

THE WAY TO HUMAN FREEDOM

INTRODUCTION

If there is one thing that is essential to the enjoyment of authentic human living, it is the matter of *personal freedom*. In the 25 ‘studies’ of ‘The Way To Human Freedom Teaching Series’ we will be exploring what the Bible reveals about this crucial theme. Study by study the amazing dimensions of *God’s liberating action* towards us will be gradually spelt out, showing its power to bring personal and social transformation.

The freedom we all need is one that does not depend upon ideal situations and circumstances. It is, rather, one that is able to liberate us into *full human vocation*,¹ bringing *a new capacity* to be all we were created to be, *regardless* of our past experience or present environment. And so, the freedom this series will declare is not only a freedom *from* but also a freedom *for*.

Within the 25 studies there is a *progressively, unfolding understanding*. Each one will build upon what has gone before, until the whole picture is complete. Through it all, we may come to know our Maker’s way to the freedom of spirit He² created us to enjoy—and the personal, relational and vocational fullness and wholeness this brings!³

Over the first eight studies of the series, we will be exposed to the ‘big picture’ of God’s redeeming (that is, liberating) work. In this we will see who He is, what He has created us to be, what has become of us historically, and what He has done to make possible the personal, relational and vocational freedom that every person yearns to know. Then the next seventeen studies will describe the functional outworking of this life-giving liberty.

Central to the series is an amazing proclamation of the Person of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, who has dealt with our human failure once and for all by His death, and has been raised from the dead to live forever as our, very Life—the One in whom is all of the present and eternal hope we have ever longed for! We will see that it is He who is the supreme focus of the Great Story that is being told within human history: the One who stands in the midst of it all as the Light of the world, the Liberator, Fulfiller and Integrator of humankind, and the One through whom, finally, all justice will be established and the entire creation forever renewed. He truly is the ‘Desired One’ who, in Himself, fully answers the strong, insistent yearnings of every person—those from among every nation and within every cultural climate. As will be seen, His coming among us was unlike that of any other person of history, for it was only after a remarkable process of divine preparation had taken place.

Since the studies are designed to bring a progressive understanding—with each one building upon what has gone before—it is needful to move through in numerical order; for only then will an adequate grasp of the various themes be gained. It will be seen that the process is not just for those who enjoy academic pursuits⁴. What is gradually unfolded is quite easy to understand. And in the end the reader will have received a

¹ At this point, vocation can be generally defined as: human activity that is divinely purposeful—action that expresses who we are and serves others.

² The personal pronoun ‘He’ used here may not sit comfortably with some, but as the series unfolds this will find its place within a broader understanding of the nature of all things.

³ For those who are responsible for ‘the cure of souls’, the entire series may be understood as an ‘integrated pastoral theology’.

⁴ Neither is it footnoted in an academic way. Footnotes are used mainly to provide clarification.

‘mental framework’ that will be of enormous personal value: one that will, among other things, help to unlock the Bible’s rich treasures.

All of us, in fact, have a mental framework of some kind that determines the way we either respond or react to life, and how we read the Bible. The question is whether or not this delivers the sense of freedom of spirit, fullness of life and wholeness of being that our humanity cries out to know.

Because we have been made in ‘the likeness of God’⁵ it is essential for us to first know who He is and what He is like. We can never truly know who *we* are and what we were created to *be* without receiving such understanding. As we move through the various studies one thing will become increasingly clear: a ‘God-centred’ understanding of life is indispensable to the enjoyment of a true and authentic humanity. A merely ‘human-centred’ approach promises much, but cannot truly satisfy those deepest yearnings of the heart.

So then as we begin, let us now open our mind to receive, firstly, some breathtaking revelation of that One who is the Author of the grand Story set before us, and is Himself the Goal of all things: ‘The God and Father of our Lord Jesus, the Christ’.

Study 1

THE GOD WHO IS

As was said in the introduction, each study in the series builds upon what has gone before. That makes this first one foundational to all the rest. It could be said that within Study 1 there are twenty-four others clawing to get out! This is, in fact, the case with each of the studies throughout the entire series: the remaining one’s are within the current one, impatiently awaiting their moment in the unfolding process.

In this first study we’ll be looking at the basic nature, character and action of God: a revelation that, although not immediately *human-centred*, is absolutely central to our most critical human need.

a matter of understanding

Every person has a concept of God. We all have ideas in our mind of what He is like. Even the atheist who, for example, says, “I cannot believe in a God who does this, or doesn’t do that,” is in fact, describing their view of God. Everybody has one. It may be adequate, or it may not.

And so there is a question we all need to ask: “Is the way I see God the way He really *is*?” People who are extremely religious—even those who are zealous readers of the Bible—may have a view of Him that is sadly deficient.

The particular way we see God affects the way we see ourselves, others and the world around us. Our concept of God also strongly shapes that personal, mental framework mentioned in the introduction, which determines the way we respond—or react—to Him, to others and to the circumstances of life. This too, will become increasingly clear as we proceed through the various studies before us. It is no exaggeration to say that the most significant thing anyone can ever do, is come to understand the way He *really is*.

⁵ What it means for us to be made in God’s ‘image’ or ‘likeness’ will be explained in our second study.

Not all we need to know of our Maker will be covered here in this first study, but a foundation will definitely be laid for what is to follow. Actually, each study throughout the series will progressively reveal more of who God is, what He has done, is doing and has promised to do—and how that relates to what is for us all a relentless pursuit: true, personal *human freedom* with the fullness of life and wholeness of being it brings.

His nature:

- Father

In speaking here of God's 'nature' we are describing the most basic elements of His divine Being. And the very first thing we must understand about Him is that He is, by nature, Father.⁶

Galatians 1:1

—the supreme revelation of the divine nature
[He is] God the Father.

The most basic and wonderful thing we can ever know about God is the reality of His Fatherhood. It will be seen as we progress through this study, that this is not at all to be understood merely in the light of certain ideas of 'maleness'. His Fatherhood is, actually, full of everything that any person could ever long for! And it will, in fact, take the whole of the series to unfold something of its magnitude.

Ephesians 3:14b–15

[He is God the Father] from whom [all familyhood] in heaven and on earth derives its name.

It is the Fatherhood of God that is behind the familyhood that is at the heart of every culture. Further on in the series we will see the wonderful nature of the vast human family He is creating throughout history, and its incredible ultimate, eternal destiny—with members drawn from among all the nations of the earth!

- Creator

The entire universe, including the earth and everything in it and upon it, is the Father's handiwork. This fact is the starting point for all thinking and understanding. We must always begin with the One who is, Himself, the Origin of everything in His amazing world—and all that lies beyond it in His vast universe. Only then can we proceed on the basis of the way things really are.

In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, we have a thrilling account of the creation of all things, starting with a grand statement in the very first verse:

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Before the Creator brought the heavens and the earth into being, there was NOTHING! The account then goes on to spell out—with powerful simplicity—the details of what has been made:

Day 1: light	>	Day 4: the lights: the sun and the moon
Day 2: the sea and the sky	>	Day 5: creatures of the sea and the sky
Day 3: the land and vegetation	>	Day 6: land animals and human beings

⁶ In later studies we will speak of the glorious nature and work of the Son and the Spirit. But here we are focusing specifically upon God as Father.

At once there can be seen in the sequence of God's *grand creative act* a precisely ordered pattern—with the things made in each of the first three days corresponding to those in each of the last three. We will see further on that the Creator has, in fact, built a purposeful order into the whole of His magnificent creation.

Later in this study it will be shown that God created all things by His *word*. But apart from this the Bible does not seek to tell us specifically *how* He created. What it does emphasize is *who* He is as Creator and *why* He created. Throughout its pages we have an awesome revelation of *who God is* and an ever-expanding proclamation of His extraordinary purpose!

The most significant thing we can ever learn about *the action of God* is that He is Creator. There is so much more to be known as we continue, but it is His glorious act of Creation that is basic to everything else.

Revelation 10:6b

[He] created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it.

God is both the Maker and Sustainer of the heavens, the earth and the sea and their bounty—and the humanity that is at the centre of it all!

Isaiah 42:5

[He is the One who created] the heavens, who stretches them out, who spreads out the earth with all that springs from it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it.

The immense universe that surrounds us was, and still is being, *stretched out* by this amazing Creator. And the earth that we inhabit was, and has continued to be, *spread out* by Him, along with all that *springs* from it. And what an unbelievably *lavish variety* of things our Maker has caused to *spring up* from His soil—His good dirt!

A massively significant thing for every human creature to understand is that each of us, who find ourselves in God's world, receives our very *breath* and *life* from Him, every moment.

Acts 17:25b

[He] Himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

Life and breath—yes, and *everything else* we are, have and enjoy!

Zechariah 12:1

[He is the One] who forms the human spirit within a person.

The human spirit is, in one sense, the same as the 'life-force' that animates all living creatures: the 'get up and go' within us. But as the image of God our human spirit—the 'breath of life' He has breathed into us—is also much more. It is the *dynamic moral and relational energy that makes us to be uniquely human*—and which brings with it a unique *self-awareness and sensitivity to spiritual influence*. And as such, it energises the *soul* (our inner life: the deep stirrings, thoughts and decisions of our heart and mind); and in this, it determines the actions of our *body* (the things we say and do)⁷. The spirit formed within us, then, has to do with our entire, dynamic inner, personal capacity to make *uniquely human choices*: responses that are consistent with the awesome, divine calling we have received (a calling that will be *outlined* in Study 2 and *filled out* through the rest of the series).

⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:23, speaks of the ideal situation of these three elements of 'spirit, soul and body' as *blamelessly* operating together, through a relationship with our Creator.

Psalms 139:14b

—an inescapable declaration

[We are] fearfully and wonderfully made.

Every human person—along with all other creatures—is truly magnificent: a physical wonder to behold!

Yes, the creation is an absolutely splendid thing. And the best part about it is that its Author is not a merely ‘impersonal, creative force’. Not at all! Behind the whole of the creation is One who is by nature *Father*. And He always intended His world to be a superb, pleasure-giving home for His Family!

Much more will be said of the Father-Creator’s character and works as we move through this study and those to come.

- King

Being Creator, He is also *Owner* of all things. They belong to Him. As the Author of creation He has *author-ity* over all He has made. Every moment He reigns as Supreme King over the whole of His world. All earthly and heavenly powers receive their authority *from* Him and must finally answer *to* Him.

Isaiah 37:16

LORD Almighty ... enthroned ... You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.

Psalms 24:1

The earth is the LORD’S, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Every *thing* and every *person* in God’s world belongs to *Him*: the Creator and King!

Psalms 103:19

The LORD has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all.

Hebrews 12:28

[His is] a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

History is a record of the rise and fall of rulers and kingdoms. But the kingdom of God is one that will never be diminished in any way!

Psalms 47:8a

God reigns over the nations.

1 Timothy 6:15

[He is the] only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

There is only one Ruler. All others who rule do so under His authority—whether they realize it or not.

Psalms 47:9

The kings of the earth belong to God.

With all their power and prestige, earthly kings and authorities are creatures of their Creator. They are not their own, but have an Owner whom they must serve.

Isaiah 33:22a

The LORD is our Judge, the LORD is our Lawgiver, the LORD is our King.

