

The background of the cover is a deep blue night sky filled with stars and a faint, glowing nebula. A bright, vertical beam of light descends from the upper right, illuminating a small figure of a person kneeling on a dark, undulating horizon. The person is silhouetted against the light. The title text is overlaid on the sky and horizon.

The Subjective God

The Holiness-Purpose Connection

ALAN R JONES

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*Anyone honestly searching for the truth
eventually finds that it is the searcher,
not the truth, who is lost.*

by Alan R Jones

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Preface

This is the second edition of *The Subjective God*. Originally, this book took about four years to write between 2011 and 2015. Although these are concepts God had been pointing out to me with great patience for many years prior to writing it. They have helped me enormously in my personal spiritual walk, and I hope they will help you too.

Rather than offering a new definition of holiness, this book returns us to its most fundamental meaning—one that may unsettle our assumptions. What if holiness isn't about perfection or divine grandeur, but about a singular dedication to a costly purpose? This understanding, rooted in the very nature of God, invites us to see His command—'be holy as I am holy'—in a startling new light.

I am grateful for the people around me who've kept me grounded along the way: Thanks to my wife, Meg, for her patience, encouragement, and amazing love; to my son, Daniel, for keeping me on my toes; to Layne Reading for curtailng my logic-leaping; to Ryan Peter for his remarkable editing; and to the Holy King, Jesus, for making a way for me where there was no way.

Introduction

In the movie *Kung Fu Panda*, Master Shifu rebukes his student, Po by saying, “Panda, we do not wash our pits in the Pool of Sacred Tears.”

What’s so special about this pool? Isn’t it just a combination of clean water, minerals and organic matter of the kind that you’d find in millions of places all over the world? Most of them are really great for cooling off on a hot day, so why not this one? But Shifu’s point is that some things aren’t for everyday use—they’re set apart, special, sacred. It has a special use—it’s reserved for something greater than washing one’s underarms. It’s what we humans call a ‘holy’ pool.

Kung Fu Panda fans all over the world, from diverse cultures ranging from secular humanist to deeply religious animist, understand this completely without any further narrative. For some reason in Po’s world, this pool is holy and those who are not holy ought to behave themselves appropriately if they find themselves in its presence.

It’s a necessary arrangement. You and I have some sacred objects and relationships that work much the same way.

I have a Leatherman Wave—it’s a great multi-tool. It belongs to me, but I’ve been known to lend it out on rare occasions.

When I do, it leaves me with strict instructions on its use and return. I've used it to repair my car, a house toilet, boat equipment, and a whole range of other things. Now, if I compare my Leatherman with, say, my toothbrush, I see a range of very important differences.

I don't ever lend my toothbrush out to anyone; even though it'd be great for cleaning all sorts of things. I only use it to clean my teeth (which is the most compelling argument against utilitarianism I've encountered). As soon as it's used to clean anything except my teeth, it's no longer fit to clean my teeth, no matter how new, expensive, or high-tech it is.

In this simple illustration, we have two things that are holy to me, but one more so than the other. In the strictest definition of the word, it's only my toothbrush that's actually holy to me, because holiness—or sacredness—means being dedicated to a single, special *purpose*. Generally speaking, they're both dedicated to *my* purposes—one stays that way even if I loan it out or use it for multiple purposes; the other loses its holiness the moment it's used by another or for another purpose. I'm sure you know which is which.

This idea of being set apart for a special purpose isn't mine—it's God's pattern. Holiness is a golden thread right through the Bible. Early on in the Bible story, we see things, people, places, and times being set

apart as holy to God. The seventh day of the week, the land Moses stood on, the nation of the Hebrews, to name a few.

As the story unfolds, we come to know the biblical account of God as a single being who's utterly objective, who calls Himself 'The Great I AM'. All things are presented as subject to Him—some are holy, others are not. And just when we're beginning to think, 'Ho hum, we've heard this before—the great being to whom all things are subject,' we come across this little gem:

“For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming thing that crawls on the ground. For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” (Leviticus 11:44–45 ESV)

Wait, what? Not, “be holy because I told you to.” Not, “be holy or I'll smite you.” Instead, the God of the Bible says, “be holy because I am holy.”

Surely it is *other* things that are holy *toward* God? We have to consecrate ourselves, correct? We have to make sure we are good enough? How can the most objective I AM be holy? What is He being holy toward? What is He set apart for? Or set apart *from*?

What is *God's* Purpose?

