

# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Glory of God  
2 Chronicles 26; Isaiah 42:5–8



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

If the human race were suddenly struck blind, the sun would continue to shine by day and the moon by night. If we were suddenly struck deaf, birds would continue to sing and brooks to babble. And if we were suddenly struck with the “disease” of atheism, God would continue to exist in His resplendent glory. Our belief or disbelief in God adds nothing to nor takes anything away from His glory, any more than our sight or hearing commands the sun and the birds. But if we were suddenly struck by disobedience and self-conceit to steal God’s glory, even then He would remain undiminished. God’s glory is His and His alone, and with no other does He share it.



## LET'S DIG DEEPER

### 1. A Declaration Most Have Forgotten (Isaiah 42:5–8)

As Christians, we need:

- A clear reminder of our calling
- A strong statement about God’s glory



## GETTING TO THE ROOT

### *Too Heavy a Word to Toss Around Lightly*

Before the temple was built in Jerusalem, Israelites worshiped God in a “tabernacle.” A portable tent, constructed in the desert while the people wandered their way to the Promised Land, the tabernacle became a “house” for God whenever they stopped. Exodus 40 describes the first

*Continued on next page*



## Quotable

*To God alone  
belongs the glory—  
all of the credit,  
all of the attention,  
all of the applause.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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MM01

# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Glory of God

2 Chronicles 26; Isaiah 42:5–8

*Continued from previous page*

time the tabernacle was erected and God took up “residence” in it. As Moses recorded: “The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34).

But what does it mean that God’s “glory” filled the tabernacle? The Hebrew word for glory is *kabod* and basically means “heavy.”<sup>1</sup> When *kabod* is associated with God’s visible presence, as in Exodus 40:34–35, it takes on a special meaning—the heaviness of God’s holiness. In the words of one Hebrew scholar, “God wishes to dwell with men, to have his reality and his splendor [glory] known to them. But this is only possible when they take account of the stunning quality of his holiness.”<sup>2</sup>

Like dew weighing heavy in the air, so God’s holy presence, His glory, was heavy in the tabernacle—it permeated everything around it. Christians who carry the presence of God within them, in the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit, do well in not taking lightly God’s glory, just as Moses didn’t when he couldn’t enter the tabernacle because of the heaviness of God (40:35).

## 2. An Example We Should Always Remember (2 Chronicles 26)

King Uzziah was a man everyone could admire—until everything changed—and then he became the man nobody could respect.

- The King Everyone Admired (2 Chronicles 26:3–15)
- The Moment Everything Changed (26:16)
- The Man Nobody Respected (26:16–23)



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MM01

# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Glory of God  
*2 Chronicles 26; Isaiah 42:5–8*

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## LET'S LIVE IT

### Five Lingering Warnings to All in Leadership

- Beware when greater battles are fought within than without an organization.
- Beware when more attention falls on someone interested in building his or her own kingdom.
- Beware when the Lord's help is no longer considered essential.
- Beware when reproofs and warnings are resisted instead of respected.
- Beware when the consequences of sin no longer bring fear.

What should we do about our pride? What will God do if we take action to thwart our own pride? Read 1 Peter 5:6 to find out.

### ENDNOTES

1. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006), 457.
2. John N. Oswalt, "kabad," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 427.



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Glory of God

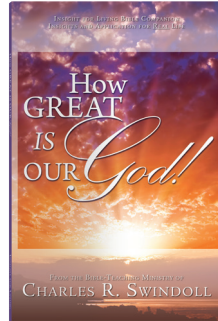
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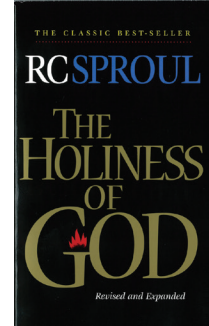
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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Holiness of God

Isaiah 6:1–8



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

What comes to your mind when you think about God? Whatever those thoughts are, one thing is true: they say more about you than they do about God. Fashionable thinking today—in a society that no longer receives its cues from the Scripture—wants a god who is predictable, not one of mystery. We want a god who is comfortable, not one who makes us shudder. We want a god who is a little holier than us but not too holy. In short, we want a god like us . . . only better. How foul such thoughts are, for our God is none of these things. In His unique otherness, our God is the measure of all things. And in the beauty of His holiness, we see the ugliness of our wretchedness, yet we also find the encouragement to be holy as He is.



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. Revisiting an Ancient Temple (Isaiah 6:1–4)

In the beauty of God's holiness, with angels all around, Isaiah's life changed.

#### 2. Rediscovering the Forgotten Truth (Isaiah 6:5–8)

In the beauty of God's holiness, we reaffirm two truths: God is holy, and we are to be holy.



### Quotable

*The magnificent thing about the holiness of God is it prompts us to be like Him.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Holiness of God

*Isaiah 6:1–8*



### GETTING TO THE ROOT

#### *Seraphim: The Burning Ones*

*Seraphim* literally means “burning ones,” the angelic servants of Yahweh, created to extol the holiness of God.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the Hebrew word *seraphim* sometimes refers to “fiery serpents” (Numbers 21:6, 8; Deuteronomy 8:15; Isaiah 14:29), perhaps because a snake’s poisonous venom and stinging bite tend to “burn” its victims. Though some Baroque and Renaissance painters depicted *seraphim* differently, these angels were far from chubby, placid, winged babies or androgynous figures clad in diaphanous garb. These special ministers are stationed closest to God’s throne and tasked with constantly declaring His holiness (Isaiah 6:2–3; Revelation 4:8). Some believe that the *seraphim* described in the book of Isaiah are analogous with the *cherubim* described in Ezekiel 1 and 10 but are differently labeled in order to distinguish how they specifically functioned in each passage (for example, when they worshiped at God’s throne as opposed to when they guarded His holiness from humanity’s defilement, as in Genesis 3:24).



### LET’S LIVE IT

In the beauty of God’s holiness, I reaffirm a holy life in three areas.

- In my mind, I must counteract my depravity with godly thoughts.
- From my mouth, I should be free of all unwholesome words.
- Through my morals, I need to be cleansed from every compromise.



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Holiness of God

*Isaiah 6:1–8*

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Does purifying your mind, mouth, and morals seem overwhelming and impossible? Why, or why not?

