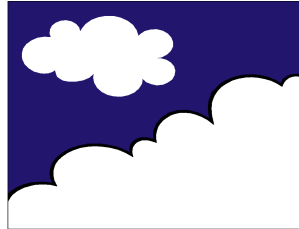


How Do You See God?

-by Dave Arch-



All page numbers refer to the New International Version of The Bible as published by Zondervan Publishing as their Thinline Bible. It is available at all Christian Book Stores and many others too.

Every person alive today has some picture that comes to mind when the word "God" is spoken. Possibly that picture came from parents, a pastor, a friend, a movie or a book.

In my twenty years of work in the area of personal and family counseling, I have had demonstrated to me over and over again the importance of that picture. I have come to believe that every person can benefit by first clarifying that picture at a conscious level and then examining that picture to correct any distortions. In the final analysis, those God view distortions feed unhappiness and destroy relationships with such caustic emotions as guilt, hopelessness, and despair (as opposed to those success nurturing attitudes of forgiveness, hope, and endurance).

Consequently, in an effort to help you clarify your own picture of God, take a few moments to reflect on how you would complete the following statements about God and His attitude towards you. The first thought that comes to your mind is usually the best one to write in the blank following each statement.

1. The commandment of God I feel farthest from fulfilling is _____.

2. When I look up and see God's face in my mind after I have failed to meet that commandment, He looks _____.

3. And I think that He feels _____.

4. The first thing I think God does after I fail is _____.

5. I think that I'll never be perfect enough to suit God in the area of _____.

6. I feel like I frustrate God most when I _____.

7. When I do something that God doesn't like, He usually punishes me by _____.

8. Picture God commanding you to obey the commandment you listed in Statement #1.

From the list below, check the words that best describe His tone of voice:

___ High

___ Low

___ Strong

___ Weak

___ Cold

___ Warm

___ Loud

___ Soft

9. As best you can, try to describe why God listed the breaking of that commandment as something He didn't like. _____

10. If someone came to God and asked Him to give His opinion of you, what words would He use?
_____.

[11. What in your life do you believe that God could get positively excited about?](#)

As you'll see above, the individual questions are highlighted links that will take you to other Bible studies to help you explore the question in even more depth.

I hope that this series of studies helps to expand your view of God.

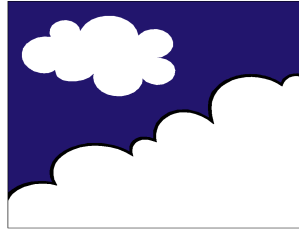
Please write if I can be of assistance.

Pastor Dave
AskAPastor@aol.com

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GOD IS UNDERSTANDING

by Dave Arch



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Psalm 78 is a short history of the nation of Israel's walk with God. As with all of us, its a collection of highs and lows. When things were good, they tended to forget God. However, when things got tough. . .well, that was another story probably best summarized by verse 34 which says "When He killed them, then they sought Him. . ."

This cycle of the nation forgetting God and then remembering God went on literally for generations and generations. Why didn't God just get fed up and totally destroy the nation? It seems like a reasonable question.

A clue can be found in verses 37-39:

"their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant, yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a passing breeze that does not return. (Psalm 78:37-39, pg. 498)

He understood that they were weak. Psalm 103:13-14 makes the same point with a different analogy:

"As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103:13,14, pg. 511)

He alludes to the fact that he was there at the beginning when according to Genesis 2:7 (pg. 2) He made man "out of the dust of the earth." We forget we're dust, we think that we're strong, but He never forgets that we are dust. Someday following our deaths we will all return to the dust from which we are made.

That perspective forever changes the way God deals with us. It forever impacts His understanding of us.

However, there is also the analogy of the parent and child that captures my attention. Any parent or child for that matter can identify with what He's saying. Even when my four teenagers talk boldly (with the untested confidence that they can do anything) my understanding overrides their words.

If in my humanness, I can make those mental adjustments based on my understanding. how much more

will God.

How would you complete the following statement?

"I think that I'll never be perfect enough to suit God in the area of _____"

How would you complete it in the light of His understanding?

Is God's standard perfection? His commandments in the Bible indicate that the only answer is "yes." However, that's a completely different question than the question "Does God expect perfection from you?" In the light of His understanding of our make-up being dust, I believe that the answer is "no." We are clearly dealing with a Person Who is more than we ever imagined.

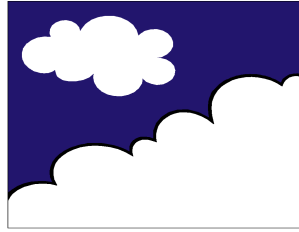
This study might have raised some questions that you'd like to send me. I hope so. Please E-Mail me at AskAPastor@aol.com and I'll be happy to write back -- beginning a dialogue that could benefit us both.

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GOD'S REACTIONS WHEN WE FAIL

by Dave Arch



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"God loves you."