Now, before we hurry on to that fascinating question, let's do justice to the concept the Bible's just presented to us. We have been trained to think that when God says that He's holy He means that He is intriguing, more than a little frightening, awesome, majestic, splendid, sinless—on an infinitely higher plane of glory and goodness. Those things may be perfectly true of Him, but it's not what is actually meant by holy in the Bible. Three great mischiefs are done when we swap *awesomeness* for *holiness* in theology:

1. It elevates people and things into positions they do not deserve, until being awesome is just being cool.

The truth is that a golden box, a nation, a piece of land, or Mary, Jesus' mother... each has as much intrinsic value as any other of the same. If someone in my home cleaned out the basin with my toothbrush they wouldn't be disrespecting my toothbrush—they'd be disrespecting *me*, the one who chose that toothbrush out of all the others in the store as holy to me. It would be the same if they let my toothbrush sleep in my bed when I was away, or asked it if it wanted a cup of coffee. Holy things have a practical purpose, and a rational reason for their holiness, and neither of those things are intrinsic to the holy object. I may be awesome and omnipotent; that has nothing to

do with the sacredness of my toothbrush (in my case I'm neither awesome nor omnipotent). It's the same with what God sanctifies—it makes them no more awesome than they were before.

Of course this has a lot to say about how we practice and view liturgy and tradition, but we'll get to that later.

2. If holiness is some built-in, intrinsic attribute of God—like awesomeness, immutability, or sinlessness, then how are we to possibly attain it? (And God says I *am* to attain it). 1 John 1:8, quite rightly, does not allow me to define myself as sinless as it says:

"If we claim to be without sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." (ESV) What Reformed theologians tend to do with this paradox is to describe at least two different kinds of holiness. They describe a *definitive* kind of holiness that believers receive through justification; and a *practical* kind of holiness which is more like the ongoing process of sanctification. This is a bit of a clumsy way to handle a concept as clear as holiness. A far better approach is to regard holiness not as *sinlessness*, but as *purpose*—which is much closer to the origins of the concept (my toothbrush is not holy because it's a perfect toothbrush, but because it is singularly devoted to the cleaning of my teeth). We will see why in this book.

Speaking of perfection, what then do we do with texts like Matthew 5:48 “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (ESV)? The word translated here as “perfect” is *teleios* in Greek. It’s a well used adjective found in: Matt 19:21; 1 Cor. 2:6; Phil. 3:15; Col. 1:28; 4:12; James 1:4; 3:2; and Ephe 4:13. The word also does not describe a moral perfection akin to sinlessness, but rather it refers to maturity, completeness, or a state of being fully developed.

3. Substituting God’s awesomeness for His holiness also immunizes us from the shock we were intended to receive when God called Himself holy. We tend to gloss over the words as we read them. “Of course God is Holy, what else would He be?” I think we are intended to stop right there and ask what God could possibly be subject toward? The fully objective One, the Great I AM, the One to whom all is subject, the one who separates the holy from the common. It’s a shocking statement, and it’s intended to be so. It’s a ‘how can this be?’ moment in Scripture.

Of course this does not mean that God is not perfect, powerful, intriguing, awesome, or even remotely safe; but His holiness is something very different from His capacity.

Maybe God's holiness means that He is altogether perfect and omnipotent simply because He is subject to Himself. Many argue along these lines. "For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself," says Hebrews 6:13 ESV.

This tells us that although power corrupts, absolute power is incorruptible—but that's not a very compelling reason for me to recognize my own subjection toward Him.

Since there's no way for me to ever be God or anything even slightly resembling the way God is God—all-knowing and all-powerful—what then could He mean when He says, "be holy as I am holy"? What kind of instruction would incorporate an impossibility? There must be something beyond His perfect personality, character, or metaphysical traits—something He has a purpose for, something I could emulate. So we get back to the question: If God's holy, what's He holy toward? What's His purpose?

Let's find out.

Chapter 1 - In the Law - God Has a Name and a Purpose

The first five books of the Bible contain a lot of narrative even though they are collectively understood as The Law (Torah). The main theme of this narrative is undoubtedly holiness.

Before we knew any better, everything was holy. There simply was no need for the distinction between what is holy and what is not. But tragically as we gained the knowledge of the concept of holy versus common (the tree of knowledge of good and evil), so we became unable to distinguish between the two.

It seems that holiness has a fundamental limit of perception, just like atomic particles. The more you know about one aspect, the less you know about the other! In physics this is called “Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle”; in holiness it’s called *sin*. You can know that there is a difference between good and evil, but to know specifically that *this* thing is good and *that* thing is bad requires an act of divine intervention and a body of unusual obedience. “Sin” means in the Bible “to miss the mark” and you have to know what the mark is! That second kind of knowing—what specifically is good or bad—trips us up every time, because we think we can figure it out ourselves.

Very early on in the human story the fulfillment of the human desire for knowledge at the expense of relationship put us in a very vulnerable, mortally weakened state. Suddenly we knew that some things were holy, and by inference others were not; but as soon as we knew this we also knew that we were utterly ignorant as to which was which.

It is a state of nakedness infinitely more severe and shameful than the physical nakedness it is represented by in the narrative. Cain killed Abel out of jealousy, but which was worse, the murder or the jealousy? What about the lie he told, “I don’t know where my brother is”? Where did Cain’s trouble start? It didn’t start with the murder, the lie or the jealousy. Something else much deeper and harder to pinpoint turned Cain away from God: “But for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. The LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?’” (Genesis 4:5–6 ESV).