According to Philippians 2:12–13 and Hebrews 13:20–21, who is responsible for making changes? What is your part?

## ENDNOTE

1. Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2014), 97.



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Holiness of God

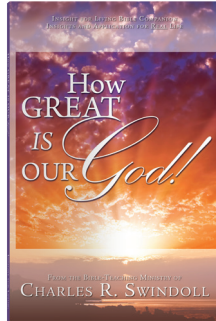
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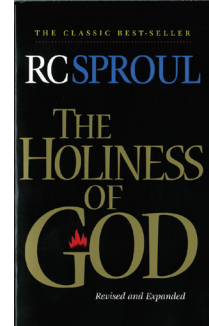
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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Love of God Selected Scriptures



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Love is the best known and least understood of God's attributes. Few doubt that God is love. Yet many believe that God's love, as demonstrated in His patience, mercy, and forgiveness, nullifies His righteousness, justice, and holiness. This popular notion of God, as if He were a benign, aging grandfather, sitting passively in heaven—affable, lenient, permissive, and devoid of any real displeasure over sin because He loves us—cheapens God's love. It doesn't uphold the value of His love. In truth, looking into God's heart to discover His love is to discover His other attributes as well.



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. Defining the Meaning of God's Love (Selected Scriptures from 1 John)

For us to grasp the depth of God's love, we must first understand what God's love is *not*.

#### 2. Seeing Examples of God's Love (Selected Scriptures)

Some believe that God showed Himself as the God of judgment in the Old Testament and the God of love in the New Testament, but this is false. He demonstrated His love in both testaments.

- In the Old Testament
- In the New Testament



### Quotable

*You may or may not believe you deserve to hear it, but here it is: God loves you.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Love of God *Selected Scriptures*

### 3. Illustrating the Extent of God's Love

God's unconditional love is illustrated in Jesus' story of the prodigal son and from Paul's great letter to the Romans.

- From a Story in Luke's Gospel (Luke 15:11–24)
- From a Statement in Paul's Letter (Romans 8:31–39)



#### **DIGGING DEEPER**

##### *A God with Two Faces?*

Some have observed that God as He revealed Himself in the Old Testament is One of stern justice and capricious wrath, bordering on the thin edge of madness, while God as He revealed Himself in the New Testament is loving and merciful, a doddering grandfatherly type who smiles a lot but doesn't quite know why. Both are extreme distortions of the popular view that God is inconsistent or hasn't revealed Himself consistently in Scripture. Such a notion renders God as schizophrenic.

This dual vision of God is not only unbiblical, it reduces God to a god (with a lowercase “g”) . . . which is to say it reduces Him to no god at all, because it denies His unchanging nature or reduces Him only to a god of our making. The problem lies not in the reality of God but in the perspective of those who cannot see God's love in the Old Testament and His justice in the New Testament. Many have wrongly concluded that love and justice are mutually exclusive. But justice is not the opposite of love (nor is hate), indifference is. (Even hatred recognizes the existence and worth of another as worthy of time and negative attention.) Indifference treats another as a nonperson, as nonexistent; justice treats another as worthy of redemption, as worthy of love. Justice may seem a cruel cut, but the cruelest cut is the cut that never comes—that is, indifference. God's love is too great not to cut out our sin with the scalpel of justice. He cannot be indifferent and let us die from the cancer of sin.

We may take God as He really is or reject Him on the same basis, but the one opinion not open to us is to create Him as we'd like Him to be. He is and has always been the God of love and justice in both the Old and New Testaments.



# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Love of God *Selected Scriptures*

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### 4. Claiming the Reality of God's Love

Claim the reality of God's love by receiving, in faith, the sacrificial death of God's Son, Jesus Christ. If you're already a follower of Christ, reclaim God's love by reminding yourself that God loves you.



### LET'S LIVE IT

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life" (John 3:16 MSG).

To people perishing in their ignorance of the reality of God, such a message of love seems inconceivable. They believe their sin is too great and God, though affable, is too weak to do much about it. How sadly incorrect that view is. God's love is greater and tougher than our sin. His is a love so great that He sent His own Son to die on a cross, just to win the hearts of humanity . . . including yours. No greater love than that exists!

**If you are a believer in Christ but you tend to doubt God's love for you, reread Romans 8:35–39, and write in it your own words.**



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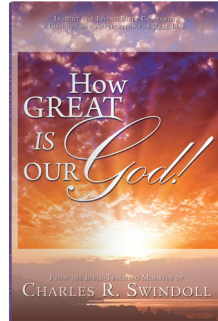
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*Selected Scriptures*



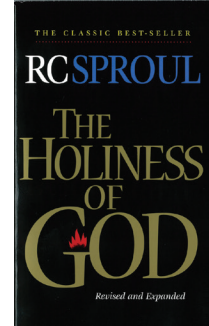
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MM03

# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Grace of God

2 Samuel 9:1–13



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

Some Bible words have been handled and mishandled for so long they've become shopworn and of very little interest to anyone. Not so with the word *grace*; it still retains its luster and mystery. Perhaps this is because grace, unlike so many other biblical ideas, is never earned or rewarded. Grace is only given as a free gift, a gift given to all who are undeserving and disabled—and that includes all of us.



## LET'S DIG DEEPER

### 1. Grace Defined

Grace is free, sovereign favor to the ill-deserving; it is not God helping those who help themselves.

### 2. Grace Proclaimed (Selected Scriptures)

The proclamation of God's grace was given by the apostle John, regarding Jesus (John 1:14–17), and by the apostle Paul, regarding salvation (Ephesians 2:8–9).



## Quotable

*God doesn't fold  
His arms and  
frown, waiting  
for us to meet Him  
halfway. Instead,  
He demonstrates  
grace.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Grace of God

### *2 Samuel 9:1–13*

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#### 3. Grace Illustrated (2 Samuel 9:1–13)

David's question about Saul's house was prompted by grace (2 Samuel 9:1–4), and David's actions toward Mephibosheth personified grace (9:5–13).