He is our Judge because He is our Lawgiver, and He is our Lawgiver because He is our King! Every person on the earth has one Judge, one Lawgiver and one King. This, of course, includes those who are judges, lawgivers and kings! They judge, make laws and rule under His authority—and, as has been said, must finally answer to Him for the way they have done this.

but there is much more that needs to be known!

To understand that God is *by nature* Father, Creator and King is a necessary place to begin in coming to see Him as He is. But this of itself is not enough information for us to know what He is really like!

In fact, to be told only that He is Father, Creator and King may well cause all kinds of images to come to our mind, leaving us with a concept of God which is far from accurate.

He is Father. But there have been many *fathers* whose fatherhood has been particularly distant, self-interested, careless or cruel, or ineffective in any number of ways. What if that's what God is like?

We have said that He is Creator. But there are certain *creative types* who do what they do only to *express themselves*. What if God is like that? What if His creation was brought into being merely as the fulfillment of some kind of *creative urge*: a great accomplishment He was very proud of at the time but for which He no longer has much concern?

We have said that He is King. But down through the centuries there have been *those with kingly responsibilities and powers* that have misused their office, serving only themselves and *oppressing* those under their rule and care, or have just been inadequate or foolish. What if His kingship is like that?

It must be understood that God is not *like* the human fathers we have known—even the very best of them. He is *the* Father, whom all other fathers should be *like*.

He is not *like* some 'creative types' we have observed. He is *the* Creator, whose purpose in bringing His creation into being was totally glorious. As will be seen, it was a most marvellous act of love! All other creativity should be *like His*.

And He is not *like* the kings and rulers of history but is *the* King, whose reign is the *true* exercise of authority—to be *reflected* by all who are given that responsibility. Tragically, in our world as it is, such likeness to Him is never fully seen. It will be shown later that it was only made known in the coming of His Son among us—in the freedom of His true and full humanity!

It *is* a fact that our concept of God *does* come from the experiences we have had, the impressions we have received and the mental images we've developed in relation to human fathers, human creativity and human kings. And it is true that unless our mind is renewed according to God's own revelation to us of Himself, we will continue to bear wrong images and ideas—which will keep us from understanding what He is really like. It is one thing to know that God is by nature, Father, Creator and King. But it is quite *another* thing to know what *kind* of Father, Creator and King He is!

The kind of Father, Creator and King God is, is seen in:

HIS PERFECTIONS AS 'THE HOLY ONE'

The Bible reveals to us that God is holy. Holiness is not merely one aspect of His Being. His holiness is everything that He is: all that He *is* and *does* that makes Him to be the ONE AND ONLY GOD. Every part of His character and everything He does as Father, Creator and King is a description of His holiness.

To say in worship, “Holy is the LORD!” is to declare, “You are *God!* There is *no one* like You! You are entirely *separate from, different to and other than* anyone or anything that is not GOD!!!”⁸

Isaiah 57:15c

[He is] the high and exalted One ... whose name is holy.

His entire Being and every action is holy.

Psalms 47:8b

God is seated on His holy throne.

His is a *holy* throne. It is completely different to any other: a throne from which all ‘His perfections as the Holy One’ are expressed. There never has been or ever will be a reign and rule like His!

Isaiah 46:9b

[He says] “I am God, and there is none like Me.”

Isaiah 40:25

“With whom will you compare Me? Or who is My equal?” says the Holy One.

Isaiah 6:3

—*the joyous, awestruck cry of heavenly beings before the throne*

[They] were calling to one another, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.”⁹

Isaiah 40:18

[With whom] will you compare God? To what image will you liken him?

He can never be compared to any physical image made by human hands; nor any mental image that is developed by human minds.

Exodus 15:11

Who among the gods is like You, LORD? Who is like You—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?

As this study will show, the humanly devised gods of history are many. But none may be compared with THE GOD WHO IS!

His perfections

In speaking of the various expressions of God’s holiness, the only adequate word to employ is ‘perfections’. Sometimes the word ‘attributes’ is used. That’s fine. But attributes may refer to any kind of characteristic or feature. The term perfections rightly allows for no possibility of misunderstanding. Everything about our Father, Creator and King is PERFECT!

In this study we are going to be exposed to *ten* of these divine perfections. But before they are explored, we need to establish a *key concept* that is common to each one.¹⁰

⁸ Later it will be seen that God’s holiness includes His utter *separateness* from impurity. But holiness is primarily about His divine *distinctiveness*—all that He is that makes Him to be DIFFERENT to anyone or anything else. His separateness from evil is, of course—among His other perfections—a significant part of what declares the absolute distinctiveness of His divine Being.

⁹ It will be seen as we continue that God’s glory—simply put—is all that He is and does as God.

¹⁰ Except for Study 9, each study in this series has at least one key concept—indicated by an asterisk (*).

His perfections are characterized by:

*** *the unsearchable greatness of His divine glory***

The greatness of God is undeniably the key to understanding the ten perfections that are before us. It is the greatness of His ‘divine glory’¹¹ above all else that sets Him apart as the Holy One—gloriously reigning over His creation.

Psalms 47:2

[The] LORD Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth.

In the previous section mention was made of the many ‘humanly devised gods of history’. Referring to God as the ‘Most High’ is one way that the Bible distinguishes Him from these.

Nehemiah 1:5

[He is] the great and awesome God.

God’s greatness is a reality that is far beyond our capacity to mentally comprehend. This may be expressed by saying that He is ‘infinite’, meaning immeasurable. But just now we will use that biblical expression, ‘*unsearchable greatness*’.

One of the most common problems we have in understanding what God is really like is that we can tend to keep Him reduced in our mind, for example, to the size of the gods of ancient Greece: a kind of oversized human. Such an idea must be resisted at all costs if we are ever to know Him truly. Our mind must be open to receive an understanding that is so much more glorious, awesome and majestic!

Human greatness is one thing, but *divine greatness* is quite another. Just to consider the vastness of our Creator’s universe, gives us at least some idea of the unsearchable nature of His greatness.

Our solar system, consisting of Earth and eight other planets circling round the sun, is part of the Milky Way galaxy. Within the Milky Way there are at least 12 billion other solar systems like ours, each with their own sun (or star, or star system). But then our Milky Way galaxy is only one of *hundreds of billions* of other, ever-multiplying galaxies in the universe!

Such vastness is very hard to comprehend. But this is only what God has *made*. He, Himself, is so much greater than His creation! To bring such awe-inspiring insight into the greatness of His divine Being is, clearly, one reason why our universe is like it is: ever beyond human ability to measure.

Job 36:26a

How great is God—beyond our understanding!

Psalms 145:3

Great is the LORD, and [greatly to be praised]; His greatness is [unsearchable].

Job 11:7

Can you [search out the deep things] of God? Can you [find out] the limits of the Almighty?

There are none who could ever ‘search out’ the inner depths of God’s holy Being. Nor could they ever ‘find out’ the vast dimensions of the ten perfections now to be described. But thankfully, although these things are beyond our understanding, the Holy One does delight to richly reveal Himself to us—in our deepest parts!

¹¹ God’s glory is all that He is and does as God (just like the glory of a flower is all that it is and does as a flower etc.).

Ezekiel 38:23

[He says] “I will show My greatness and My holiness ... Then they will know that I am the LORD.”

Our Creator’s intention has been declared! Let’s apply our minds, then, to the things He has made known of Himself.

Firstly, His perfections are understood by the awesome revelation of:

- His dynamic eternal-Being of love

(irrepressible out-flowing of that *divine inner spring* of the One who *is love*: the Eternally Self-existent, Immortal, Invisible, Living & One True God—*always* at work in His world)

As we progress through this study, we’ll see why it is so appropriate for us to begin a proclamation of the perfections of the Holy One with a statement of His ‘dynamic eternal-Being of love’.

The word ‘dynamic’ speaks of what is *active* rather than *passive*: what is full of *life* and *energy*. Throughout the series we will wonder at our Maker’s unceasing action within His world—stunningly rich and productive engagement! There is nothing passive about Him.

And this action of God is nothing other than the *irrepressible out-flowing of His divine love*. That love which is an *eternal spring* within His holy Being! Consequently, each of His other perfections is a glorious manifestation of this. His love is at the heart of them all, as will soon become apparent.

the One who is, Himself, love

The Scriptures tell us that God is not merely ‘loving’. He IS LOVE!!! Love is the very essence of His unsearchably great, divine eternal-Being. And for this reason, His love is, above all else, the thing that is needed by every person created in His image—a need that He delights to fulfil.

Because He *is* love, it is impossible for Him to love anyone just 99%. He can only love 100% and does so 100% of the time. There has, in fact, never been an unloved person in the whole of human history!

The Creator’s love is His pure and holy affection, desire and action towards us and, indeed, the whole of His creation. Every moment of every day He goes out toward us His beloved humanity to bless, serve and do us good—desiring above all that we be with Him in the freedom and fullness of His love.

Later we’ll see—and at least in general principle in this first study—the *amazing fruit* of His action towards us in His Son, that enables those who embrace it to cry out from their deepest parts:

1 John 3:1

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us!”

1 John 4:16a

We know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love.

As the One who has created all things in love, He delights to see His creatures abundantly endowed with—and fully enjoying—every good thing He has purposed for

them. Again, later, we will see why this divine delight is often pained by a deep and holy grief as His love is spurned and disregarded.

So, having established something of the nature of the Father's irrepressible, inner spring of love, let's now take a very brief look at those five other elements listed in our heading, that speak of His 'dynamic eternal-Being'.

These five (like others in this study) are amazing facts that are important for our understanding of the Being of God. But it must be seen that each of them could have no personally liberating and heart-transforming impact upon us, apart from the awesome reality of His love. Any fact about God that doesn't find its centre there will always be of limited value. This extremely significant principle will, actually, be at the centre of the entire 'Human Freedom Series'.

the outflowing love of the One who is *eternally-Self-existent*

It is common to speak of 'the existence of God'. That's OK, as long as He is not seen as existing as *we* do. *We* exist because there was a time—before we were brought into being—when we didn't. But God simply *is!* He is the eternally *Self-existent* One.

John 5:26

[The] Father has life in Himself.

This statement clearly answers that often, asked question, "Where did God come from?" He didn't come from anywhere. All things came and come from *Him* and find their existence in Him. But He *is!*

Job 36:26b

The number of His years is past finding out.
He has never *not been* who He is: *God!*

the outflowing love of the One who is *immortal*

Yes, He has never not been God. But He will also, in the future, never *cease to be* the great Father, Creator and King.

1 Timothy 6:16a

[God] alone is immortal.

Human beings are neither self-existent, nor—of themselves—immortal. Before their conception in the womb they do not exist, and although they do have continued existence in eternity, this is only because the Immortal One gives it to them.

Genesis 21:33b

[He is] the Eternal [and Everlasting] God.

Isaiah 57:15b,

[He is] the high and exalted One ... who lives forever.

Revelation 4:9b

[He is the One] who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever.

We will see that immortality is a theme that is of very great significance to those who have been created in the image and likeness of the Eternal One.

the outflowing love of the One who is *invisible*

The nature of God's eternal-Being is, indeed, *dynamic* and is manifested in so many awesome ways, as our study will show. But the Creator of physical things does not, Himself, have physical form—and so, cannot be seen. Later we will observe that during the time of the Old Testament—the first part of the Bible—He did 'appear' to His people in different ways. This was usually in the form of one called 'the Angel of the LORD'.