I’ve heard people say that it was Cain’s grain offering that God did not like. God is not a vegan, apparently! He preferred Abel’s offering of meat! Others have said that Abel was accepted because he brought the firstborn of his flock, but Cain did not bring the first of the harvest he gathered. I doubt that Cain’s original issue was as external as that, none of our original issues are. They are hidden, deep inside our

innermost parts, our motives and thoughts, our intents and driving forces; parts that are just out of reach of our consciences. It is these parts of ourselves that we don't know how to reach, but thanks to a knowledge of holiness we know they are there, and we know they need to be directed. We just don't know what to do next.

Cain's story hints at the truth that holiness isn't simply sinlessness, despite how many sermons have relegated the word to that simple definition. John puts the simple definition of holiness as sinlessness into a chokehold: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8 ESV). That's not just a paradox—it's a fatal blow to the definition. God calls us to holiness, as He is holy, but we still have sin. If I'm holy but can't claim I'm sinless, then holiness can't mean sinlessness, surely?

So what is it? Holiness is purpose—divine purpose. This is shown again and again in the Bible. Objects that were defined as 'holy' in the temple were set apart for specific *purpose*. It makes no sense to simply be "set apart" because, again, we have to ask: set apart *from* what and *for* what? The items in the temple in the Old Testament weren't just there for aesthetics, although even that would give them a purpose.

Once we grab hold of this Biblical definition of holiness, the pieces fall into place: Abraham, Jacob, David, the twelve disciples, all holy, none sinless. This is the claim that Scripture makes of these heroes of the

faith. The Church is called a “holy people” (1 Peter 2:9) and ‘chosen’. The same for Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6). But is the Church sinless? Was Israel sinless? The answer is obvious.

The Law was not given to fix us, but to show us the depth of the tangle of sin, pointing us to a *purpose* bigger than our own: Holiness!

At some point we know that the things we’re doing are no longer right, but usually where the crossover from *right* to *not right* happened we just don’t know. And the less holy we allow ourselves to be, the more foggy the origins of wrongdoing become, until we eventually call what is bad, good, and what is holy, unholy.

The rest of the Law story, Genesis to Deuteronomy, lays out God’s attempt to repair and remind humankind about the qualities of holiness and to keep them from errors. But as we reach the end of Deuteronomy we are left with the distinct feeling that although this Law is a very good start, it does not go nearly deep enough. It even provides for our failure to keep it, but in a very temporary way. Alan Perlis, the famous computer scientist, stated the problem very well: “In programming, everything we do is a special case of something more general—and often we know it too quickly.” And Augustine posed the problem magnificently in his *Confessions*: “Happiness is something mankind has forgotten so completely that they do not even remember

having forgotten it. If they desire happiness so much, where did they learn what it was? ...in some sense they have knowledge of it.”

Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961 ISBN-13: 978-0140441147), book X, chap. 2, 210.

Holiness is something we have known too soon, and the happiness we had before knowing it is something we’ve forgotten so completely we don’t even remember having forgotten it.

Happily this is the lowest point in the story of God’s holiness, at least from our point of view. Even from the start there is good news.

The two trees

There were two trees of acquisition in the Genesis garden metaphor: both represent the potential of gaining something mankind did not have out of the box, like human accessories.

The first was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This was for acquiring the knowledge of the general concept of holiness, and its special cases of nakedness (shame) and evil; and we partook of it too quickly, just like we have done with everything since.

The other was The Tree of Life, which mankind has yet to partake of. We were banished from the garden before we could: “Then the LORD

God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever..’ (Genesis 3:22 ESV). The sense we get here is not one of punishment, but of protection; punishment had already been meted out.

Imagine getting older and older, sicker and sicker, as a result of the mortality brought on by the knowledge of holiness—and imagine that state lasting forever, always approaching death, but never achieving it. That is the horrific cocktail we would have drunk had God not intervened with a protective banishment. It would have been an infinity loop of perpetual disaster.

The banishment from the garden was a protection, and at the end of Genesis 3 we are left with the palatable expectation that the banishment, and its curse, are not eternal.

It’s very much like the description of Sleeping Beauty’s frozen kingdom, ensconced in sleep and thorn bushes, with the drop of blood slowly drying on the needle; but chock-full of potential, waiting for a brave and worthy rescuer. The Tree of Life is without a doubt the quintessential and original “happily ever after”—the happiness we have forgotten.

I have told many stories to children and adults, many of them have ended with, “... and they lived happily ever after. The End.” I have never had someone correct me with the truth that eventually everyone in the story would have to get old and die. Even the most cynical of adults don’t pose this as a serious argument against the value of the story—even when the story is a particularly poor one that I made up myself!

Why not? Because we all have this undeniable hope that one day death will end, and the terrible torture of knowing that we ought to be different but unsure of *how* we ought to be different will also come to an end.