- David, out of sheer grace, extended his love to a nobody, just as God, in sheer grace, extended it to you and me.
- Just as David sought and found this undeserving man, so God sought and found us.
- As David restored this man to a place of honor, God has done that for us.
- As David adopted Mephibosheth from a place of emptiness, so God has adopted us into His forever family.
- Just as Mephibosheth's disability was a constant reminder of the king's grace, so our disabilities remind us of the same.
- There was no rank at David's family table.



# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Grace of God

2 Samuel 9:1–13



### DIGGING DEEPER

#### *Grace Is Life*

God's nature exudes grace. We can rely upon that truth because we can see that God's deeds exude grace, both in our lives and in Scripture. From start to finish, God's Word reveals His grace to those with eyes to see and ears to hear. Even from the first chapter of the Bible, we see that God displayed His grace in His creation of the world, in its plants and animals and, ultimately, in humanity. God's gift of creation, undeserved and underappreciated by humanity, associates His grace with the gift of life. This, too, seems to be the emphasis of the first explicit mention of grace in the Bible: when Noah found grace—often translated “favor”—in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8). This mention of grace comes just after God declared His intention to “blot out” humanity (6:7), making the gift of grace a gift of life to Noah and his family. Likewise, just as God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, delivered His people from oppressors during the time of the judges, and provided Jonah a fish in the midst of his rebellion, we see in the Old Testament that God's grace regularly provided people with the chance at life—undeterred by bonds within and without.

The New Testament continues this theme. Jesus, whom John described as “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14), came so that we might “have life, and have it abundantly” (10:10). The apostle Paul echoed a similar sentiment in Romans: “Those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17). As Paul indicated, grace has both present and future implications. Just as God's grace has impacted people throughout history, God, through His grace, will continue to bring life into the future—when Christ returns, God's people will enter into an eternal life with Him.

Over and over again, the Bible teaches us that grace leads to life—not just some disembodied existence. Indeed, we see fulfilled in grace the promise of life as it was meant to be lived—a life free from bondage to sin, a life free to serve God and others.



### LET'S LIVE IT

All of us are disabled in one way or another, which is why we need grace. But some of us have disabilities that are more obvious to the world, and we long to be accepted. The tragic truth is that even the family of God is not as accepting or gracious as it should be to people with disabilities. Yet the grace of God teaches this overriding truth: there *because* of the grace of God go I.

Thinking about those who are disabled, how can you be a “David” to at least one person this week?



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The Grace of God

2 Samuel 9:1–13



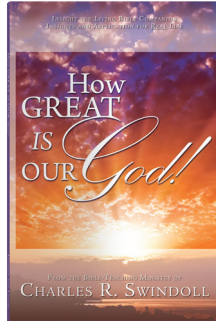
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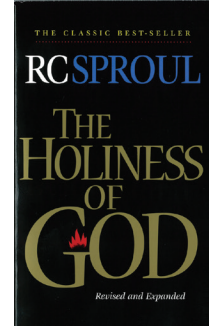
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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Servant Who Came  
*Philippians 2:5–8*



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus came to earth to seek and to save those lost in their sin (Luke 19:10). But why did Jesus do this? Why did Jesus leave His glorious throne in heaven to mingle among sinful humanity and eventually die? Does the Bible make this equally clear? Absolutely. Jesus left His heavenly throne because of His great love for us and because He is a humble servant.



## LET'S DIG DEEPER

### 1. Christlikeness in One Word (Mark 10:45)

*Servant* is the one-word description of being like Christ—the willingness to give up our will for another's good in order to accomplish what's best.

- Identifying the term: *servant*
- Amplifying its meaning

### 2. Christ's Humility in Paul's Words (Philippians 2:5–8)

Paul commanded us to have the same mind-set as Jesus had (2:5):

- Before His incarnation
- In His coming as a servant
- On the cross as a sacrifice



## Quotable

*When you are a  
humble servant,  
you're willing  
to give up your  
will for another's  
greater good.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Servant Who Came

*Philippians 2:5–8*



## DIGGING DEEPER

### *The Hymn of the Kenosis*

Philippians 2:6–11 is an early Christian hymn, which has become commonly known as the *Kenosis*, from the Greek verb, *kenoo*, translated as “emptied” (Philippians 2:7). Though ample evidence suggests that Paul was the hymn writer, scholars continue to disagree on the authorship of this hymn. Some argue that Paul incorporated the hymn from “a Gentile contemporary . . . who puts into poetic form his praise to Christ in a way similar to his pre-Christian pagan practice of lauding divine heroes.”<sup>1</sup> Regardless of whether or not Paul was the author, the truths expressed in the hymn are both inspiring and arresting. In fact, the hymn skillfully captures an early song of praise to the preexistent, earthly, and exalted Christ. Its beauty and simplicity rival anything David wrote in the Psalms and serves as a fitting tribute to our glorious Lord, Jesus Christ!

### 3. Christ’s Death, Proclaimed without Words (1 Corinthians 11:24–26)

- Two essential symbols: the bread and the wine
- Two crucial questions: “Am I clean?” and if not, “Why not?”



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Servant Who Came

*Philippians 2:5–8*

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## LET'S LIVE IT

No one comes to Christ without first humbling himself or herself and admitting his or her need for a Savior; no one continues in Christ without following Christ's example of humble servitude. So whether we look upon the cross or remember Christ in the bread and wine, we are reminded of divine love, divine grace, and divine humility—a humility that wrings from our mouths the heartfelt confession that “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11).

The bread and wine represent the humility of Christ's death, His obedience “to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8), but what of His resurrection? What is implied in Luke 22:18?

### ENDNOTE

1. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1970), 540.



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MM05

# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

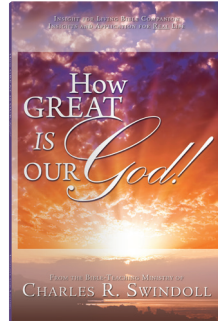
The Servant Who Came  
*Philippians 2:5–8*



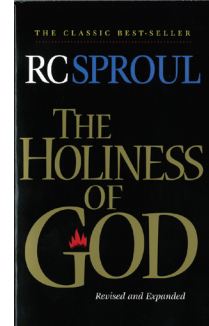
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MM05

# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Cup That He Drank

John 18:1–11



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

It has been said that the secret to a happy life is learning how to avoid pain. We certainly live in a day in which this philosophy holds sway. Ours is a comfort-at-any-cost, I-want-it-now society; a society that trumpets, “It’s all about me!” Yet, what the world shuns as foolishness, the Lord embraces as wisdom—the wisdom of pain to turn mere followers of Christ into disciples of Christ. Jesus called it “the cup.” To Him the cup was the anguish, humiliation, and torturous death on the cross. To us it means “taking up our cross” and following Him daily.