His divine Being is by nature, spiritual; and so, He is to us the Unseen One.

John 4:24

God is spirit.

1 Timothy 6:16c

[God is One] whom no one has seen or can see.

John 1:18

No one has ever seen God.

1 Timothy 1:17a

[The] King Eternal [is] ... invisible.

He is invisible, but is, nevertheless, dynamically reigning every moment as the King of kings and Lord of lords!

No one has ever seen God, but as we progress through the series it will be shown—as stated already—that He has *visibly* made Himself known in a *total* way in the Person of His Son. What a Story that is going to be!

Furthermore, in the last chapter of the Bible (Revelation 22:4) we are told that ultimately, in eternity, His people 'will see His face'! This will be a 'relational sight' rather than physical. How awesomely glorious *that* will be!

Not only will His people enjoy such sight of Him in eternity, there is also much to be 'seen' of Him now. Through the Story that is to be told, we will be enabled to behold more and more of the revelation of His glory to us in His Son—and also, even now, catch thrilling glimpses of what will be fully seen then!

the outflowing love of the One who is *the Living God* —*always* in the action of who He is

We have said that God has *never, not been* who He is, and that there never *will be* a time when He won't *be* Father, Creator and King. But there also never *has been* a time when He wasn't, and never *will be* a time when He won't *be in the action of* all He is as Father, Creator and King.

The Bible does not speak of God being 'eternal' merely as amazing information. It always has to do with the fact that He is the One who is unsearchably greater than time, and wonderfully *at work* within it. When speaking of His eternal Self-existence, immortality and invisibility, the focus is upon what He *does*. HE IS 'THE LIVING GOD'. Our Father, Creator and King, is always and forever the One who not only has life in Himself, but who *gives life* and who *acts*. History is full of the ceaseless operations of the Self-existent, Immortal and Invisible God of Love!

Jeremiah 10:10

He is the Living God, the Eternal King.

Revelation 1:8

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

God is the Alpha and the Omega, that is, the beginning and the end, or the A to Z of all things. There is nothing that exists or that operates outside of His absolute reign and rule as King of His creation. The record of history focuses on human activity. But He is the One who is constantly operating far above and beyond it all!

Exodus 3:14

God said ... “I AM who I AM.”

‘I AM’—in the Hebrew language of the Old Testament—is a form of the verb ‘to be’. Within any moment of history we can count on the fact that He is *actively being who He is!* When He said, “I AM who I AM” He was saying, in effect, “I AM the ‘ALWAYS GOD!’” And as we continue through this study, it will be very apparent that He is, in fact, *always* in the action of each of the ten perfections that are being outlined. Everything about ‘the God who is’ is ALWAYS!!!

Psalms 90:2

From everlasting to everlasting You are God.

From the most ancient of times He *has been*, and into the most distant future He *will be*, in the constantly, dynamic action of who He is as the Holy One.

History has shown that powerful, human personalities can sometimes hold situations together for many years. But when they die, so often all that has been secured falls apart. God, however—in ‘His dynamic, eternal-Being of love’—will always be totally and effectively active on behalf of His creation.

When God’s Son came to live among us in our human flesh, He made His own declaration regarding this foundational reality:

John 5:17

“My Father is always at His work to this very day.”

Graphic illustration of that will be seen in each of the studies to come.¹²

the out-flowing love of the *One True God*—the dynamic *One and Only*

There *has* only ever been, *is* today and *will* only ever be ONE GOD—who is marvellously at work in His world.

1 Corinthians 8:6

There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we [exist].

1 Thessalonians 1:9

[He is] the Living and True God.

¹² To say that our Maker is always at work in His world on behalf of His beloved humanity may, for some, indeed, cause raised eyebrows. When we look around this world we do see all kinds of things that would seem to contradict a constantly irrepressible out-flowing of divine love. This is a mystery that we may begin to—at least to some degree—*enter into* as we are exposed to the ten divine perfections outlined in this study. And it will increasingly be the case as we progress through the series.

Isaiah 44:6

The LORD says ... “I am the First and the Last; apart from Me there is no God”.

Isaiah 46:3, 9a

[He says,] “Listen to Me ... I am God, and there is no other”.

Jeremiah 16:20

“Do people make their own gods? Yes, but they are not gods!”

Psalms 96:5b

The gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

There are many ancient religions with their various deities. But the Creator Himself saw their beginnings—when they were devised—and He will see their eventual *end* as the mere delusions that they are. There was no God before Him and will be none after Him.

Listen, then, to the heart-cry of one powerfully impacted by the actions of ‘the dynamic One and Only’:

1 Timothy 1:17

Now to the King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, the Only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

How appropriate it is that from this very first proclamation of the Holy One’s perfections, we conclude with such an outburst of worship and praise. He truly is, the Unsearchably Great, One and Only Eternal GOD OF LOVE, who, though invisible, is incessantly and gloriously at work in His world!

Secondly, His perfections are understood by the awesome revelation of:

- His righteousness

(right relational action according to the way of His nature)

All that God does matches perfectly with what is *right* for Him to do as the unsearchably great Father-Creator-King of love. There is, of course, never any difference between what He *is* by nature and what He *does*. We will see later, in fact, that He has total *freedom* to act authentically, every moment, in accordance with the way of His own nature. He is never *driven* from within or *forced* from without to act any differently!

Later in the series it will be seen that speaking of ‘the way of God’ is actually another way of referring to His law: the law of His own divine Being. To say, however, that God does what is right according to the *law* of His own nature doesn’t mean that He operates *under* His law—as if He were legally subject to it. It simply means that He always acts consistently with the *way* of His Father-hood, Creator-hood and King-ship. God’s righteousness has to do with *true and right relational action*. It has nothing to do with any strict legal demand that He places upon Himself—for He lives always in that irrepressible spring of His love, not as if under some sense of legal or moral obligation. Yes, there is no *legalism* in God, nor is there in His written word the Bible. True law in the Scriptures is ‘a relational instruction in the way of God Himself’, rather than heavy, legal demands.

Any experience we may have had of oppressive legal burdens must *never* be confused with the life-giving way or law of God. The proclamations throughout this series will serve to *liberate* us from every vestige of spirit-deadening, legal living—into a joyous inner spring of right, relational action of love!

the Holy and Righteous One

Our Maker's unsearchably great righteousness is a constant and magnificent revelation of His holiness. By His unceasing actions of righteousness He shows Himself to be *separate from, different to and other than* anyone or anything that is less than God!

Isaiah 5:16b

The Holy God will be proved holy by His [righteousness].

That His righteousness brings the awesome revelation of Himself as 'the Holy God', says something about its incredible nature. The Scriptures put it this way:

Psalms 36:6

[LORD,] Your righteousness is like the [mighty mountains].

In hearing of 'the mighty mountains' our thoughts might go immediately to what is, maybe, the most remarkable of all mountain ranges: the mighty Himalayas. We may indeed say that the righteousness of God is by nature breathtakingly 'Himalayan'!

Psalms 111:3

Glorious and majestic are His deeds, and His righteousness endures forever.

Every act that He performs according to His way as Father, Creator and King is glorious and majestic; and there will never be a time when He doesn't act in this way. It is also true that each of His righteous deeds will *forever stand* as an awesomely significant and breathtakingly, wonderful revelation of His holiness!

Psalms 145:17

The LORD is righteous in all His ways.

Psalms 11:7

[The] LORD is righteous, He loves justice.

He loves *justice*. Nothing brings Him more pleasure than to act in a way that is just, true and fair towards His creation. The LORD'S every righteous act in history is marked by an absolute love of justice, truth and fairness.

Daniel 4:37

[Everything] He does is right and all His ways are just.

Psalms 97:2

[Righteousness] and justice are the foundation of His throne.

All that flows from the throne of God is a manifestation of this twofold reality: the righteousness and justice of the Holy One—His *right and just, relational action of love* as Father, Creator and King.

Romans 14:17a, c

The kingdom of God is [a matter of] ... righteousness.

Yes, His holy reign and rule over the entire creation is totally founded upon divine righteousness, in all its perfection. As the series progresses we will learn much, much more of the unsearchable greatness of this reality—with its astonishingly liberating, life-giving and personally integrating implications for us, in both time and eternity.

Thirdly, His perfections are understood by the awesome revelation of:

- His faithfulness

(absolute trustworthiness & dependability as the One who does not change & whose word is liberating revelation of the truth)

Because God is righteous—always acting consistently with His nature—He is also faithful. At all times and in every way, He is totally reliable and dependable. We can always trust Him to do what is right!

To say that His trustworthiness and dependability are *absolute* means that they are as great as they could possibly be. We could never say, “If He were a little more like this or a little less like that, it would be easier to trust Him.” There is nothing that could be added to or taken from His character that would make Him to be more reliable or dependable—or desirable!

Lamentations 3:23b

—*the proven affirmation of those who know Him*
“[LORD], great is Your faithfulness.”

God’s greatness is always *unsearchable*. And when it comes to the greatness of His *faithfulness* this is certainly the case. All who truly know Him are aware of His faithful nature in so many ways. But its immense proportions could never be fully comprehended by them. They just know that during every minute of every day and in each detail of their lives, His absolute trustworthiness and dependability as the Holy One—the Awesome God of Love—can be counted on.

the One who does not change

In His faithfulness God is the Unchanging One. *We* change, people around us change, circumstances and social standards change. But God always remains the same!

Malachi 3:6

—*what every person may be absolutely certain of*
“I the LORD do not change.”

James 1:17b

[He is] the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Due to the movement of the sun and the moon there are changing times each day and changing seasons throughout the year. Change is part of life in this world in so many ways. But the heavenly lights *and all else within the creation* belong to the Father and are under His hand. He reigns over all changing situations—whatever they may be—but He Himself never changes!

In particular, *relational* change can be extremely painful—especially when it involves someone we care about very much. But even at such times, the Father-Creator-King of us all—in His unsearchably great faithfulness—can be trusted to always be the same, every moment!

Hebrews 1:10–12

—*unlike His magnificent creation, He is the Eternally Unchanging One; never in need of renewal!*

“In the beginning, Lord, You [founded] the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But You remain the same, and Your years will never end.”

There is no ‘principle of degeneration’ within God! He is never ‘less than He once was’. How much better, then, to look to an eternally unchanging and never diminishing Creator, than a creation that is wearing out!

Deuteronomy 32:4a

—*as steadfast as can be*
He is the Rock.

Earlier we recorded the divine declaration from Exodus 3:14, “I AM who I AM”. We saw there that this is a revelation of God as the One who is always *actively being who He is*. Here we can further declare that as the ‘I AM’, He is THE, *ETERNALLY UNCHANGING, ALWAYS ACTING GOD OF ALL HISTORY!!!* Every dynamic manifestation of His *perfections* is all that He ever has been and all that He ever will be—nothing more, nothing less!

As Father He will never change the way He relates to His family; as Creator He will never change the way He has structured His world; and as King He will never change the way He constantly exercises His perfect reign and rule over all things. This One who is the *Rock*—the great I AM—is, indeed, absolutely trustworthy and dependable!

the truth of His word

God’s faithfulness also has to do with the *unchanging truth* of what He says. In the Old Testament the ideas of ‘truth’ and ‘faithfulness’ come from the same word in the original Hebrew.

Isaiah 45:19

[He says], “I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right.”