You've heard that before. However, its repetition can make it trite. And the multitude ways in which we use the word "love" can make it almost meaningless at first glance. After all we use the word "love" in so many ways. "I love baseball." "I love lasagna." "I love my wife." And now "God loves me?"

So a good place to begin is to stop and ask a foundational question "What does it mean that 'God loves me?'"

Particularly, what does it mean to you when you fail?

1. The commandment of God I feel farthest from fulfilling is. . .
2. When I look up and see God's face after I have failed to meet that commandment, He looks. . .
3. And I think that He feels. . .
4. The first thing I think God does after I fail is. . .

Now we are faced with another problem in grasping what it means that God loves us. Not only does the triteness of the phrase minimize its impact, but also in a paradoxical way the sheer magnitude of His love also renders it difficult to appreciate. We have nothing to even begin comparing it to.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever trusts in Him shall not eternally perish but instead will be given eternal life." (John 3:16, pg. 897)

See what I mean? With a love so great that He would send His own Son to die in order to gain our forgiveness, how can we ever hope to wrap our mind around such a love? To what can we ever compare it? If only we could dissect His love and look at only one piece at a time. Maybe then we could begin to appreciate its significance.

Fortunately, there is a very familiar passage in the Bible (usually reserved for weddings) that can help us do just that:

"Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love someone, you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him. All the special gifts and powers from God will some day come to an end, but love goes on forever."

(I Corinthians 13:4-8 as written in The Living Bible)

Unfortunately, we usually read that passage and then only lament the fact that we don't love that way and that others sure don't love us that way. However, when we apply it only to ourselves and others, we fail to unlock its greatest riches.

The above paragraph from the Bible describes God's love for you!

Consequently, you could take each of the adjectives in that passage and think about what it means in terms of how God reacts to you when you fail. "How does He look?" "How does He feel?" "What does He do?" The list below can help that process. The first one has been completed as an example. You'll get closer and closer to more fully understanding what it means that "God loves you."

Patient This means that "He never 'pushes' me!"

Kind. This means that _____

Not Jealous. . . This means that _____

Not Boastful. . . This means that _____

Not Rude. . . . This means that He _____

Does Not Demand Its Own Way. . . This means that He _____

Is Not Irritable Or Touchy. . . This means that He _____

It Does Not Hold Grudges . . . This means the He _____

Is Never Glad About Injustice, But Rejoices Whenever Truth Wins Out. . . This means that He _____

Is Loyal No Matter What The Cost. . . This means that He _____

Love Goes On Forever! This means that He _____

Although some require quite a bit of thought, you will be greatly rewarded by taking a few minutes to complete the above statements. Since, you've probably never had anyone react to your failures in quite that manner, it's not hard to get His reactions confused with the reactions of our spouse, father, mother, or another important person in our lives. Instead of seeing God's reaction and hearing His voice, too often when we fail we only hear the recordings of past authority figures in our lives.

If you think that you'd like to do even more with this, you might try taking a piece of paper and rewriting in your own words the verses that I printed above (I Corinthians 13:4-8). I started it for you.

"Because God loves me, He is _____

_____ . . . "

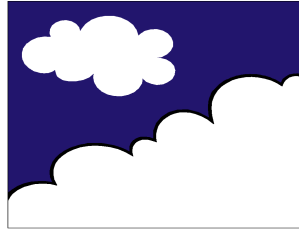
Can you begin to see what a difference this perspective could make in the way you react to your own failings or the failings of others?

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GOD'S FORGIVENESS

by Dave Arch



All page numbers refer to the New International Version of The Bible as published by Zondervan Publishing as their Thinline Bible. It is available at all Christian Book Stores and many others too.

1. _____ How many sins did you commit on an average day BEFORE you asked God to forgive you?
 2. _____ How old were you when you found Christ's forgiveness?
 3. _____ Take line 1 and multiply it by line 2.
 4. _____ Multiply line 3 by 365 to get a total number of sins committed BEFORE you trusted Christ to forgive you.
 5. _____ How many sins do you estimate you will commit on an average day now that you know Christ as your personal Savior?
 6. _____ Take line 5 and multiply it by 365 to find your yearly total.
 7. _____ Assuming that you will live to be 80 years old, take line 6 and multiply it by the number of years between the age you found Christ and age 80.
 8. _____ Finally, add line 4 and line 7 to arrive at your GRAND TOTAL of sins committed in your lifetime.
 9. _____ In your understanding, how many of the sins on line 8 were forgiven AT THE TIME YOU FIRST TRUSTED CHRIST FOR SALVATION?
 10. _____ Subtract line 9 from line 8 to determine those sins remaining.
- Whats going to happen to those sins remaining on line 10?
-

What do the following verses have to say about your answer to the previous question?