Our virgin concept of holiness is not just some arbitrary quirky requirement of God, nor is it some messed-up version of humanity, like a human edition of Windows Vista. It is a matter of fact to be consummated into a real relational fullness. Just as deep as the problem is, so deep is its remedy, and the end result of holiness far supersedes the awkward, confusing and often painful adolescence of human life on planet Earth.

Our knowledge is not too much, we are not a lonely over-evolved collective intelligence; our knowledge is actually too little, we only know in part. To know fully is the same thing as to be fully known, and that is the “happily ever after” that every human heart instinctively

desires. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12 ESV.)

If we did a very quick skip to the end of the book, we see *The Revelation* ending the story as we have always hoped. The Tree of Life forms a multi-thousand-year parenthesis describing the human condition and its ultimate resolution:

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God...

through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations...

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.” (Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14 ESV.)

So we have a diagnosis of the sort we can grasp, what about a remedy? How did God go about the rescue mission?

Relationship with the Almighty

The primary trade we made for knowing holiness as a concept was

relationship with God. The rest of Genesis is about how God re-established that relationship, even though it was only a tiny fragment of what it was before. The Law is more like a wheelchair for a paraplegic after an accident than it is a complete restoration. It does the bare minimum, which is also the maximum possible under the circumstances.

We see various individuals in the Biblical narrative set apart from all the others as relational representatives: Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and his descendants. We also see objects and places also set apart and so the specifics of holiness begin to take shape around the rather disturbing concept of holiness we were left with after Adam and Eve.

Joan Osborne's popular single, *One of Us* released in 1995 asked some pretty fundamental and very interesting questions about holiness. One of them was this: "if God had a name, would you call it to his face?" It's a good question even though it has been asked and answered already. This question was first asked in one of the moments when God was instructing Moses on the specifics of how holiness was to work out in his life.

In a story strangely similar to Adam and Eve's encounter with the fruit of the knowledge of holiness, Moses was out tending sheep when he saw something curious. By the time his curiosity was satisfied he was

unable to exit the situation, and was receiving a download of relational information and instruction that he was barely able to contain. His shoes were off as he trembled before a powerful God who was expecting holy behavior on holy ground. In the midst of the discourse Moses asks a great question: “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”

God then says to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:13–14 ESV.)

So God has a name, who would have thought? We have always known God to have a title, but it’s a fair shock to realize He has a name. It reminds me of when I first realized that my elementary school Principal had a name. Someone whispered it in hushed tones during break time. It was such a stretch for me to think of this absolute authority being addressed in the first person by a peer or sibling! I don’t think that I AM is the proper noun for God, the name that God’s brother would call Him by, but then I would be very surprised to learn that God had a brother or any peer who could call Him by a proper name!

There it is, God’s name. It’s the name from which we get the words *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*. Over the years many people have come to believe

that the name is so holy that the likes of you and I should not even use it, which seems rather unnecessary to me. Why would God give it to us if He never intended us to use it? In fact, unlike the Tree of Knowledge, it was given together with instruction for its use.

I have a father whom I call Dad. Only his children and their spouses call him Dad. Only his peers call him Peter. Everyone else calls him Mr Jones. I AM is the “father” name of God, and God is His “Mr Jones” title.

The name itself, I AM, also denotes the utter objectivity of the one who holds it. By definition, time and creation are both subject to Him. The name gives us no clue toward God’s holiness. In fact it seems to contradict it. It is only when Moses gets the people out of Egypt and to Mt. Sinai (where God gives His written law which is punctuated with clear distinctions between holy and unholy things, practices, places, animals, foods, and people) that He also declares, for the first time, that He, the I AM, is holy.

At that time His intentions with Israel are also revealed. He chose this nation, not to just stand apart from other nations, but to represent them—to be a priest nation toward God and all the earth. “And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:6 ESV.) That is, one set apart with a specific purpose.

It was never God's intention to have a tribe of priests inside Israel, rather He wanted a priest nation on the earth.

So we come to the end of the Law the same way a baby comes to the end of its birth, having traded a vital connection for a set of startling knowledge points and a very frightening experience.

At the end of the Law, God is being reconnected with His creation, albeit very tentatively. The whole initiative was initiated by God through reiterated instruction on holiness and relational revelation. The human awakening toward the knowledge of holiness was a premature birth that exposed us to the realities of life; its powers, passions and poisons; with underdeveloped capacities and immune systems. The law acts as the incubator for the collective human spirit.

We now have a well-formed sketch of what it means to be holy, and to practice holiness, and we have instruction to do those things. We also know that God has a name that denotes His utter objectivity, and that He has a subjective purpose (because all purpose is subjective by definition; all holy things are set aside for a specific purpose) and God Himself is holy.

As Churchill said in November 1942, three years before the end of the war: "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

Chapter 2 - In the Psalms - The Surprising Purpose of God

The Psalms show us God's purpose in some very surprising ways, and I got a taste of this some years ago.