Everything God says is a perfect revelation of the truth; that is, ‘*things as they really are*’. His word makes known to us the way things were created to *be*, or the way they have *become* in history because of choices made against Him. Through His word we may know the exact truth about Himself, humanity and the creation.

John 17:17b

—*the Son’s joyous affirmation*
“Father, Your word is truth.”

Psalms 12:6

[The] words of the LORD are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times.

Precious metals like silver or gold are often passed through a process of purification. The goal in this is, of course, to have a piece of metal that is absolutely pure. In a court of law, the statements people make are also put through a process of testing or purification. Questions are asked from all kinds of angles until, hopefully, the real truth is finally arrived at. But with the words of the Faithful One no such process is needed. Every word He speaks is like a precious metal that has been purified seven times!

In a later study we will look in some detail at the Bible as the ‘Holy Scriptures’: God’s good and trustworthy word to us in written form.

a word that will never cease to be the truth—in time or eternity

Because God's word reveals to us 'the way things really are', it is a word that will continue to be absolutely reliable and dependable.

Mark 13:31

Heaven and earth will pass away, but [the word of God] will never pass away.

1 Peter 1:24–25

All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands firm forever.

Human thoughts and ideas can be brilliant. But like those who form them they come and go. It is only God's word that endures as the unchanging truth.

Psalms 119:89–90

Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations.

The Creator's word 'stands firm in the heavens'. Nothing can touch it! His faithfulness 'continues through all generations'. No matter how much things change socially and culturally over the years, our Maker's word is always the one unchanging source of authentic wisdom for living in His world.¹³

We could say that His word is like the needle of a compass: always pointing us in the right direction, no matter how confused we may be.

the Ten Commandments¹⁴

In Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, God gave His people *foundational instruction for life* in what are known as 'The Ten Commandments' or 'Ten Words'. He has never had to give a *revised version* of these, in order to keep up with the times!

The Ten Words are, in fact, a revelation of the way our Maker created us to operate. Any society at any stage in history which goes against these—or any other word of God, for that matter—is going against the very design of creation. History tells us that when this is the case, it is not long before things begin to become dysfunctional—so much less than what they were intended to be.

the promises of His word

Another aspect of the absolute trustworthiness and dependability of God's word has to do with the promises He has made.

incredible and priceless

Our Creator delights to secure and strengthen our capacity to respond to His love. And He does this by giving us promises regarding His right, relational action towards us. There is no gift more wonderful than these to be received within the 'seeming uncertainties' of life in our present world.

2 Peter 1:4

He has given us His very great and precious promises.

There are many things in life that people regard as *incredible*, which have enormous significance for them. There are also things that are regarded as being of *great value*,

¹³ A future study will show how we may wisely interpret certain culturally related statements in the Bible.

¹⁴ In future studies the Ten Commandments will be spoken of in some detail.

which are treasured above all else. But as we move through this series one thing will become increasingly apparent: there is nothing more incredibly significant, nor utterly priceless, than the very great and precious promises of God!

fulfilled by the Faithful One

The amazing Story of divine love that is told in the Scriptures is a constant stream of fulfilled promise—bringing exalted declarations such as these:

Psalm 145:13b

The LORD is trustworthy in all He promises and faithful to all He does.

Numbers 23:19

God is not human that He should lie, not [one of us], that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and not fulfil?

Joshua 21:45

Not one of all the LORD'S good promises ... failed; every one was fulfilled.

1 Kings 8:56

Not one word has failed of all the good promises He gave.

Titus 1:2–3

[God], who does not lie, promised ... and ... at His appointed season He brought [His word to light].

Lamentations 2:17

He has fulfilled His word.

We will see as we go on that what was promised in the first part of the Bible, the Old Testament, was wonderfully fulfilled in the second part, the New Testament. There are still historical promises yet to be fulfilled, but God's faithfulness as our glorious Father, Creator and King, makes it *impossible* that He should ever fail to keep one of them!

Fourthly, His perfections are understood by the awesome revelation of:

- His goodness

(wonderfully functional provision for His beloved creation; richly blessing out of His abounding divine fullness & Self-giving)

We've spoken so far of God's *dynamic, eternal-Being of love*, together with His *righteousness* and *faithfulness*. Now, very much related to these, is that particular manifestation of His *irrepressible outflowing* of divine Self-giving: the strong and lovely reality of *His goodness*.

Earlier, it was said that our Creator's love is expressed in 'His pure and holy affection, desire and action towards us'; and that 'every moment of every day He goes out toward us, His beloved humanity, to bless, serve and do us good.' Now we will briefly unpack these significant statements.

the goodness of the creation itself and the blessing it brings

After each successive day of the Creation we are told that, “God saw that it was *good*.” But then when humanity—as His image and likeness—was created as the crowning glory of it all, we are told that, “God saw all that He had made [and behold], it was *very good*” (Genesis 1:31).

For the creation to be ‘good’ meant that it was ‘functionally good’. It was exactly what was needed in every way, to fulfil the deep longing of the Creator to ‘bless’ His creation, and in particular, His beloved humanity. That is, to provide, supply, equip and endow each person with all that is needful for them to fulfil and enjoy their amazing nature, as the image and likeness of God! More will be said of the ‘functional goodness’ of our Creator’s abundant provision later in this study.

a good and kind Father, Creator and King

The goodness of God is seen in His glad provision of our needs in two ways: through both the *established creation* and His *ongoing providence*. As the Provider and Keeper of His creation, His goodness is expressed in endless seen and unseen ways. He displays His divine benevolence—His kind-hearted provision—through the vast and generous supply of all that is pleasant to, and beneficial for, His creatures.

In this way, each moment of every day He is acting on our behalf as OUR GREAT SERVANT KING.

James 1:17a

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father.

Psalms 34:8, 10

Taste and see that the LORD is good ... Those who seek the LORD will lack no good thing.

In the Scriptures God has revealed Himself to be the Shepherd of those who love Him—the One whose kind provision can be depended upon.

Psalms 23:1–3a, 4a, 6

—*the assurance of a king, who knew the goodness of his own Creator-King*

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul. ... [LORD] even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me ... Surely Your goodness and [unfailing] love will follow me all the days of my life.

Psalms 33:5

—*His goodness to us in a good creation*

The earth is full of His unfailing love.

The whole of the creation was brought into being in love, and as such, is a magnificent gift for our enjoyment and benefit day after day. It is His *glad provision* not only for those who love Him but also for those who don’t.

Matthew 5:45

He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Luke 6:35

He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

Acts 14:17

—*a proclamation of the goodness of God to those who don't know Him*

He has not left Himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with [gladness].

This statement was made to a particular group of people whose circumstances in life were at this time clearly, very favourable. Of course, experience of life in this world is often not that way—impacted by wrong human choices, natural disasters, etc. There may not always be the abundance that is desired. Yet in these situations there is, nevertheless, still much to be grateful for—as many people living in such circumstances have confirmed. The gifts of God are ever-present, even in the midst of great deprivation.

Psalms 145:9a

The LORD is good to all.

Yes, to all, without exception!

This teaches us something very wonderful about our Father-Creator's authority as King of His creation: HIS AUTHORITY IS ONE THAT INCLUDES BOTH *RULE AND CARE*. It will be seen in future studies that in any true exercise of authority, these twin dynamics of rule and care are never separated.

Further on in Studies 5 and 6—when we look at the Story of God's great love from the beginning of all things to the end of history—it will be seen that our 'faithful Creator', from the beginning, established a 'covenant of love' with the whole of His creation. He has, in fact, *bonded Himself in love* to every element of it—from the tiniest particle to the hugest mass, and from the most seemingly insignificant creature to the humanity He created as His image and likeness.

We will see that His covenant of love is one that will never be dissolved. It is not *contractual*, that is, not dependent in any way upon human response for its continued existence. There may be questions that come to mind at this point about the biblical nature and implications of such a covenant. These will all be covered in those two later studies.

Throughout the series we will see more and more of the 'perfectly functional provision' that our good and kind Father-Creator-King delights to make—the rich blessing and supply that is part of the *irrepressible out-flowing* of His abounding fullness and Self-giving!

Fifthly, His perfections are understood by the awesome revelation of:

- His moral purity

(utter separateness from evil & jealous burning against it; in the holy wrath of His love bringing just & righteous judgment)

Within God's holy Being there is only complete and absolute purity. There is *nothing* in Him that is impure or evil—nothing that is morally dark, ugly or unlovely.

What is *moral* always has to do with *relational choice*: choice between what is right or wrong, good or evil (creationally functional or dys-functional). And *every* choice made by the Holy One in relation to His creation, arises out of the utter purity of His divine

Being. This is the same as saying that His every motivation flows out of an inner spring of absolutely untainted, divine love!¹⁵

But not only is there *nothing* impure, dark or unlovely within the Holy One, there is also *everything* within Him that is right, just, fair, true, kind, wise, lovely, beautiful and breathtakingly excellent!

1 Timothy 6:16b

[God] lives in unapproachable light.

In the unseen spiritual realm, His very presence illuminates everything around Him with the blazing splendour of an unapproachable brightness! From within His holy Being there shines out the radiance of a glorious ‘uncreated light’!

Psalm 76:4a

—*the Outshining One who is awesome in His righteousness and truth*

[LORD,] You are resplendent with light.

1 John 1:5a

God is light.

Yes, the One who made us is, Himself, light!

And so, the declaration is made:

1 John 1:5b

In Him there is no darkness at all.

Psalm 92:15

There is no [wickedness and] unrighteousness in Him.

the dynamic nature of His purity

The complete moral purity of God is, indeed, an awesomely wonderful thing. But—as must be immediately obvious—it is definitely not something that is merely *passive* or *static*. Rather, it is totally *active* and *dynamic*!

Because of the utter purity of His Being there is an instant response within Him to all that is false, impure and morally corrupt. He is deeply grieved and offended when faced with any kind of moral darkness or corruption.

Our Maker is never *unmoved* in the face of evil. There is no sense in which He is prepared to ‘put up with a bit of bad behaviour’ from the objects of His love—as if at least some measure of human unrighteousness should be expected and tolerated.

Our next study will show how far this is from the case. There it will be seen that human beings—as the image of God—have been given a high and holy calling. They have been created as magnificent creatures, to exercise a noble, moral authority in their Creator’s world. His expectation of them is, rightly, very great, and His grief in the face of their moral and vocational failure, enormous.

Genesis 6:5–6

The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the [the human heart] was only evil all the time ... and His heart was deeply troubled [and grieved].

Isaiah 63:10

They rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit.

The grief God knows in the presence of evil is more than just a deep sorrow. It has within it a right and holy anger and jealousy—a fierce burning against all that is morally

¹⁵ It could be said that ‘good’ is that which is of divine love and ‘evil’ is that which is not of divine love.

dark and impure! Yes, a *holy* anger and jealousy, which is different to, separate from and 'other than' the kind of dark and mean-spirited outrage that is so often humanly expressed.

Habakkuk 1:13

Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; You cannot tolerate wrongdoing.

That His eyes are too pure to look on evil does not mean that He is too sensitive to gaze upon it. Rather He cannot look upon evil without determining to bring it under the judgement it deserves. He cannot and will not tolerate *anything* that violates the righteousness—and divine, relational functionality—that is to fill His creation!

