

Chapter Three

The God We Thought We Knew

There is a question that quietly lives beneath every human question.

It is not,

“Does God exist?”

Nor is it,

“What happens after I die?”

Beneath every theological debate...

Every religious tradition...

Every fear...

Every hope...

There is a simpler question.

“What is God really like?”

How we answer that question shapes everything.

If we believe God is distant, we will keep our distance.

If we believe He is easily angered, we will approach Him cautiously.

If we believe His love must be earned, we will spend our lives trying to deserve what can only be received.

Our image of God becomes the atmosphere in which our souls learn to breathe.

Perhaps this is why the serpent's first question was so devastating.

He did not begin by tempting humanity with pleasure.

He began by inviting humanity to question the Father's heart.

Every lie since then has simply been another version of the same deception:

“Perhaps God is not as good as He seems.”

History bears witness to what happens when that suspicion takes root.

Fear creates religion built upon appeasement.

Shame produces endless striving.

Power justifies violence.

People begin speaking in God's name while no longer resembling His heart.

And still the Father keeps moving toward His children.

Throughout the Scriptures we encounter moments of breathtaking beauty alongside passages that leave us deeply unsettled.

Some stories fill us with hope.

Others leave us asking difficult questions.

Faith has never required us to pretend those questions do not exist.

Perhaps mature faith begins when we have enough courage to ask them honestly.

For generations, thoughtful believers have wrestled with the tension.

How do we reconcile passages that appear to portray divine violence with the God revealed in Jesus Christ?

How do we understand commands that seem inconsistent with the One who taught us to love our enemies?

These are not questions born from unbelief.

They arise because we take Jesus seriously.

The Gospel of John records these remarkable words:

“No one has ever seen God. The only begotten Son... has made Him known.”

Later Jesus tells Philip,

“Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.”

Those words invite us into a profound way of reading Scripture.

Not by dismissing what came before...

But by allowing everything to find its fulfillment in Christ.

Jesus does not stand in opposition to the story of Israel.

He stands as its fulfillment.

Its clearest revelation.

Its unveiled face.

If we wish to know what the Father is like, we do not begin with our fears.

We begin with Jesus.

Watch Him.

He touches those others avoided.

He speaks with those religion excluded.

He receives children without hesitation.

He restores those shame had pushed to the margins.

He weeps at the tomb of His friend.

He forgives those who crucify Him.

Again and again, He reveals a God who would rather bear violence than answer it with violence.

A God whose strength is not diminished by humility.

A God whose holiness is not threatened by compassion.

A God who enters our suffering instead of remaining distant from it.

This is not a new God.

This is the Father who has always been.

Jesus did not come to change the Father's heart.

He came to remove the veil from ours.

And perhaps that is the beginning of every true return to Eden.

Not discovering a different God...

But finally seeing the One who has been walking toward us from the very beginning.

I AM still here...

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