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. On Being a Christian . . . On Becoming a Disciple (Luke 9:23)

A Christian is a person who is rightly related to God through faith in Jesus Christ. A disciple is a believer whose commitment to Christ has grown into a deep desire to obey, regardless of the consequences, sacrifice, or cost.

#### 2. Jesus Christ Our Lord: The Ideal Example (John 18:1–11)

The garden where Jesus prayed and where torch-bearing officials came to arrest Him produced a threatening setting (John 18:1–3). But Jesus didn’t resist, which was a surprising surrender (18:4–10). Before He was taken into custody, Jesus asked a searching question (18:11).



### A CLOSER LOOK

#### *When Mortal Flesh Meets Majesty*

John opened his gospel proclaiming the deity of Jesus (John 1:1–5) and then told us about His humanity (1:14). It shouldn’t be surprising, then, that toward the end of his gospel, John gave us a glimpse of deity clothed in human flesh when Roman and Jewish officials came into the garden that night.

*Continued on next page*



### Quotable

*A disciple of  
Christ has a  
growing drive to  
obey regardless of  
the consequences,  
sacrifice, or cost.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Cup That He Drank

*John 18:1–11*

*Continued from previous page*

John recorded that when Jesus said “I am” to those who came to arrest Him, “they drew back and fell to the ground” (18:6). Some commentators interpret the unexpected collapsing of these battle-hardened soldiers, falling like dominoes, one on top of another, as a surprised reaction to Jesus’ sudden approach—as if the soldiers in the front backed into those standing behind, causing them to stumble and fall.<sup>1</sup> A more likely interpretation is that when mortal flesh met Jesus’ majesty, the soldiers’ reaction was in keeping with others who have encountered deity (Ezekiel 1:28; Luke 5:8–9; Acts 9:3–4; Revelation 1:17). And though Jesus’ “I am” sometimes refers simply to an acknowledgment of His identification (John 9:9), in light of the soldiers’ response, Jesus’ words were probably a revelation of His deity (Exodus 3:14; John 8:58).



### LET’S LIVE IT

To those who wish to deny themselves and drink whatever cup God has for them, here are four realities we must never forget.

- For every disciple, there is a purpose to fulfill.
- With every purpose, there is a cup to drink.
- In every cup, there is a pain to accept and endure.
- Through every pain, there’s victory to claim.



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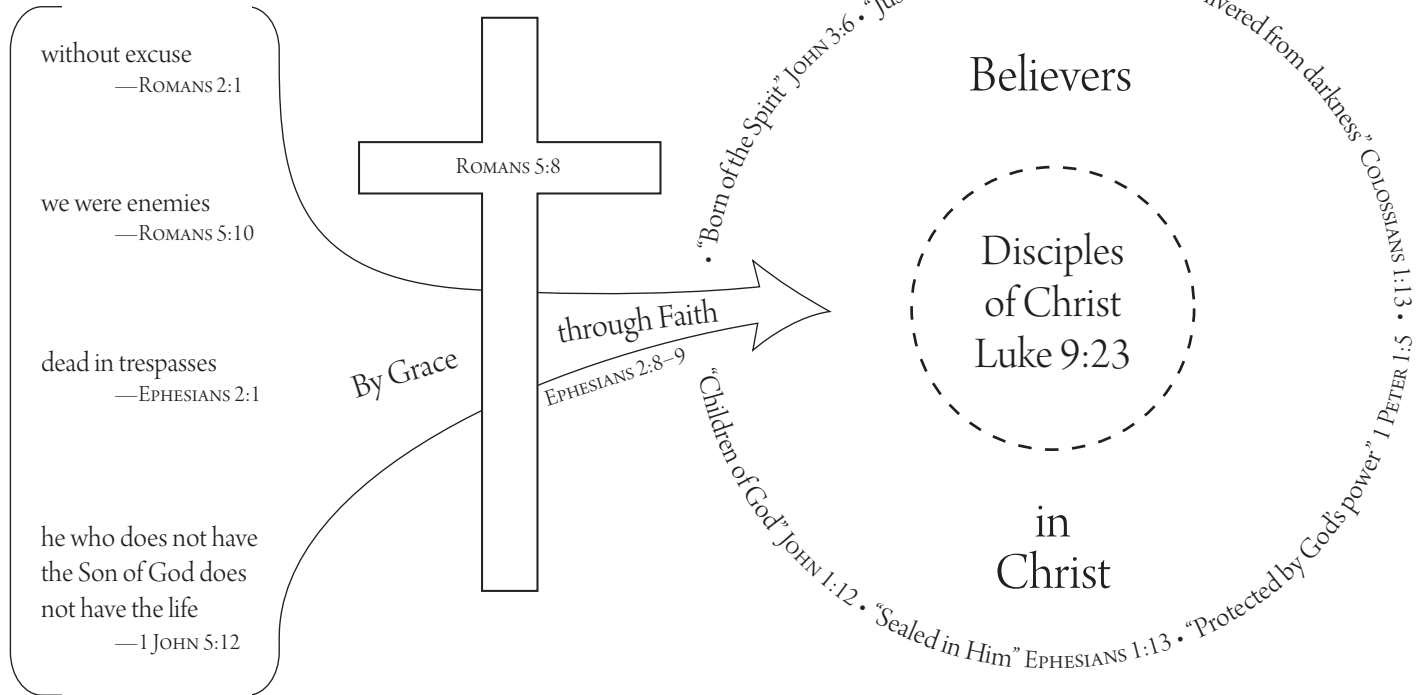
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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Cup That He Drank

*John 18:1–11*

## A Distinction: Believers and Disciples



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### ENDNOTE

1. See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 743–44. Morris doesn’t take this position but offers it as a possibility.