Deuteronomy 4:24

The LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

Yes, He is jealous. A divine jealousy that is not tainted by the fearfulness and petty self-interest that often accompanies human jealousy (with its even darker perversion, envy). Again, it is A 'HOLY JEALOUSY' THAT SPRINGS FROM WITHIN HIS GLORIOUS, DIVINE BEING OF LOVE!!!

In the unsearchable greatness of His love He will not finally leave *un-judged* what corrupts, desecrates and demeans His image and likeness, within a culpable humanity that refuses His way.

His holy agenda—the revelation of His glory

We will see throughout the series that God continually acts in history with one grand purpose above all others: THAT THE SUPREME EXCELLENCE AND WONDER OF ALL THAT HE IS AND DOES—HIS GLORY—MAY BE MADE KNOWN AND ENJOYED IN ALL THE WORLD!!!

In the relentless pursuit of this He will never allow His name or His word to be despised. He will, in fact come in judgment against the doers of evil who dishonour Him. If He did not pursue the revelation of His glory in all the earth, nor finally judge those who despise it, *that* would, actually, be *great unrighteousness!*

And so, He is all the time moving out towards and coming up against every expression of human evil—with a view to judging it and, ultimately, purging it from His universe!

We have, then, such declarations as these:

Psalms 138:2b

You have [exalted above all things Your name and Your word].

Isaiah 42:8

I am the LORD; that is My name! I will not yield My glory to another or My praise to idols.¹⁶

Ezekiel 36:23

I will show the holiness of My great name ... Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD.

Yes, His glory made known—that it may be enjoyed in all the world!

¹⁶ An idol is any false object of worship. That is, anything that is given the honour, trust, gratitude or allegiance that is due to God alone. The implications of this will become clear as the series progresses.

the holy wrath of His love

The wrath of God is His righteous anger against all that is greatly offensive to Him; and this, an inevitable part of that spring of holy love within His divine eternal-Being.

Romans 1:18

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and [unrighteousness] of those who [are all the time, in unrighteousness, grasping hold of and suppressing the truth].

Psalms 7:11b

[He is One] who [passes sentence and] displays His wrath every day.

With the evil of the world as it is God's wrath is expressed daily. But—as will be spelt out in a later study—our Father, Creator and King is, not wrathful by nature. He is angry only in the face of evil.

His wrath is a 'holy anger'—one that is *different* to any other. Like His divine jealousy it is a response that flows out of the inner fountain of His love—always a manifestation of divine freedom and fullness. It is never the expression of an insecure, dark and perpetually smouldering, inner rage that erupts at the slightest provocation. His wrath is always clean, clear, purposeful, decisive and perfectly controlled.

Never an uncontrolled outburst, but nevertheless:

Nahum 1:2a–3b

The LORD is a jealous and avenging God ... The LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.

The wrath of God is experienced daily by those who stubbornly disregard Him and His way.

Psalms 81:11–12

[My] people would not listen to Me. [They] would not submit to Me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.

In His wrath He personally gives us over to the futility of our choices.

Psalms 105:7

He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth.

In the midst of human rebellion, God's wrath can also take the shape of severe and alarming acts of divine intervention.

1 Samuel 6:20

—*the cry of some who tasted His fierce intervening action*
“Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God?”

Hebrews 10:31

It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.

Mention was made above of the *liberating* and *life-giving* implications for us of His righteousness. But His righteous acts of judgment may also be terrifying.

the righteousness of His judgments

As terrible as His judgments may sometimes be, they are, of course, always entirely right and just. He could never be accused of 'creation abuse'! We may know that these strong judgments of His love upon human evil, always, have as their goal the ultimate blessing of those who come under them—if they will have it that way.

Psalms 7:11a

God is a righteous judge.

Genesis 18:25

Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?

Job 34:12

It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice.

Deuteronomy 32:4b

His works are perfect and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He.

Ezekiel 14:23

I have done nothing ... without cause, declares the Sovereign LORD.

Daniel 9:14

—*when promised judgment comes*

The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster on us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything He does.

Revelation 15:3b

Great and [marvellous] are Your deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, King of the [ages]!

Throughout all the ages of history over which He has reigned, His ways have never been less than 'just and true'. His every act of judgment—rightly understood—is a 'great and marvellous' revelation of His glory. God's glory is actually revealed as much by His righteous judgment of evil, as by the more 'pleasant' actions of His righteousness.

Revelation 16:5b, 7b

—*the worship in heavenly realms at the outpouring of His wrath*

"You are just in these judgments, [You who are and who were, the Holy One] ... Yes, Lord God Almighty, just and true are Your judgments."

God is justly working out His judgments in His world today. This is what He always has done. It is good and right that evil be judged, with a view to righteousness being established in the whole earth. One who neglected justice within His creation would never be worthy of His creatures' worship.

The unsearchably great Father, Creator and King is One who relates to His family, creation and kingdom in absolute *moral purity*, with impeccable justice and complete integrity. Of this we may be absolutely certain!

In our previous section the matter of God's *blessings* (the good things He loves to give) was spoken of. These are wonderful to receive. But it must be seen that His judgments are, in reality, as much a part of divine *faithfulness* as His blessings. In any situation He will bring them both, according to what He has said in His word.

Then further on in the series, it will be shown how, IN HIS SON, GOD HAS ACTED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO BE JUST, AND YET DECLARE TO BE *NOT GUILTY FOREVER* THOSE WHO TRUST IN WHAT HE HAS DONE!!! The unfolding revelation of this—and its' thrilling personal, relational and vocational outcomes—will speak powerfully to the deepest elements of our human need.

Sixthly, His perfections are understood by the awesome revelation of:

- His mercy and grace

(yearning to bless: judgment withheld & abundance freely given)

We've spoken of God's *dynamic eternal-Being of love* with its irrepressible out-flowing: the *faithful* exercise of His *right relational action* as Father, Creator and King, together with—in His divine goodness—the rich blessings He delights to bestow; and then also—in His moral purity—His right and just *response to evil* as it intrudes into His good and functional creation.

Now we are to add to the perfection of His divine goodness, two more *stunning manifestations of His yearning desire to bless us as His beloved humanity*: His *mercy* and *grace*. These too, are righteous and faithful expressions of His love and kindness towards us—even in the midst of our spurning of His way. And this, to a degree that is far greater than we usually recognise.

Like His goodness, these two are realities that He delights to see thrilling our senses! They, in particular, will find their fullest expression in later studies where the coming of the Son—and all that He accomplished for us—is proclaimed in rich detail.

We'll now look at both of these in turn.

His love expressed in mercy

God's mercy is His reviving action towards those who are in trouble (either rightly under His judgments, or suffering through no fault of their own) and His deliverance of them from their misery! His divine mercy is *perfect* for every situation in which it is exercised—and so wonderful to receive!

Deuteronomy 4:31a

The LORD your God is a merciful God.

In the Old Testament study to come we will see that when God's people were under His wrath (the action of His holy-anger—His hot-love), they remained in the pain of His judgments only for as long as was needful. Then He had mercy on them and brought them out of their misery. Again and again, He showed Himself to be 'the Merciful and Compassionate One'.

God is in no way obliged to be merciful to those who are rightly under His judgment. All who wilfully live against Him and His way may have no assurance of mercy. Yet He does love to be merciful!

Ephesians 2:4

God ... is rich in mercy.

Micah 7:18c

[He delights] to show mercy.

Psalms 78:37b–38a, c

They were not faithful ... Yet He was merciful ... Time after time He restrained His anger and did not stir up His full wrath.

Psalms 103:10

He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

Up until now we have not mentioned the word 'sin'. As we proceed through the series it will be seen that sin is whatever is against God, His will and His way. The word 'iniquity' describes sinfulness that comes out of an extremely wicked moral choice—

which is, in principle, the case with every sin. There are, actually, no ‘low grade’ sins. It is, indeed, by His great mercy that we are not treated every day as our sins deserve!

Lamentations 3:22a

Because of the LORD’S great love we are not consumed.

Psalms 145:8, 9b

The LORD is gracious, [merciful] and compassionate, slow to anger and [abounding in unending] love ... He has [mercy and] compassion on all He has made.

God is deeply and profoundly moved by the plight of those who suffer.

Isaiah 63:9

In all their distress He too was distressed ... In His [unfailing] love and mercy He redeemed them.

The grand theme of *REDEMPTION—THE ACTION OF GOD IN LIBERATING HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS INTO FELLOWSHIP WITH HIMSELF*—will be introduced in our Old Testament study, and from then on it will be a key to the rest of the series.

Psalms 116:5b

God is full of [mercy and] compassion.

2 Corinthians 1:3b

[He is] the Father of [mercy and] compassion and the God of all comfort.

Lamentations 3:22b–23a

His [mercies and] compassions never fail. They are new every morning.

It is a marvellous fact that those who know Him—and, so, are seeking His way—may anticipate His mercy in all kinds of situations!

Much more will be revealed of the thrilling dimensions of divine mercy as the series proceeds.

His love expressed in grace

God’s grace is all that He delights to freely and lavishly bestow upon His sinful and undeserving human creatures, for their *freedom* of spirit—and the *fullness* of life and *wholeness* of being it brings! It is our awesome Creator being so aboundingly good to us in the face of totally deserved judgment.

In the Old Testament the grace of God is described in two ways: ‘unfailing love’ and ‘favour’.¹⁷ We will see later in the series how God was wonderfully and constantly gracious to His people throughout the Old Testament period.

Exodus 34:6–7a

[The LORD] passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the [merciful,] compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in [unfailing covenant] love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

Genesis 6:8

Noah found *favour* in the eyes of the LORD.

It is in the New Testament that grace is revealed in its ultimate and most glorious form. There, as alluded to, above, we witness THE FATHER FREELY GIVING UP HIS

¹⁷ ‘Unfailing love’ is a translation of the Hebrew word *chesed*, and ‘favour’ is from the word *chen*.

ETERNAL SON TO 'THE CROSS'¹⁸ FOR THE COMPLETE FORGIVENESS AND PURIFICATION OF OUR SINS. In this—and all that flows endlessly from it—He makes Himself known as 'THE GOD OF ALL GRACE'!!!¹⁹

Romans 5:20b

Where sin increased [and abounded, God's] grace increased [and abounded] all the more.

Ephesians 1:2, 6b, 7b, 8a

Grace and peace to you from God our Father ... His glorious grace, which He has freely given us ... [The] riches of [His] grace that He lavished on us.

Ephesians 2:7b

[He finally will show] the [all-excelling and] incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us.

And yes, as the series unfolds, these 'incomparable riches' of divine grace will be progressively explored, so that we may know more and more of the great joy they bring! We will see that this amazing grace of God is at the heart of the *redemption* He has accomplished for us, His dearly loved humanity.

Seventhly, His perfections are understood by the awesome revelation of:

- His purposefulness

(unwavering resolve to sovereignly accomplish—according to His perfect wisdom & knowledge—His eternal plan[s]) of love)

As with everything that stirs within the eternal-Being of the Holy One, His plans are never anything other than the purposes of His love! And as with all of the divine perfections, His 'purposefulness' truly is unsearchably great! Right from the time of creation He has been totally purposeful in everything He has done—progressively bringing all things towards a *great and glorious climax*.

The diagram below will be developed throughout the series. It displays a linear ('straight line') view of history—where all (in the midst of different periods and epochs²⁰) is moving forward towards the Creator's goal.