I was in Pretoria, South Africa, listening to a sermon by Dr. R.T. Kendall. In the sermon, he asked a question which in some ways was the beginning of the formation of this book in my mind. At face value the question seems rhetorical, but it's really not.

"If He had to make a choice between the two," asked Dr. Kendall, "Would God choose to honor His Name? Or His Word?"

The dilemma caused by our willful trade of relationship for knowledge was our own making. It was not God's dilemma. He would be well within His rights to annihilate, punish, or simply start over as soon as we put ourselves in the dilemma. He would have been well within His rights to let us partake of the fruit of the Tree of Life also, to allow us to live forever on the eternal road to death, but never actually getting there.

It is really worth a moment's reflection to consider that last possibility which God prevented by banishing us from the garden. I really cannot think of a story plot as horrific as that. Gratefully, instead of all the other legitimate responses before Him, God chose to face the dilemma square on; a choice that would initiate some difficult paradoxes for Him. Such is the love of God.

Why?

Before we ask why He chose this route, there are two things we really ought to consider.

First is a massive sigh of relief, an overwhelming gratitude toward God for interfering in the natural consequence of our own selfishness. The moment we realize just how precarious our position is, we find that God is already there! Thank God!

I ran a business called Access in South Africa. However, banks in South Africa also offer a mortgage account commonly known as an "access bond". Through the years we had a few people pay money into our business account by direct transfer thinking they were paying their access bond mortgage accounts. In one instance, after finding out the payee's details from our bank, my wife called the payee to tell them they had put about \$4,000 into our account by accident.

Initially the man on the other end of the call was skeptical imagining some scam and he tried to cut the conversation short. But his tone quickly changed from skeptic to desperate once he did some internal research and realized that Meg was absolutely right. He also realized that she was not only the messenger but also the redeemer!

It's like this for us with God. We have a deep-seated suspicion that something is not as it should be but we carry on with an 'oh, well' attitude—until we are faced with the reality that our outward bent toward irrational anti-social behavior is not just an evolutionary quirk that can be fixed with politics, pills and psychology. Rather, it is a dreadful disease that we could do nothing about without God's intervention.

The second consideration is just how much it cost God to face our dilemma. It meant exactly answering R.T. Kendall's excellent question. We could pose it this way:

"I AM, what will you do now? Your creation has rebelled, they have chosen to know with their minds at the expense of knowing with their hearts, and now they have less than half of one and none of the other. Your justice demands that this wrong be put right."

It's not as if God's perfect reputation was ever in jeopardy, that somehow our actions had reflected poorly on Him. That could not be any more true than the moon could diminish the radiation from the sun by reflecting badly.

I AM responds, well within His rights but outside of all expectation: "Come now, let us reason together: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool." (Isaiah 1:18 ESV.)

"But how, I AM? How are you going to do this?"

The answer comes in action, not just words. Mankind faced certain death—God determined to face that death Himself, to take the place of mankind.

What would this action cost God? There is a sense in which He would learn of its cost at the point of paying it. "In your majesty ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness; let your right hand teach you awesome deeds!" (Psalm 45:4 ESV.)

"Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered." (Hebrews 5:8 ESV.) And the point of paying it was right at the beginning: "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you"

(1 Peter 1:20 ESV.) It cost God Himself to place His Word above all His Name.

I find it helpful to think about this like corrupt software. Most coders will either delete or reformat the hard drive; it's only software after all. But not God, because God is holy. He became code in order to fix the corruption. As it would cost a coder himself to become code, so it cost God Himself to become man.

It is only the infinite account that can pay the ultimate price and remain undiminished.

The plan all along was that God Himself would carry the cost of our presumption, He would face the brunt of our preconception. And in so doing He would receive the glory that He deserves. It would be the most costly undertaking, one only He could possibly afford.

The purpose of God

So then, have we discovered the purpose of God? Is the purpose of God to bring to Himself all glory, praise and adoration? Yes, in a sense we have, but it's not quite as straightforward as that.

Thomas Browne, the 17th century author once said, "I am not so much afraid of death, as ashamed thereof; 'tis the very disgrace and

ignominy of our natures, that in a moment can so disfigure us that our nearest friends, wife, and children stand afraid and start at us.”

How would the God who deserves all this glory, whose purpose it is to receive it, actually receive it if he has to face this great embarrassment in order to receive it? How does God remain strong if He has to display ultimate weakness in death?

It’s very much like the age old paradox. What would happen when an unstoppable force (God) met an immovable object (death)? God would abandon His glory to face His death in order to achieve a rescue.

The only way to do that would be to answer Dr. Kendall’s question with this: *“I will worship toward Thy holy temple, and praise Thy name for Thy lovingkindness and for Thy truth: for Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name.”* (Psalm 138:2 KJV.)