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The Cup That He Drank

*John 18:1–11*



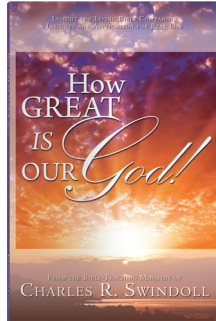
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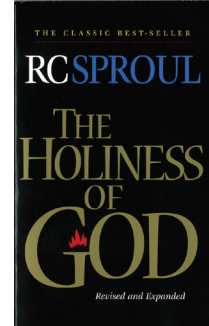
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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Lamb That Was Slaughtered

Isaiah 53:3–7



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Rarely do you hear someone described as “a person of character.” The idea speaks of maturity and integrity and self-sacrifice. But the phrase has fallen on hard times—perhaps because people of this sort are harder to find or harder to appreciate. We celebrate the rogue, the rough-and-ready, and the rugged individuals. Those who are meek and mild possess a character too wimpy for the times, so we think. We love lions, not lambs. But Jesus demonstrates that meekness isn't weakness—it is incredible strength.



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. Lambs throughout the Scriptures (Selected Scriptures)

Lambs are the most significant animals in the Scriptures; they appear throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament.



#### A CLOSER LOOK

##### *Did God Deceive Abraham?*

When we look closely at God's words to Abraham, we see a very simple, seemingly straightforward command: offer Isaac as a burnt offering (Genesis 22:2). As readers of this narrative, we're told up front that this command was a test (22:1). But at the time, Abraham didn't know this. From our vantage point, we know God had something up His sleeve, so to speak. He always intended to provide a substitute (22:12–13). Yet neither Abraham nor Isaac knew any of this for sure. All Abraham had to go on was a command, not an explanation.

*Continued on next page*



### Quotable

*The Lamb of God  
paid for the sin  
that forever plagued  
humanity—past,  
present, and future.*

—Charles R. Swindoll



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Lamb That Was Slaughtered

*Isaiah 53:3–7*

*Continued from previous page*

As readers, we aren't surprised when we get to the end of the story. We knew that when God said, "Offer Isaac as a burnt offering," He intended all along to provide *a substitute—a stand-in sacrifice* that He would accept as payment in full. From this story on, the principle of offering a firstborn child to God and his being "redeemed" through the offering of an animal substitute runs throughout the Old Testament (Exodus 13:13, 15).

Though God really and truly demanded the life of the firstborn, in His gracious economy of substitution, He mercifully accepted a stand-in.

As believers, we don't have to think long before we see parallels between the offering of Isaac by means of a substitute and the substitutional sacrifice of Jesus Christ that took place centuries later in the same region of Moriah. Some have even speculated that the mount on which Isaac was offered may have been the same one on which Jesus Himself gave His life as a substitute for us . . . or the same hill on which the temple was built, where the sacrifices offered anticipated and pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus (Genesis 22:2; 2 Chronicles 3:1; Hebrews 11:17–19). In any case, God's provision of the ram in place of Isaac illustrates His later provision of Jesus, the Lamb of God who willingly sacrificed Himself for our sins—the just for the unjust, to bring us into a relationship with God.

## 2. God's Lamb on Earth (Isaiah 53:3–7)

Jesus is the Lamb prophesied by the prophet (Isaiah 53:3–7), introduced by the baptizer (John 1:29), and affirmed by the apostle (1 Peter 1:18–19).



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Lamb That Was Slaughtered

*Isaiah 53:3–7*

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## LET'S LIVE IT

Four lamb-like qualities especially worth emulating

- A life of dependence
- The assurance of approachability
- A heart of innocence
- A spirit of sacrifice

What pleasing sacrifices are listed in Hebrews 13:16?

What can you do this week to make a sacrifice to God?



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The Lamb That Was Slaughtered

*Isaiah 53:3–7*



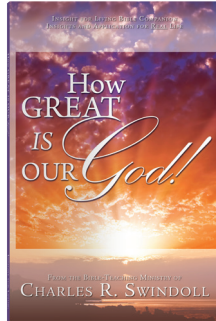
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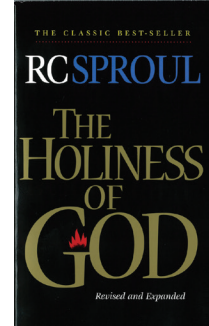
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MM07

# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Cross We Proclaim

1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5



## LET'S BEGIN HERE

Not many people are powerful, not many are rich, not many are famous—though many wish they were. No one wants to appear foolish or weak, which is why the allure of worldly ways is so enticing. The world has built a better mousetrap, so it seems, coaxing Christians onto its spring-loaded trap of humanism and intellectual pride. But Paul would have none of it. He warned us to turn our attention to what really matters—the cross of Christ—even if the world thinks it foolish and weak. Because through the cross, God blesses.



## LET'S DIG DEEPER

### 1. Understand the Significance of the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:18–25)

The cross of Christ brings about conflicting opinions, differing desires, and contrasting realities when compared with “wrong-way” values.

### 2. Consider the Truth of Your Calling (1 Corinthians 1:26–31)

Wrong-way Christians boast about fame, wealth, or powerful position. Instead, we can boast about our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption through Christ's cross. What an amazing perspective!

### 3. Hear the Honesty in Paul's Confession (1 Corinthians 2:1–5)

Paul's message and method: preach Christ crucified, simply and directly. Paul's purpose and motive: that the weakness of human wisdom would highlight the power of Christ's cross.

With the cross ever before us, we must never forget to remember the pit, to refuse the praise, and to rely on the power.



## Quotable

*I've always been impressed with the fact that we all stand level at the foot of the cross.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Cross We Proclaim

1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5



### A CLOSER LOOK

#### *The Brutality of Crucifixion*

Crucifixions were brutal affairs—the worst kind of punishment reserved for the vilest of criminals. So horrific was the cross to the ancient mind, the great Roman orator and statesman Cicero declared:

The mere name of the [cross], should be far removed . . . from the persons of Roman citizens, —from their thoughts, and eyes, and ears. For not only the actual fact and endurance of all these things [the executioner and cross], but the bare possibility of being exposed to them, —the expectation, the mere mention of them, even, —is unworthy of a Roman citizen and of a free man.<sup>1</sup>

The Romans didn't invent crucifixion, but they did turn it into a macabre art form. The executioner, an *exactor mortis*, was schooled in the finer points of death and led a team of soldiers whose sole task was to make Roman execution a terrifying spectacle. Held by nails in the wrists and feet, the one being crucified hung naked from splintered wooden beams, for prying eyes to mock and birds of prey to terrorize. Over time, Roman soldiers learned how to add various elements to the procedure and adjust them to achieve the desired effect. They could expertly control the amount of suffering, the cause of death, and even when the victim would die.