God is sovereignly²¹ working out His great *purpose* and *plan* for history, and along the way is also fulfilling His particular *plans* and *purposes* towards that End. His purposes

¹⁸ It is in Study 6 that this Central Divine Act of 'the Cross'—the great Crisis of all history—will be spelt out in wondrous detail; and then, its' awesome implications for our personal freedom, fulness & wholeness will be proclaimed in Study 8 and beyond!

¹⁹ 1 Peter 5:10a. 'Grace' is a translation of the New Testament Greek word *charis*.

²⁰ An epoch is a period of history marked by notable events or particular characteristics.

²¹ The words 'sovereign', 'sovereignty' and 'sovereignly' will often come up throughout the series. The 'sovereignty of God' is a wonderful reality that involves the perfect outworking within history of His unsearchably great purposes of love. His sovereign plans are those that He alone decides upon, and which He works out independently of all else. In His accomplishment of them—although incorporating human response—He is not controlled or limited by anyone or anything.

are those things that—in holy wisdom, knowledge and love—He has planned from eternity to accomplish in history.

creation, a product of the wisdom and will of God

There is nothing random in God's creation. Nothing is a result of chance. All exists and operates according to His sovereign plan.

Jeremiah 10:12

He founded the world by His wisdom and stretched out the heavens by His understanding.

Psalms 104:24

How many are Your works, LORD! In wisdom You made them all; the earth is full of Your creatures.

Immediately after His awesome act of creation we have the statement of our Creator's great pleasure in it all:

Genesis 1:31

God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.

'Very good' means *functionally* or *purposefully* good. When God saw the finished creation His response was, "It is perfect! It will exactly fulfil My purpose in making it. Every part, down to the very last detail, is precisely as it needs to be to achieve My goal!"

From that point onwards all of history has been the outworking of His great plan. And since then our wise Creator has been relentlessly moving all things towards a glorious final 'telos' (the New Testament Greek word for 'end' or 'goal').

As we progress through the series, the wonder of this grand *climax* will be unveiled. In it all we will see that history has always been, is today and will always be *HIS-STORY*—*THE STORY OF GOD!!!*

In Study 4 we introduce the presence of dark, spiritual powers at work within God's world, who are intent on overthrowing His purposes of love and exercising relentless, tyrannical power towards humankind. But as the Story of God is told in Studies 5 and 6, we will see the sovereign unfolding of His good and wise purpose in spite of fierce resistance to His will. Then as we further progress through our series the astounding nature of this grand Story that God is telling—which He delights to include us in—will continue to capture our heart and imagination!

The fact of the creation itself is enough to draw exalted worship from every man, woman, boy and girl—let alone the glorious purpose for which He created it!

Revelation 4:11

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being.

the unsearchable nature of His purposes

Not only is God's *purposefulness* unsearchably great; His plans and purposes themselves are also! In them all He is exercising the unfathomable wisdom that only He has, as the Holy One.

Isaiah 40:28c

His understanding no one can fathom [—it is unsearchable].

Isaiah 55:9

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

When we consider the incalculable vastness of the universe—the degree to which ‘the heavens are higher than the earth’—we may appreciate the unsearchable greatness of the ways and thoughts of the One who is far greater than His creation! There is never a moment when we are able to stand in judgment upon what He has determined to do in His world. Our only appropriate response is to know that history is the outworking of the purposes of the Holy One—in the perfection of His wisdom, knowledge and love.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

He has made everything beautiful [and functional] in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet [no one can search out] what God has done from beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes 11:5

You cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.

Unless He reveals His purpose, we are completely unable to comprehend what He is doing or predict what He will do. It is utterly beyond us!

Job 37:5b

He does great things beyond our understanding.

Isaiah 40:14

—in His unsearchably great wisdom He never has been nor ever will be, in need of counsel or advice

Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten Him, and who taught Him the right way? Who was it that taught Him knowledge, or showed Him the path of understanding?

Romans 11:33–36

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counsellor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them? For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever! Amen.

Yes, it is very true that unless He reveals His purpose, we are completely unable to comprehend what He is doing, or predict what He will do. It is utterly beyond us. However, it must also be said that as the series progresses, we will in fact, come to grasp more and more of ‘THE GREAT MYSTERY OF HISTORY’ that God is accomplishing in His Son—and in this be able to view all things through the lens of that glorious reality. We will still not be able to work out the many complexities that abound within life’s circumstances. But the revealed mystery of history will certainly give us a wise, deeply joyous and restful perspective in the midst of it all!

the One who knows all He has purposed to do

God’s greatness in relation to His purposes is often referred to as His ‘omniscience’. This is a philosophical term that speaks of Him being ‘all-knowing’. Care must be taken, though, in the way such a term is used of Him.

To say that God is all-knowing doesn’t merely refer to Him being able to see into and predict the future. He must not be regarded as a kind of celestial fortune-teller. Rather, as the Eternal One He has planned everything He will do throughout the centuries and millenniums of time.

From before the Creation He established the purposes which seen and unseen forces relentlessly oppose, but cannot ultimately frustrate.

Isaiah 37:26

Long ago I ordained it. In days of old I planned it; now I have brought it to pass.

Isaiah 46:10

I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what still is to come.

Acts 17:26

—sovereignly purposeful regarding the history and geography of the nations

From one man He made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

Psalms 139:16

—sovereignly purposeful regarding the length of our lives

All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be.

What must be understood is that the matter of God's sovereign purposefulness has nothing at all to do with 'fatalism': the idea that the future of every nation and person is already planned out in detail and cannot be changed no matter what they do. Such a view of history produces a sense of hopeless resignation. It also suppresses human initiative and moral choice. This is by no means the way of God.

The revelation of His purposes from eternity is not meant to dampen our own will but to thrill our heart! Actually, the more assurance we have of a good and sovereign Father, the more able we are to live confidently, gladly, freely, creatively and purposefully in His world.

The Scriptures speak not only of God decreeing the span of our life but also of us 'prolonging our days' through the choices we make. Both realities are operating together under His sovereign hand!²²

It is good to stand within the fellowship of those who have embraced the reality of God's sovereign purposes of love, and joyously declare:

Psalms 147:5a, c

Great is our Lord. ... His understanding has no limit.

Maybe at this point it would be good, also, to once again say that as we proceed through the various studies there will, no doubt, be many questions that come to mind. But when all twenty-five have been covered—and the 'big picture' of God's purposes and His provision for our part in them has been received—all of these questions should have been appropriately answered. As said earlier, this is an integrated series, with each study building on what has gone before, and so the framework for such answers will be progressively developed.

²² Deuteronomy 6:1–2; Proverbs 10:27.

the One who is relentlessly at work in His world, according to His righteous and eternal purpose of wisdom, knowledge and love

As we've been saying, God knows exactly what He has planned to accomplish within His creation, and is working this out in the midst of both resistant spiritual powers and human decision and action.

As Our Maker accomplishes His great plan—and His many purposes within it—He does not act within humanly desired time limits. How foolish it would be to demand that He operate according to our timetable! He is the God of the centuries, and His purpose spans them all. Only at the end of history will it be seen how amazingly He has brought it all to its ultimate climax.

2 Peter 3:8b

—time is nothing to Him

With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

Time is something God has created; He, Himself, is not locked into it. Although always at work within time, He is unsearchably greater than it and sovereignly rules over it.

This great Father, Creator and King is neither slow nor impatient as He goes about His business. In His wisdom, knowledge and love He is always acting according to His will—and His timing is always *perfect*. The only fitting response on our part to this grand reality is *joyous humility* and *full-hearted worship!*

Ephesians 1:11

[He] works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will.

Romans 12:2

[His will is] good, pleasing and perfect.

Proverbs 16:4

—His sovereign purpose includes ultimate judgment for those who oppose His will and way

The LORD works out everything to its proper end—even the wicked for a day of disaster.

Isaiah 45:6–8

—the One whose purpose includes both judgment and salvation

I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things. ... Let salvation spring up, let righteousness flourish with it; I, the LORD, have created it.

God is sovereignly operating in the affairs of His world. As has been seen, sometimes this takes the shape of needful judgment. At other times He allows tragic situations to take place for reasons known only to Him, as the One who is *wise in His love*. But in it all there is one thing we may know: our Father-Creator-King is relentlessly engaged in working out His GREAT, SAVING PURPOSE in the midst of human history.

God's *salvation* has to do with His *deliverance* of those who desperately need it. As we proceed, much more will be said about His AMAZING PLAN OF SALVATION. Its

accomplishment is one of the grand themes of the Scriptures—and so is a central emphasis in this series.²³

Jeremiah 29:11

“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Isaiah 28:29

[He is] the LORD Almighty, whose plan is wonderful, whose wisdom is magnificent.

Romans 15:13a

—*with Him there is always a sure way ahead*

[He is] the God of hope.

To people of faith the revelation of God’s unsearchably great purposes brings *enormous* expectation and promise. Those who look to Him need never be afraid of His will, for it is the path of His wisdom, knowledge and love!

Just one more observation: We have seen here that in relational to His purposefulness God is ‘omniscient’ / ‘all-knowing’. But in this, HE IS ALSO ‘OMNISAPIENT’ / ‘ALL-WISE’. THAT MEANS HE ALWAYS KNOWS WHAT TO DO ‘FOR THE VERY BEST’!!

Eighthly, His perfections are understood by the awesome revelation of:

- His power

(total ability to bring about everything He has purposed)

God’s power is His sovereign ability—in holy love—to personally accomplish in history all He has purposed from eternity. And His power is, indeed, unsearchably great! This perfection is often called His ‘omnipotence’, meaning that He is ‘all-powerful’.

Job 26:14

“[His many mighty acts within the creation] are but the outer fringe of His works; how faint the whisper we hear of Him! Who then can understand the thunder of His power?”

The frighteningly powerful forces of nature can be awesome to behold. But these are only a faintly whispered testimony to the power of the Almighty One.

needing only to speak in order to accomplish His will

Reference has already been made to the *absolute dependability* of God’s word. But now we see that His divinely uttered word also has *incalculably great power*.

Romans 4:17

[He is the] God who ... calls into being things that were not.

Genesis 1:3

God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

2 Peter 3:5b

By God’s word the heavens [existed] and the earth was formed.

Psalms 148:5b

At His command they were created.

²³ In the Bible God’s righteousness and salvation are often linked together. The salvation of a needy humanity is at the heart of His righteous purpose—and the unfolding of its nature throughout the series will show it to be nothing less than thrilling in its dimensions!

Hebrews 11:3

The universe was formed at God's command.

Psalm 33:9

He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm.

The Creator brought all things into being out of nothing—simply by His word!

always the Sovereign Creator-Sustainer

The creation does not just continue on automatically, operating and replenishing itself apart from its Creator. It is always renewed, maintained or 'diminished' by His personal sovereign action.²⁴

the Giver, Maintainer and Taker of Life

Every second of life or occurrence of death within His creation is in His hands.

Psalm 104:29–30

When You take away [the breath of Your creatures], they die and return to the dust. When You send Your Spirit, they are created, and You renew the face of the [earth].

Job 12:10

In His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of [every human being].

There is *no* expression of life within the creation that does not flow from the One who "has life in Himself" (John 5:26). All life is His to give, and to take (either by His direct action or wise permission).