“Thou hast magnified Thy Word above all Thy Name.” Only the King James translates it this way, but clearly this is what is meant. Above all the greatness of His Name, God places His Word.

If it ever came down to it (and boy did it ever come down to it?) God would lift His Word above all of His Name. In other words, God is

subject to His Word. His Glory, His Honor and His position waits on His Word and His overriding objective is to fulfill His Word at any cost.

God is holy toward His Word.

No wonder that the author of Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, is so fixated on God's Word. Psalm 119 is a kind of alphabet poem where the author writes eight things beginning with the first letter of the alphabet; then he writes another eight things beginning with the second letter of the alphabet, and so on.

Now there is not normally any tension between God's Name and His Word. God's Word is almost always perfectly aligned with the honor due His Name. Except in this one instance, this rebel race of humans misaligned themselves from their relative purpose, and so found themselves on a one-way ticket to eternal horror.

But God said, "... let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."

(Genesis 1:26 ESV.) That was His Word and it would be fulfilled.

Mankind would not be left in the pre-knowledge ignorant state; nor in the post-knowledge, sinful state; but brought safely through both of those dangers to an eternal relational state. And God continued to speak, prophecy after prophecy of the coming savior, from Genesis to

Malachi: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15 ESV.)

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” (Isaiah 7:14 ESV.)

“The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12 ESV.)

Those were His Words and they will be fulfilled come hell or high water. Because God is holy toward His Word, He never says what He does not intend to complete—and before He speaks He has already visited every eventuality, and he has already paid every cost.

In this way the full measure of the Glory of God will ultimately be delivered to Him, and the humility that His Name endured only serves to make Him more worthy of the honor, instead of making Him weak. His weakness strengthens His strength. God is employed by His Word, and He never, ever misspeaks. Unlike our multi-purpose mouths, God’s mouth is holy. It is reserved for speaking, and speaking the truth only.

Now the Word of God must be understood not just as something God stands by—not just a reflection of His character. The Word of God is God’s character, the Word of God is Himself. His Word is so much Himself that He is a second person of God.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” (John 1:14 ESV.)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:1–5 ESV.)

The relationship between God and God’s Word is, in the same way, also God. This relationship is so much God that He is a third person of God, the Holy Spirit of God.

“For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:11 ESV.)

So the purpose of God is to fulfill His Word, and as John tells us, this Word became human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And the

purpose of Jesus was always to take the death punishment for all mankind, and so set mankind free to partake eventually of the fruit of the Tree of Life to live in the image of God, as He was originally intended to do.

This picture is made all the more significant when one realizes that living in the full image of God while fully knowing both good and evil is infinitely more sublime than never having known that there was evil in the first place.

I have heard it said that the true measure of the character of a man is what he does for those who can do nothing for him. I think this statement is utterly false, it is born from the misguided notion that God is motivated by pure kindness, and so ought we to be. It's the idea that being made in God's likeness will result in increasing capacity to do good things to people less fortunate than ourselves, and that if our motives remain purely directed at others this way with no thought for ourselves, our own joy, then He will give us increased capacity to continue our selfless activity. Well, the end result of that line of thinking is selflessness, the Buddhist ideal, not Christ who despised the shame of the cross "... for the joy that was set before him..." (Hebrews 12:2 ESV.) Interestingly, He did this not for the joy set before *us* but before Him, although our joy in Him was also His joy!

God is not motivated by kindness or fairness or any other kind of *sentiment*. He is far more than mere sentiment. He is much too Holy for that. He is subject to His Word, which can sometimes be very unkind, very unequal and unfair. I don't mean that He is motivated by unkindness. His Word can be unkind the way a firefighter can be unkind while issuing instructions on how to safely exit the building you are in that is being consumed by raging flames.

It is the soft sentiment of children that demands kindness, equality, and fairness as if any of those things have ever been a real part of life or desperate times. The differences in definition are extremely subtle. A motivation to treat people who can do nothing for you may so very easily be a mask, an attempt to bribe your conscience to keep quiet about all the times you have stepped on people below you, or lied to get something that you want, or sacrificed someone else's future for your present; someone you claim to love, perhaps. The foggiest sets in as we become blind to the fact that those we are treating with kindness "that can do nothing for us" are in fact doing something very significant for us—they are kidnapping our self-abused consciences and holding them to ransom.

No, the true measure of a man's character is the same as the true measure of any being's character; how he treats those who can do something for him.

The world around and within us has always been groping around trying desperately to find a purpose. We look to relationships, fame, wealth, generosity, and any number of good and bad things. But until we look through ourselves and stare at the Word of God, and let it stare right back into the dark reaches of our souls, we will not find our own purpose.

The knowledge of good and evil is a futile attempt to control the light so that by it we can know everything and yet remain in the darkness; to know while remaining unknown. It is the ultimate form of dysfunction. We have been self-hacked and instead of setting us free into objectivity we have just become unholy. The Word of God calls it sin.