Victims were forced to carry the implement of their own demise to the place of execution. In Jesus' day, the cross itself was typically made in the shape of a "T"—the top crossbeam (the *patibulum*) joined to the vertical member (the *stipes*). Usually, the victim was attached to the cross with his arms outstretched on the *patibulum* and his feet on the *stipes*, the soles flat against the wood. Hung this way, victims usually took three to five days to die.

Victims nailed to a cross had to keep their bodies in constant motion to relieve the pain in their arms, chest, and legs, which only agitated the damaged nerves in the nail wounds. The primary causes of death were likely excessive blood loss, traumatic shock, or cardiac and respiratory arrest.<sup>2</sup>

This was the kind of death Paul wrote of, unadorned, in Philippians 2:8: "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Cross We Proclaim

1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5



## LET'S LIVE IT

If, at a sophisticated cocktail party, you were to confess that you were in love with the Eiffel Tower or describe how you bamboozled billions of dollars from taxpayers or announce that you've decided to become a terrorist, you would gather quite an intrigued and inviting crowd around you. But if you were to confess that Jesus Christ is God, who died and rose again for the salvation of humanity, you'd find yourself in an empty corner with a distinct chill in the air.

The world is not interested in Christ's cross; it is simply too scandalous! Yet we, the saved, proclaim God's gospel—considered weakness and folly by the world—as the only wisdom and power to save those who are perishing.

Do you believe that your days could be better if you relied on the power of the Spirit more? Explain.

### ENDNOTES

1. Marcus Tullius Cicero, "The Speech of M. T. Cicero in Defence of C. Rabirius, Accused of Treason," sec. 5, in *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, vol. 2, trans. C. D. Yonge (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1917), 269.
2. Adapted from Insight for Living, *Jesus: The Greatest Life of All Bible Companion* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 142–45.



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The Cross We Proclaim

*1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5*



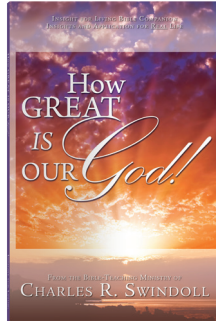
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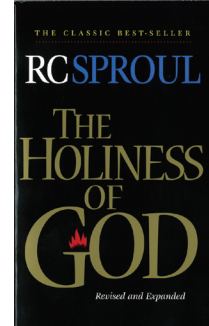
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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## Getting Reacquainted with the Spirit of Power

### 1 Corinthians 2:6–12



#### LET'S BEGIN HERE

“Boo! I’m the Holy Ghost.” That’s what some people think whenever the subject of the Holy Spirit arises. But who is He, really, and what exactly does He do? Is He an actual ghost, a mysterious fog-like substance that floats in the ceilings of cathedrals or hovers over cemetery plots like an ethereal phantom? Hardly! Of the three persons in the godhead, including God the Father and God the Son, God the Holy Spirit is the least understood and the most mystifying. Let’s dispel some of the myths and mystery by getting reacquainted with the Spirit of Power.



#### LET'S DIG DEEPER

##### 1. Blowing the Dust Off the “Holy Ghost”: Who Is He? (1 Corinthians 2:6–12)

The Holy Ghost isn’t a ghost at all. He is a Spirit who, as the third member of the godhead, possesses all the attributes of God and operates in the same realm as God the Father and God the Son.

##### 2. Blowing the Dust Off the “Holy Ghost”: What Is His Role? (Selected Scriptures)

The Holy Spirit works in regenerating the spiritually dead, baptizing saved individuals into the family of God, sealing Christians for eternity, and illuminating Christians with the truth.



#### Quotable

*The Holy Spirit  
reveals the deep  
things of God to  
us in the Word of  
God, the Bible.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## Getting Reacquainted with the Spirit of Power

### 1 Corinthians 2:6–12



#### DOORWAY TO HISTORY

##### *God's Signet Ring*

Seals were important objects in the ancient world of the Bible. Usually engraved, like signet rings, seals were made of semiprecious stones, gold, and onyx.<sup>1</sup> Their significance in the Bible was twofold. First, usually with an image impressed in wax, they physically sealed letters (1 Kings 21:8), legal documents (Nehemiah 9:38; Jeremiah 32:10), scrolls (Isaiah 29:11; Revelation 5:1), or doorways (Matthew 27:66). Second, figuratively, seals, like rings, united lovers (Song of Solomon 8:6), symbolized the deputizing power of God (Haggai 2:23), served as a sign of covenant ratification (Romans 4:11), and became a form of identification (1 Corinthians 9:2) and a declaration of ownership (2 Timothy 2:19; Revelation 9:4).

God's seal of the Holy Spirit—His signet ring, if you will—gives assurance that believers in Christ can never lose their salvation; they are secure and safe under the ownership and authority of God.



#### LET'S LIVE IT

Why should we care? Because we must guard against the thought that we have reached the pinnacle of our Christian maturity. Though the Holy Spirit no longer gives divine revelation through divine inspiration, He continues to give divine illumination into God's deep truth and to move us to take the gospel message of the Savior where it is needed.

**What are the implications for your spiritual growth, given the fact that the Holy Spirit no longer gives divine revelation or inspiration but continues to provide illumination?**

#### ENDNOTE

1. See Larry G. Herr, "Seal," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, Q–Z (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 369.



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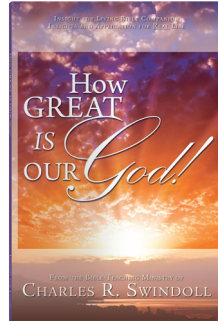
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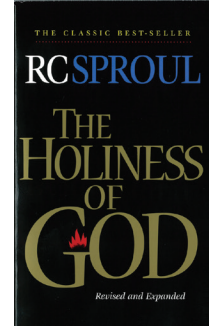
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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## What Does Being “Filled with the Spirit” Mean?