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross." (Colossians 2:13,14, pg. 995)

If he forgave ALL sins (past, present, and future) when you first trusted Christ for salvation, what do you do with a verse like: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9, pg. 1028)

An incident that happened between my wife and I early in our marriage might help clarify. I got up one morning feeling irritable and on edge. When I sat down to breakfast, I noticed that we had no bread for toast. I quickly said some harsh words to my wife and left the room.

However, my juvenile reaction bothered me. Nevertheless, I didnt go back to apologize. Rather, I simply tried to make it up to her -- hoping that she would forget. I bought her flowers. I complemented her and said nice things about what she doing.

Still after several days I still felt no better and finally came to apologize. Upon hearing my confession, she simply responded, What? Youve been bothered by that? I forgave you right away. I understood.

For days I had been experiencing miserable emotions. All of this occurring because I refused to admit to my wife that what I had said was wrong. The forgiveness was there, but I was not experiencing it. I John 1:9 tells us how to experience God's forgiveness by maintaining a constant acknowledgment of our wrongdoings to Him. We can then enjoy the forgiveness that He's already provided!

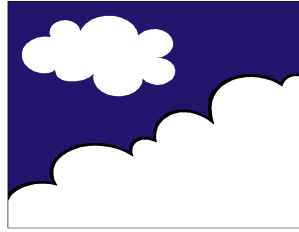
Now let me ask you this question. If someone came to God and asked Him to give His opinion of you, what words would He use? _____

If you felt His opinion of you had anything to do with past actions that were contrary to Him, you underestimated God's ability to forgive and forget! God remembers your sins no more.

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GOD'S DISCIPLINE

by Dave Arch



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Just by using the word "discipline" in the same phrase with the word "God," our mind immediately uses the word "punishment" as a synonym. The phrase God disciplines us means exactly the same as God punishes us in nearly every persons mind!

However, the Bible draws a big distinction between "punishment" and "discipline." God promises those who trust in the death of Christ's death for their forgiveness will not face punishment, since Christ took care of their punishment. He says it this way in His Word "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1, pg. 955)

In that sense punishment is basically a backward-looking action of someone paying you back for what you did. The result is fear on the part of the one being punishment.

On the other hand, discipline is administered by a loving forward looking parent with an eye on helping the child become all that they can become. If this distinction is not made, the pain that always accompanies discipline can be erroneously interpreted as an indication that God has withdrawn His love.

Fortunately, there is one chapter in the Bible that speaks nearly exclusively to this parental action of God. The first eleven verses of Hebrews chapters 12 help us understand this potentially confusing area of God's dealings with us.

Take a moment to read over the passage below and then answer some of the questions that follow to help you in the processing of all the truths in these verses:

"For whom the Lord loves He disciplines and He scourges every son whom He receives. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. However much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live? Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but 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 12:4-11, pg. 1017)

1. Why does God discipline us? (Hebrews 12:6)

2. How is His love demonstrated through His discipline of us?

3. If God didn't try to stop you when you went in a direction that would hurt you, what would that show about your relationship to Him? (Hebrews 12:8)

4. As God looks ahead to our future, what is His goal for the discipline He sends to us? (Hebrews 12:10,11)

5. From the opening paragraph of this Bible Study, how would you explain the difference between punishment and discipline using your own words?

6. Finally, in just a few sentences, write a prayer to God giving Him specific reasons why your thankful that you can count on Him to discipline you.

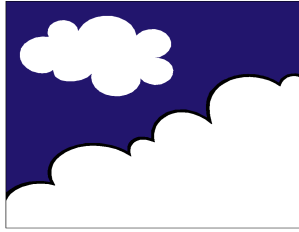
Learning to see pain as indication of God's love instead of a sign that it has been removed is one of the first steps of maturation in your view of God. May God increasingly give you that perspective.

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GOD'S COMPLIMENTS

by Dave Arch



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Guess how it ends!

If you were to guess how the following Bible verse ends, how would you complete it?

"Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of mens hearts. At that time . . .
 _____" (I Corinthians 4:5, pg. 965)

Please don't read any further until youve tried to predict what goes in that blank.

Is God going to yell at you? Berate you? Punish you? No. None of those will occur to a person who has trusted Christ for forgiveness.

Listen to how it ends.

"Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of mens heart. At that time **EACH WILL RECIEVE HIS PRAISE FROM GOD.**" (I Corinthians 4:5, pg. 965)

Surprised? God is going to praise you at the judgment!

What for?

Well, lets take a look at what He praised some people for in the Bible.

"When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, `I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.'" (Luke 7:9, pg. 871)

"I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary." (Revelation 2:2, pg. 1034)

"I know where you live -- where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city -- where Satan lives." (Revelation 2:13, pg. 1034)

If God were writing a letter to you and wanted to compliment you for something He sees in your life, what would it be? _____

Take time to talk back to Him in a prayer just graciously receiving the compliment. Sometimes its difficult but always encouraging!

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