But there is a way out of that darkness and back into holy living, fulfilling our purpose, just like Jesus did.

Chapter 3 - In The Revelation - Holiness and Worthiness

The final apocalypse of the Bible, The Revelation, was written by the apostle John, brother of James and son of Zebedee. It was written on a Greek island where John was exiled, away from the churches in the cities of Turkey to whom he was an apostle.

The Revelation was not written to tell us about the final calamities of the world in grand dramatic allegory. It may or it may not do that, but that is not its purpose.

We know this because it is an *apocalypse* which, contrary to popular cultural references, does not mean ‘a world-altering calamity’. It is, in fact, far more serious than that! An apocalypse is a prophetic revealing, usually of events but not in this case. It’s like a magnificently wrapped gift. Unlike Daniel’s and other revelations in the Bible, John’s revelation is a personal one. It’s a revelation of a person. John states it plainly in the very first verse of the book:

“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place...” (Revelation 1:1 ESV)

The book is about Jesus the Christ, revealed as we have not yet seen Him. It's not about things happening, it is about a *person* happening. John tells us in the first three words: "*Apokalupsis Iesous Christos*".

While it's true that John does say that the revelation includes "the things that must soon take place," this does not indicate that this is principally what the book is about. It's a lot clearer if you think about this introduction as, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants whatever is necessary about His future interactions with planet Earth."

The letter begins with the Christ. Every verse is written with a Christ context and it ends with Him also. It bears repeating, the book is not about events, it's about Jesus. Where it includes events they have to do with a further revelation of The Christ.

Up until chapter four of Christ's Revelation, John has been dictating what he has seen and heard while on the island. In the fourth chapter, John is invited or instructed to leave the island, the exile, the churches, and earth itself.

"Look!" he seems to yell at the reader, "A door open to heaven! And a voice telling me to go through it so that I can see the future." It's tremendously exciting and it's easy to think that John is about to get a

definitive almanac of the future, but he's reminded that he will be shown "*hos dei*", what is necessary for everyone to know—nothing more, nothing less.

I'm laboring this point because we're inclined to get a little giddy at the thought of knowing the secrets of the future. John is not Marty McFly, God is not Doc Brown.

The Revelation of The Christ gives us very few, if any, particulars except when they have to do with the person of Jesus Christ. The book is intentionally vague about event specifics. World events form a blurry background because the book is focused fixedly on Jesus. To try and peer past Him and into the specifics; to try and 'Photoshop' the background into focus is to miss the whole point of the book. It is very similar to the sin which got us into trouble in the first place.

It is, of course, entirely possible to do exactly that—ignore the subject of the book and find its meaning only in the deliberately vague elements, like drug addicts selling the square meals they so desperately need for the fix that will kill them. And a great many have fawned over the black velvet of The Revelation, and completely missed the flawless diamond lying on top of it. But we're not going to do that here.

We'll start with summarizing the fourth and fifth chapters of Revelation by focusing on the foreground element: Jesus the Christ, The Word of God; just like The Holy God does.

A summary of the real action

After going through the door into heaven, John finds himself in the Throne room of God, just like Isaiah had done 600 years before—and he is presented with a very similar scene. No one is waiting for him to arrive. Events are proceeding with or without him. He sees God's throne and God on His throne, splendidly adorned. He also sees some significant humans, 24 of them; and John, the one to whom this revelation is being given, is not one of them. Their full attention is given to God.

The throne is active, like a wild electric storm, and there are seven spirits of God around the throne in the form of burning torches.

Lastly, there are four significant angelic beings with eyes and wings. It must have been an extremely frightening experience for John. We have the advantage of thinking about it fairly objectively.

John was shown a closed circuit of activity in Heaven. No one in that room was relying on any form of faith. There was nothing to believe; they were responding to the immediate actions of God and the activity that came from the throne. The angels never stopped saying: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Revelation 4:8 ESV.)

The angels have always been saying that and they always will, because it has always been true. And whenever they do, which is always (and, just in case you missed it, John reminds us that they are engaged in the worship of, “Him who lives forever and ever”) the 24 significant humans get off their little thrones and take off their little crowns, and they bow down saying: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” (Revelation 4:11 ESV.)

It’s hard to imagine how they would ever have actually sat on their thrones, or ever actually worn their crowns. How could they when they are constantly removing themselves from their appointments in the presence of this God?

It doesn’t matter who the significant humans are or if they represent anyone at all. It’s safe to say they are the 24 best we’ve ever produced; by heaven’s standard, not ours. They are part of the intentionally vague, albeit impressive, background.

There are two terms of worship used: ‘holy’, by the angels, and ‘worthy’ by the humans. ‘Holy’, as we know, is a state of singular subjectivity. And it becomes clear, now that we know that, why the angels use it and what all the thunderous activity is about the throne. God has always been uttering; sometimes loud and creative, at other times terrifying

and destructive, sometimes in a quiet whisper. The total of God's utterances form a perfect balance of attitudes, or spirits represented by the symbolic number seven; His Word as flaming torches. And everything He says The Holy God makes Himself subject to.