*Ephesians 5:15–21*



### LET’S BEGIN HERE

The Christian life is like a car. One needs at least two important things to drive it: a key and fuel. When an individual comes to faith in Christ, he or she is given the key: salvation. But the car of the Christian life doesn’t get very far without fuel — the divine enablement of the Holy Spirit, what the Bible calls being “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). Once we realize that we need to keep our spiritual tanks full every day, we’ll live lives of true authenticity.



### LET’S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. A Quick Review of Where We’ve Been (John 14:16–17; Acts 1:8)

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit as our helper. The Holy Spirit permanently indwells Christians. Now, we have God’s divine enablement.

#### 2. A Necessary Reminder of What We Are . . . and Why (1 Corinthians 6:19–20; Ephesians 5:15–17)

The bodies of Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit. As such, we are to glorify God in our bodies — being careful how we conduct ourselves because the days are evil.

#### 3. An Essential Understanding of How We’re to Live (Ephesians 5:18–21)

Paul gave us two commands: don’t “get drunk with wine . . . but be filled with the Spirit” of power.

These commands consist of four factors: *they are imperative, plural, passive, and present*. These commands lead to four results: *they affect our speaking, they give us melodious hearts, they make us grateful, and they encourage mutual submission*.



### Quotable

*When we operate from our sinful nature, the engine of faith shuts down. The goal is to operate in the Spirit.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## What Does Being “Filled with the Spirit” Mean?

### *Ephesians 5:15–21*

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Two important truths emerge regarding the filling of the Spirit.

- The world isn't looking for the amazing; it's looking for the authentic.
- The church doesn't need monthly miracles; it needs daily enablement.



### LET'S LIVE IT

Brennan Manning, a self-described fool for Christ, wrote,

The late Romano Guardini once stated that Francis of Assisi “allowed Jesus Christ to become transparent in his personality.” If this is what it means to live as a Christian, why are the personalities of so many pious, proper, and correct Christians so opaque?<sup>1</sup>

It is past time that we allow the Spirit to fill our souls and clean the windows of our lives. This is the only way we'll ever live an authentic Christian life; it is the only way a watching world will see Christ for who He is.

**Living authentically before others is what the world wants and needs from us. How can we achieve authenticity, according to 1 Peter 3:15?**

#### ENDNOTE

1. Brennan Manning, *The Importance of Being Foolish: How to Think Like Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 37.



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

What Does Being “Filled with the Spirit” Mean?

*Ephesians 5:15–21*



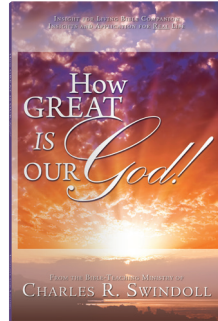
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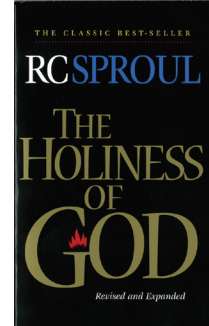
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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## Those Unidentified Inner Promptings *Selected Scriptures*



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

God often gets blamed for things He didn't do. But more times than not, He doesn't get credit for the things He does accomplish. So much of what God does in our lives is not carried out with fanfare—blowing trumpets and exploding fireworks—but in subtle, unheralded ways. All of us who follow Christ have sensed God's working, even if we couldn't put our finger on exactly what He was doing. But how do we recognize it? This spiritual sense comes from the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer and who gives believers inner promptings to participate in God's activities in our lives.



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. Never Forget: We Are “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made” (Genesis 1:26–27; 5:1–3; Psalm 139)

God made us in His own image, including the secret and spiritual chambers of our souls in which we sense the Holy Spirit's inner promptings.

#### 2. Biblical Examples: Those Inner Promptings—Then and Now (Selected Scriptures)

The Holy Spirit:

- Gives us hope in extreme loneliness and desperation (1 Kings 19:9–12)
- Brings calm determination in times of threatening fears (Acts 20:22–24)
- Prompts inner peace when we're in potential or present danger (Acts 27)
- Gives grace during great sorrow and grief (2 Corinthians 12:7–10)



### Quotable

*God sometimes communicates to us through unidentified inner promptings—but but never in contradiction to His Word.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## Those Unidentified Inner Promptings *Selected Scriptures*



### GETTING TO THE ROOT

#### *God's Still, Small Voice*

The King James Version of the Bible translates the Hebrew phrase *qol demamah daqqah* as “a still small voice.” The New International Version renders it as “a gentle whisper.” Did God speak audibly to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:12 as He did in verses 11 and 13, or was this an unidentified inner prompting?

Depending on the context in which it is used, *qol* can mean “voice,” “sound,” or “noise.” *Demamah* is only used in two other places in the Bible, Job 4:16 and Psalm 107:29, and can be translated as “stillness” or “calm,” as well as “silence” and “whisper.” *Daqqah* refers to something that has been made small, perhaps “thin” or “fine.”<sup>1</sup> Literally, we could translate this phrase as a “thin, calm [silent] sound,” indicating that it was different from the audible voice of God in verses 11 and 13. One commentator interpreted the phrase as “the soft voice of God speaking to the conscience, illuminating the mind and stirring resolve.”<sup>2</sup>



### LET'S LIVE IT

We should remember two practical suggestions and wise guidelines when dealing with unidentified inner promptings.

- When we're not sure it's from the Spirit—back off.
- When we're confident it's from the Lord—stand strong.

Theologian Vigen Guroian wrote, “The breath of God reaches into even the smallest and most remote garden and human heart and infuses life.”<sup>3</sup> Made alive by Christ, our spirits can discern the instigations of the Spirit, if we walk in intimacy with Him and we listen with biblical ears. Only then can we “hear” the thin, silent sounds of the Spirit—those unidentified inner promptings that bring unparalleled peace and fulfillment to our lives.



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## Those Unidentified Inner Promptings *Selected Scriptures*

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Do you pray that God will teach you when you open the Bible? According to John 16:13–14, who is our Bible teacher?