Psalm 36:6b

LORD, You preserve both people and animals.

Matthew 10:29

"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground [apart from your Father]."

the Maintainer of the Heavens

The vast expanses of God's immense universe are present and function solely by His great wisdom and sustaining power.

Jeremiah 31:35a

[He is the One] who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night.

Isaiah 40:26

Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls forth each of them by name. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

never unable to do what He has planned

As the series develops it will be seen that in spite of enormous opposition to His purposes, the great Father-Creator-King has never been nor ever will be *frustrated* in their outworking. He always has more options available to Him than we could ever

²⁴ It is true that many things happen in God's world that have a 'diminishing' effect because of the action of human evil. And yet, as seen earlier in regard to the nature of God's wrath, it is He who personally 'gives over' to futile choices those who rebel against His way. And so 'diminishing' caused by human choice within God's world is, nevertheless, still the result of His 'personal sovereign action'.

imagine—and all the ability needed to accomplish them! The word ‘difficult’ cannot be used in regard to His intentions. It is never a matter of whether He can or cannot do something—only whether or not it is His will.²⁵

Job 12:13

—*two inseparable perfections*

To God belong wisdom and power.

Isaiah 48:3

“I foretold the former things long ago, My mouth announced them and I made them known; then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass.”

Luke 1:37

“No word from God will ever fail.”

Jeremiah 32:17

“Ah, Sovereign LORD, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for You.”

Jeremiah 32:26-27

Then the word of the LORD came ... “I am the LORD, the God of the whole human race. Is anything too hard for Me?”

Matthew 19:26

—*in the face of His incredible mercy and grace*

“Humanly, this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Our Maker delights to secure us with such proclamations as we live in His world each day!

no person, situation or thing is able to prevail against what He has purposed

God is *free* to do all that He has purposed in His world, regardless of what is happening at any moment of history. And in this His every action is a pure expression of His love’s divine righteousness.

Again, we are given strong encouragements:

Isaiah 46:9b, 10b, 11b

“I am God, and there is no other. ... I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’ ... What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.”

Isaiah 14:24

The LORD Almighty [says], “Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will [stand].”

Psalms 33:11

[The] plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations.

Daniel 4:3

How great are His signs, how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; His dominion endures from generation to generation.

Psalms 115:3

Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him.

²⁵ As we proceed through the series it will become clearer as to what is and is not His will. But there will always be things that remain mysteries to be revealed at a later time.

Psalms 135:6

The LORD does whatever pleases Him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.

Daniel 4:35b

He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to Him: "What have You done?"

Isaiah 43:12–13

[The LORD says,] "I am God. ... When I act, who can reverse it?"

Ecclesiastes 3:14

—*the enduring perfection of His works*

Everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it.

Proverbs 21:30

There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD.

Even in the midst of great adversity His people may know that He is working out His glorious purpose of love—for them and His whole creation. The way He does this is beyond our comprehension. But He is *able* to do it to perfection!

As we've seen, often the Sovereign One gives His rebel creatures up to the wicked intentions of their hearts, so that they unwittingly become His 'agents' in bringing about His righteous purpose. The perpetrators of these things will, of course, be judged for their evil.²⁶

Proverbs 19:21

Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD'S purpose that prevails.

sovereign over the history of nations and their rulers

World affairs with all of their complexity are totally under the control of 'the King of the nations'. The rise and fall of rulers and kingdoms is in His wise and strong hands.

Daniel 4:32b

"The Most High is sovereign over all the kingdoms of the earth and gives them to anyone He wishes."

Isaiah 40:17

Before Him all the nations are as nothing.

Job 12:23

"He makes nations great and destroys them; He enlarges nations, and disperses them."

Isaiah 40:23

He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

Daniel 2:21

"He changes times and seasons. He deposes kings and raises up others."

Ezra 1:1

In order to fulfil the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia.

²⁶ Isaiah 10:5–6, 12: "Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of My anger, in whose hand is the club of My wrath. I send him against a godless nation. I dispatch him against [My] people who anger Me, to seize, loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets ... When the LORD has finished all His work against [His people] He will say, 'I will punish the king of Assyria for the wilful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.'"

Proverbs 21:1

In the LORD'S hand the king's heart [is like] a stream of water that He channels [wherever He pleases].

Isaiah 14:26b–27

[His hand is] stretched out over all nations. For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart Him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?

Again, what an excellent thing it is to have such perspective as we go on living in a turbulent world!

worthy of our absolute trust and adoring worship

Sometimes human parents—or others with people under their care—have excellent intentions and a sincere desire to accomplish certain things. But sadly, when it comes to actually carrying out their purpose or promise, they—in the end for some reason or another—are unable to accomplish it.

But this is never the case with the Living God. His people can always be sure that His every declared intention will be totally fulfilled. He is able to *do* all that He has both purposed in His heart and promised His people.

When this is witnessed—then comes the song!

1 Kings 8:24

“With Your mouth You have promised and with Your hand You have fulfilled it.”

Deuteronomy 3:24a

“Sovereign LORD, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand.”

1 Chronicles 29:11a, b

“Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour. ... Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; You are exalted as head over all.”

The Mighty One is, indeed, worthy of our absolute trust and adoring worship!

the most perfect expression of His divine power

In all this we must see, however, that God's power is not merely an *overwhelming physical force*. The greatness of His power is seen supremely in the *weakness* expressed in His *strong love*—displayed ultimately in THAT CENTRAL ACT OF ALL HISTORY: THE UNIVERSAL, SIN-BEARING DEATH OF HIS SON ON THE CROSS!!! It will be made clear in later studies that THIS VERY ACT OF DIVINE WEAKNESS IS IN REALITY THE GREAT, TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE ALMIGHTY!!!

1 Corinthians 1:18a, c

The message of the cross ... is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:25b

The weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

As has been indicated, throughout this series we will be exploring in much detail the *amazing dimensions* of such an all-powerful love—with all of its personal, relational and vocational implications.

Ninthly, His perfections are understood by the awesome revelation of:

- His blessedness & wholeness of Being

(unbounded joy & delight & perfect rest & peace in all that He is & does; even within divine, holy love's deep grief & anguish, always knowing an entirely undiminished freedom & fullness)

Having seen all that we have of 'The God Who Is', this perfection should come as no surprise!

the Blesséd God

Our Maker has unbounded joy and perfect rest and peace in the light of His own glory—that is, in view of all that He is and does as the Holy Father, Creator and King. He is the 'Blesséd God'. He lives every moment in the supreme, holy happiness and integrated calm of His own perfections.²⁷

He is neither restricted nor oppressed by anything within Himself. He is entirely free to *be* and to *do* all that is according to His divine nature. He is not striving 'to become something'. He doesn't need 'personal development' in any way. He doesn't *need anything*. He is not, like so many of the gods throughout history: the 'needy one', looking to gain something from His creation that will fulfil what is lacking within himself. HE IS GOD: eternally enjoying His own absolute, personal freedom, fullness and wholeness of Being. And it was out of this that He created—AS AN ACT OF PURE LOVE!!!²⁸

When speaking earlier in this study of His moral purity, it was said that there is *nothing* in Him that is impure or evil or morally dark, ugly or unlovely. But it was also said that there is *everything* in Him that is right, just, fair, true, kind, lovely, beautiful and breathtakingly excellent!

Ephesians 1:17b

—*the One whose dwelling place is full of the wonder of His Fatherhood!*

[He is] the glorious Father.

2 Samuel 22:31b

His way is perfect.

Deuteronomy 32:4b

His works are perfect.

In the end no one will ever be able to say, 'That was good, but He could have done *this* as well.' Or, 'It would have been better if He hadn't done *that*.' Just the opposite will be the case. All He has done—and continues to do—will be to the utter delight of those who love Him forever!

HIS WORKS ARE PERFECT, AND HE LIVES ALWAYS IN THE BLESSÉDNESS OF HIS HOLY BEING IN THE OUTWORKING OF THEM!!!

²⁷ In the original Greek of the New Testament there are two words for 'bless'/'blessed'. One is *eulogeo*, which means 'to praise', or 'to prosper, equip or supply'. The other is *makarios*, which means 'personal bliss and supreme happiness'. Here we are referring to *makarios*—indicated by the use of an inflected 'e' (é). *Makarios* is pronounced 'bless-ed' throughout this series, and *eulogeo* simply, 'blessed'.

²⁸ In Study 6 and beyond, this divine action of pure love in the creation of all things will be thrillingly explained and developed; and this in particular, as a *glorious relational mystery* that is within God Himself is clearly unveiled and unfolded!

Philippians 4:8a

—*a catalogue of divine virtues*

[That which] is true ... noble ... right ... pure ... lovely ... admirable ... excellent [and worthy of praise].

Galatians 5:22–23

—*beautiful fruit of the divine Being*

The fruit of [God's] Spirit is love, joy, peace, [longsuffering], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

There is absolutely no complexity within God—nothing that is confused. Within the blessedness of His Holy Being there is only, always, A GLORIOUSLY, PERFECT SIMPLICITY—AND YES, AN UNENDING, HOLY JOY AND REST!!!

1 Timothy 1:11

[He is] the blessed [blissful and supremely happy] God.

1 Chronicles 16:27

Splendour and majesty are before Him; strength and joy are in His dwelling place.

Our Maker, indeed, delights *always* in the utter beauty and excellence of all that He is and does. And for Him to do anything less would be both *unthinkable* and *unrighteous!* Throughout the rest of the series, we will receive increasingly wonderful revelation of 'the beauty of His holiness'.

the Joyful Creator

Imagine for a moment our dear Maker's pleasure in creating all things. He surely had huge delight in stretching out the universe in all its ever-increasing vastness, in order to display *something* of His unsearchable greatness! What joy He must have expressed when forming the mysterious depths of the oceans and the grandeur of mighty mountains; in causing the seas, rivers and lakes to 'teem with living creatures', many wildly exotic; in causing the skies to be inhabited by an almost endless variety of birds and insects, with their unique songs and intriguing behaviours; and in filling the land with an indescribable array of fascinating animal life, appealing vegetation and delicious foods.

And with all this—from the microscopic to the massive—the loving display of His glory is to be seen, heard, touched, tasted and smelt for our pleasure and delight in His presence!

But above all, how richly would His divine, holy happiness have been expressed in the formation of humankind as His image and likeness—the crown and climax of all He had made!²⁹

Isaiah 44:24b

—*His glad declaration*

I am the LORD, the Maker of all things.

Yes, He is the glad Creator—the fruit of whose Spirit is, indeed, JOY!!

²⁹ At this point in the series such a high claim for 'created humanity' may seem to be something of an overstatement. But future studies will certainly dispel any such reservation!

heavenly beings who share in His joy

Mention has already been made of ‘heavenly beings’ that joyously cry out at the wonder of God’s perfections. The Bible speaks of a whole range of such spiritual creatures that were created before the formation of the world. These love to worship and serve Him—finding their greatest delight in all that He is and does as God.

Such celestial beings are described as angels, cherubim, seraphim (‘burning ones’), living creatures and elders—each group with different roles, and each giving expression to the awesome delight that fills them in the presence of their Maker. The number of these is enormous.

Daniel 7:10

Thousands upon thousands [of heavenly beings] attended [the LORD]; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.

More will be seen of these spiritual creatures as biblical events are opened up to us.

