limitless living." I'm sure that this verse has graced the banners of "You can do it!" seminars. On closer examination, it is not saying, "You can do it!" It is saying, "You can do without it!" (Don't bother to look for "You can do without it!" seminars – not in this country anyway.)

Paul found that God's strength enabled him to do without a full stomach and to do without a full house. *God's strength doesn't merely give us the power to do; it gives us the power to do without.*

The secret of being content?

Contentment doesn't come from receiving stuff. *Contentment comes from receiving strength. God's strength!*

God gives us the power to be content.