### ENDNOTES

1. See Gene Rice, *Nations Under God: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Kings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 160.
2. Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Ill.; Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1993), 173.
3. Vigen Guroian, “Inheriting Paradise,” in *Books and Culture: A Christian Review*, July 1, 1999, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/1999/julaug/9b4015.html>, accessed April 1, 2009.



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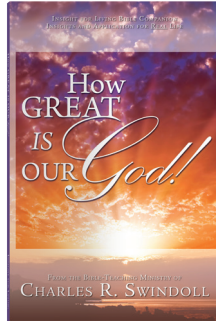
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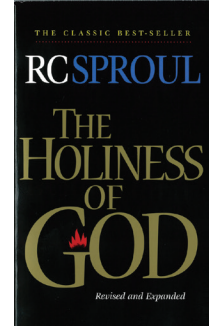
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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Spirit's Most Significant Mission

Luke 1:26–38



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

For millennia, average Christians as well as learned theologians have strained more than one brain cell trying to understand the incomprehensible mystery surrounding the conception and birth of our Savior. We'll not lose ourselves in the unsolvable riddle that is the conception of God the Son. Rather, we'll lose ourselves in the wonder that is God the Holy Spirit's most significant mission.



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. Tracking the Original Events

Keeping the events of Jesus' conception and birth in order is challenging, especially because they are scattered across different gospels. The chart at the end of this Message Mate will help you.

#### 2. Examining the Angel's Message (Luke 1:26–37)

Gabriel's message to Mary about the conception of Christ was impossible to understand with reason alone, but he assured her that anything is possible with God.



### Quotable

*I urge you to let  
this one statement  
sink in:  
**NOTHING** is  
impossible with  
God.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Spirit's Most Significant Mission

*Luke 1:26–38*

### 3. Understanding the Virgin's Response (Luke 1:38)

Gabriel's perplexing message was impossible to understand but not impossible for Mary to believe, because of her humility.

There are three benefits to true humility (1 Peter 5:5–7):

1. Humility gives us grace to accept whatever comes.
2. Humility comes with a promise—God will reward it.
3. Humility relieves us of anxiety.



### LET'S LIVE IT

The conception of Jesus Christ in the womb of a teenage Jewish girl was the most significant mission of the Spirit, and certainly the most mysteriously profound. Strain as we might to understand, in the end we must give up our striving and our unreasonable affection for reason and simply choose to “understand” by faith, to believe that the Spirit conceived the only One who can save our souls. Scripture promises that someday we will “know fully, even as [we are] fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12 NIV). On that day, all things will become reasonable.

**Two practical applications can be drawn from these passages.**

- The Holy Spirit may be sending you out, like Gabriel, to announce the good news of Christ's birth, death, and resurrection to people who need to hear.
- Or, the Spirit is persuading you to receive the good news as Mary did—in simple faith.

**What is God's opinion of those who carry the message of the good news, according to Romans 10:15?**



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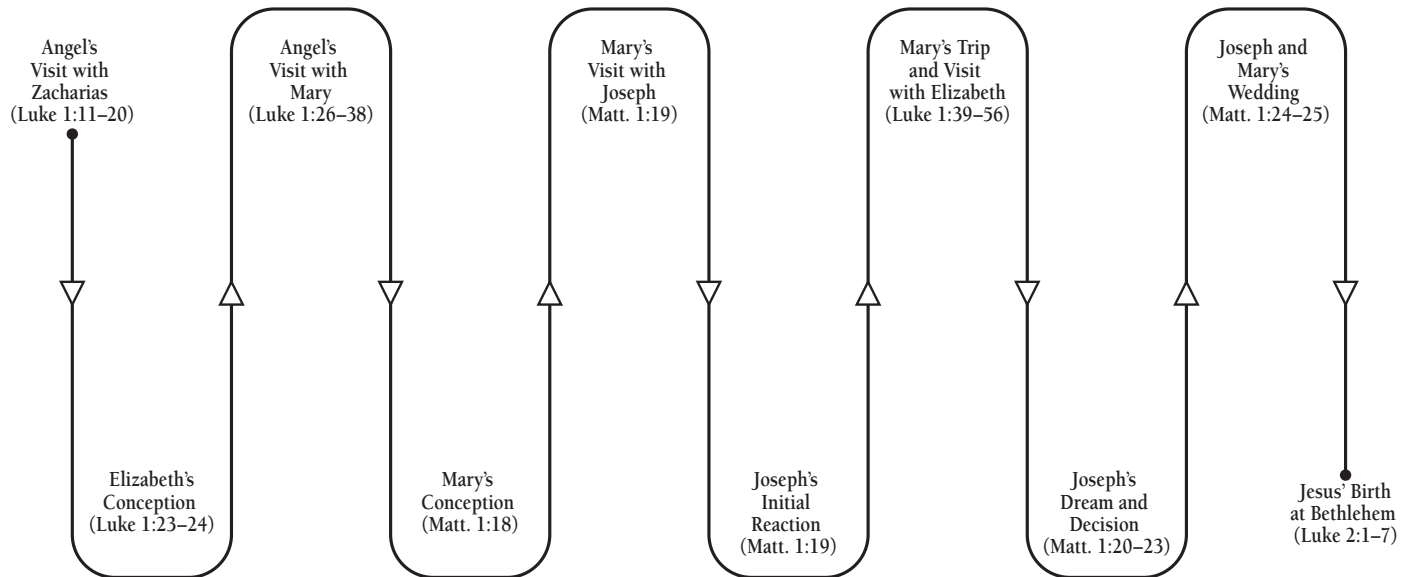
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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

## The Spirit's Most Significant Mission

*Luke 1:26–38*

### Important Events Leading to Jesus' Birth



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# HOW GREAT IS OUR GOD!

The Spirit's Most Significant Mission

*Luke 1:26–38*



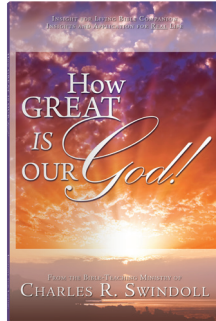
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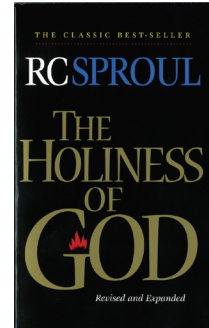
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