Job 38:7b

—*angels joining the Creator in His pleasure*
[When He created] all the angels shouted for joy.

the gladness of all creation

There is a sense in which *the whole of creation* joins its Maker in His joy. It does this by simply *fully being* all that it was created to be—existing every second for the One who formed it! At times the Scriptures actually call upon the whole creation to celebrate and exalt in what its Creator has done, is doing and will do, as He works out His great purpose of love for His world.

Psalm 96:11–13a

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all of the trees of the forest sing for joy. Let all creation rejoice before the LORD.

the God of peace

The One who in the beginning made everything to be ‘very good’, did so out of His own serene and ordered Being.

1 Corinthians 14:33a

God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

But what about today when His creation has been tainted by human disorder and corruption? How could a grieved and offended Creator maintain His personal serenity? Well, He *does*, simply because there is nothing that is disordered and corrupt within *Him*—and as we’ve seen, nothing restricted or oppressed, complex or confused.

How thrilling it is to know this! Even in the midst of so much that is now chaotic and dysfunctional within His creation, He remains always within a perfect rest and integrated peace.

Romans 15:33a

[He is] the God of peace.

Philippians 4:7

The peace of God ... transcends all understanding.

God’s peace is beyond the understanding of one whose conscience has any sense of personal failure. But it is an unceasing reality for *Him* because He has never failed, nor ever will fail, to do what is *right* according to the way, or law, of His own nature. HE IS EVER THE TOTALLY WHOLE AND INTEGRATED ONE!!!

The Father lives every moment in the perfect rest and peace of His own righteousness, and all of His other perfections. There is nothing about Him that is *desperate* or *uneasy*. Peace is always the fruit of the Divine Spirit.

As we've already said, our Creator is divinely *passionate* in His love: being deeply *grieved* by evil and profoundly *moved* by the plight of those affected by it. The concern He has for His dearly loved creation is beyond our comprehension. But there is no desperation or uneasiness in this. He is *not* 'the frantic Father'! In it all He knows who He is and the righteousness of what He has done, is doing and has purposed to do.

As the Holy Father-Creator-King He is always *entirely at rest and at peace within Himself*—even when His divine affections are deeply stirred and aroused in the face of grievous, human situations. How wonderful such serenity must be! THIS IS WHAT IS AT THE HEART OF TRUE, ONGOING, PERSONAL FREEDOM: THE *STILL CENTRE* OF A PURE AND UNTRoubLED CONSCIENCE!!! This is the 'shalom'³⁰ He promises to those who love Him: that deep, peaceful spirit of wholeness, integration, personal flourishing and functionality—in the midst of what would, otherwise, be personally disintegrating.

the Blesséd King

The One who brought His creation into being is pursuing His grand purpose of manifesting within it a wonderful kingdom of love! The way He initiates and ultimately fulfils this purpose will be spelt out in 'the great Story of Redemption' as mentioned above. There we will see the amazing actions of the Blesséd King, gloriously at work within His creation.

1 Timothy 6:15b

[He is] the Blesséd [Blissful, Supremely Happy] and only Ruler.

Romans 14:17

The kingdom of God is [a matter of] ... righteousness, peace and joy.

It is so assuring to know that the One who rules over all things is never depressed or despairing. He reigns in the constant joy and rest of all that He is, has done, is doing and intends to do!

Yes, as grievous to Him as human unrighteousness is—and as deep as His divine compassion is—His blessédness as the Sovereign One is not diminished in any way. In fact, His anguished, grieving love—and the wrath it often brings—is what naturally flows from His ceaseless and unbounded joy and delight in Himself. How could it not be so! *True* anguished compassion and burning grief and wrath *always* come out of delight in the divine perfections, and the personal peace and integration that belongs to such joy.

the ultimate purpose of the Blesséd One

As we progress through the series, we will see what is at the heart of His purpose: that it is TO ENABLE HIS PEOPLE TO BE ONE WITH HIM IN HIS BOUNDLESS JOY AND DELIGHT, AND PERFECT REST AND PEACE FOREVER!!!

He actually wants them, even now, to increasingly enjoy this with Him in every moment of their life—regardless of what has happened, is happening or threatens to happen. The way this becomes possible is the central purpose of the first fourteen studies of

³⁰ 'Shalom' is the Hebrew word for 'peace' that is described above. It is a word that we'll be hearing much more of as the series progresses.

our series; while, our experience of it—as we respond to God’s call—will be at the heart of the next eleven.

In speaking before of God’s purposefulness, it was said that He is ‘omnisapient’: not only ‘omniscient’ / ‘all-knowing’ but also One who is ‘all-wise’. We saw that in the light of His perfect knowledge, He knows precisely what to do for the very best! And here, we may see that His omnisapient wisdom is, above all, to do with what will facilitate for His beloved humanity, A MAXIMUM HUMAN PARTICIPATION IN HIS OWN BLESSÉDNESS AS THE HOLY ONE!!!

Tenthly, His perfections are understood by the awesome revelation of:

- His dynamic personal presence of love

(intimate & searching relational engagement with His creation)

The ‘personal presence’ of God is His divine capacity for *total, personal involvement* in every situation of human history. There is no place in His whole universe where the great Father-Creator-King is not fully, personally present. This perfection of God is sometimes called His ‘omni-presence’, meaning ‘present everywhere’.

Another way of describing this is to speak of His ‘immanence’—a term that is the opposite of His ‘transcendence’, which speaks of Him being ‘far above all’ as the Sovereign One.

Of course, He is not present *within* His creation like a tree is—as part of the creation itself. He is *personally* and *relationally* present *to* His creation—and that, not in a merely static or passive way. His presence is—every moment—wisely, relationally and purposefully *dynamic!* Just as we saw that His *existence* is always a dynamic thing, so also is His presence.

Jeremiah 23:24b

“Do I not fill heaven and earth?” declares the LORD.

That is, “Is not *all that I am*, present to and purposefully operating within the whole of My creation at all times?”³¹

Ephesians 4:6

—*the Father wonderfully present to His family*

[There is] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

The Father is over the whole of His ‘believing family’ in every nation (transcendent), and is actively operating towards it and dwells intimately within it (immanent). And this, with a glorious, familial purpose that we will be exploring in detail as the series progresses.

Acts 17:26–28

—*present to all and ‘seekable’ by all*

From one man He made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being.

³¹ God being ‘other than’ and yet also ‘personally present to’ His creation is a wonderful thing. This is so much different to the Eastern philosophy of Monism, which sees God as ‘in all things’—an integral part of the creation itself.

There is not one nation, tribe or people group that the Father-Creator-King is not present to and actively involved with. As will be seen later, He has provided all that is necessary for people to seek Him and find Him—if they will have it that way.

As the Holy One works out His great plan, He doesn't do it in a detached or mechanical manner without personal engagement. What is known as the 'deistic view of God' asserts that He has wound up the universe like a clock, which just keeps ticking away until all has worked itself out apart from any ongoing action by Him. This is not the way of the Living God!³²

There is no situation in the heavens or the earth where He is not *there*—actively! Never at any time does He accept evil happenings that take place in His world. When they do occur, He is sovereignly present to them all. And when—in the wisdom of His divine love—He permits such things to continue, we may be sure that His holy anger burns fiercely against the perpetrators. We may also be sure that He will bring judgment upon all such evil on the Day when history is brought to its great climax.

a penetrating, searching presence

Another aspect of His dynamic, personal presence is that there is nothing in the whole of His creation that He is not totally aware of at any moment. He even knows what is in our 'secret heart'. This, too, is an example of His omniscience, as the All-knowing One.

Because of His personal presence, it is just as though each of us were the only one with whom He had to do—having His total attention at all times!

Psalms 139:1–4, 7

You have searched me, LORD, and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue You, LORD, know it completely. ... Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?

Psalms 38:9

All my longings lie open before You Lord: my sighing is not hidden from You.

1 Kings 8:39

[LORD,] You alone know every human heart.

Psalms 139:17

How precious [are Your thoughts concerning me, O God!] How vast is the [number] of them!

Psalms 147:5b

Great is our Lord. ... His understanding has no limit.

Proverbs 15:3

The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.

³² The term 'deism' comes from the Latin word 'deus' which means 'god'. A deist is one who believes in a god who created all things but who does not intervene in the universe or interact with humankind. The Scriptures clearly present a 'theistic' view of God (from *theos*, the Greek word for 'god'), declaring Him to be the one and only God and Creator of all things, who is also personally and dynamically engaged with the creation that He has bonded Himself to in love. Deism is a non-relational view of this One who made us and loves us, and who yearns for us to know Him intimately. A deistic view of God is actually a very convenient way of avoiding such a relationship and remaining independent of our Creator.

Psalms 33:14–15

He watches all who live on earth—He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.

Proverbs 5:21

Your ways are in full view of the LORD, and He examines all your paths.

Psalms 90:8

You [LORD], have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence.

1 John 3:20

—*He is far more aware of us than we are of ourselves!*

God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything.

Hebrews 4:13

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

Hosea 11:9

[The LORD says,] “I am God, and not a human being—the Holy One among you.”

When a person's conscience is unsettled, the fact of God's presence is not very appealing. It may even be quite terrifying—or infuriating. But such uneasiness before Him is not what our Maker desires. For those who have personally received the riches of His mercy and grace, the kind of uncertainty that *human* presence often brings need never be felt in *His* presence.

an awesomely wonderful reality—the immediate and knowable presence of His divine glory

When speaking earlier of God's holy agenda being ‘the revelation of His glory in all the earth’, the glory of God was referred to as ‘the supreme excellence and wonder of all that He is and does’. And the divine glory may also be defined by this final perfection of our study: ‘His dynamic personal presence’.

We could say, then, that His glory is ‘all that He is and does as the Holy One—personally and dynamically present to His creation’. And it is indeed an incredibly wonderful reality, that this immediate presence of His divine glory may, actually, be intimately known by us!

Our Father-Creator-King *delights* to manifest His glory to His image! This, of course, is rarely a *visible* manifestation. But it is, nevertheless, an awesome, heart-enlarging, *inner revelation* that may be received by all who seek Him.

As the series progresses it will be seen that this magnificent fact is the primary purpose of God in redeeming us. HE HAS GLORIOUSLY ACTED IN HISTORY, THAT WE MAY BE LIBERATED INTO AN *ENJOYMENT* OF HIS MANIFEST PRESENCE—BRINGING A BLESSÉDNESS THAT IS MORE WONDERFUL THAN ANYTHING WE HAVE EVER KNOWN!!!

CONCLUSION

This, then, is ‘the God Who is’. He is the *Holy One*: the *Unsearchably Great* and *Blesséd Father, Creator* and *King*, who—in *righteousness, faithfulness* and *utter moral purity*—is *personally* and *powerfully* working out in history His *eternal purposes of love!*

The more we come to know Him in all the liberating and enlivening action of His perfections towards us, the more we may enjoy being part of this declaration:

Deuteronomy 32:3

I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!

It must surely be clear that the description of our Maker in this study is *not* merely a list of ideas and concepts. Indeed, the *dynamic reality* of each of His perfections will become more and more apparent as we continue on through the series. They are actually the foundation for everything else that is to come.

Now having seen who *God* is, we are in a position to see what a *human being* is, as one formed in the Creator's image and likeness. And so, we come to Study 2: 'The High Human Calling'.

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