Darius, the Persian king in Babylon at the time of Daniel, was the first recorded ruler of men to ever hold himself to his own word when he was tricked by his governors to invoke an option available to him at the time when democracy was nursing at the breast: "Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked." (Daniel 6:8 ESV.)

Even the king who made the law by this option was unable to change it and was subject to it. It gave the law extra weight, extra meaning, and extra care was used in preparing it. This king, like God, had made himself holy toward his own word. This is at its core exactly what it means to be holy, and God has always been holy. Such accountability is probably the single redeeming quality in a democracy. But it was always in the mind of the holy God. As I have said, power may corrupt us, but ultimate power is incorruptible.

'Worthy' is an altogether different term. It is much more like what we'd expect to be saying to an all powerful being. But when we examine

what the 24 elders are actually saying it's really quite conditional and small. It does not feel nearly weighty enough, it doesn't gush half as much as I would expect to gush if I was in that situation and managed somehow to get some words out.

God, who is also Master, is worthy to exist (taken literally), and to receive or to take glory, and honor and power. Presumably He would have to take these things from Himself, since there is no way that this small party of men and angels, as magnificent as they are, could provide all the glory, honor or power that God deserves. But they don't even use the pronoun "all", as in *all* power, *all* glory and *all* honor.

It's not as if anything is out of place in their words. A little human like me would surely have been consumed long before reaching the outer circle of this scene, but one gets the feeling that the activities of God must surely have evoked more of a response out of His creation. But this scene is intentionally lacking, not on the side of God, but in the reasonable reaction of His creation. The scene is presented as an infinity loop of worship, but it feels more like a smoldering volcano building to an eruption. There is something out of balance. I get the impression that the lightning bolts from the throne are more a result of a disproportion of praise given to the one praised. The stage is too small for the lead! This scene cannot continue indefinitely, something has to give, but it won't be the Worthy God... surely not; could it be

The Holy God, the subjective God? The tsunami of potential energy being held back in the throne will surely destroy everything in its path—men, angels, galaxies, species, the whole lot. I am left feeling very uneasy about the situation we're left with at the end of chapter four.

Chapter five opens up with a crack in a fissure of this volcano. God has in his right hand (his instrument of action, power, and protection) a double sided scroll. The scroll is sealed and it's time to open the seals. But alas, despite a very thorough search, a search way beyond the throne room, no one was found worthy to open the scroll.

As if to highlight the tension from the scene in the previous chapter, we have this grand travesty: not one in all of creation is worthy to consummate with God. God Himself is worthy to receive glory, honor and praise. Why then is He not also worthy to open the scroll? How can this be? If the creator God is not worthy to open the scroll, who could be?

His holiness demands that it be opened, read and fulfilled. But why is God Himself not worthy to open it? And why is there no one in all His vast creation who is worthy to open it?

Kate Ludeman and Eddie Erlandson's book, *The Alpha Male Syndrome* describes a condition that is all too familiar to people working alongside alpha type personalities, especially men. The premise is that the alpha type is constantly, and subconsciously, starring as two parts in their own drama. They are both victim and hero. Those starring as the villains in their minds are usually the ones closest to them, and are usually trying their very best to help them, but the roles of victim and hero (and director and producer) are already taken by the larger-than-life alpha type personality; those around him must take what they can get.

The plot in their mind is a continual repeat of the same theme: Just when all seems lost, alphas, playing the victim role, tend to switch roles and become their own hero rescuers; sometimes pulling an all-nighter, sometimes pulling rank, but always taking initiative to save themselves from the villains around them. Consequently, they also feel justified in taking the credit.

This explains why so many powerful people's relationships are horribly dysfunctional while they, themselves, remain both decisive and productive.

But not so with God. He may be the Alpha from whom we get the term, but He's not struggling with a syndrome in this throne room

scene. In fact it is a complete inverse. God's holiness makes the legitimate hero become the ultimate victim. The tension builds while a search is made. None is found, but the scroll must be opened—the holiness of God demands action.

John is caught in a wave of deep sadness at the dilemma and its obvious consequences. So much so that he weeps inconsolably. It is John's weeping which moves him from observer to participant in the scene. There is a lesson here for us. Worship and prayer include deep concern for the things which concern God. Don't patronize God; if you want to impress Him let the things that concern Him concern you also. This is remarkably similar to Isaiah's experience when He was called into the throne room of God. He too was presented with a closed conversation in the throne room which resulted in a timeless dilemma. He too responds with an emotional outburst, a heart after God's: "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.'" (Isaiah 6:8 ESV.)

And both of these men were given a role in the scene they were presented with by the way they responded to the affairs of the Kingdom of Holiness—God's willingness to suspend judgement till a solution be found. Like the boy who shared his lunch of loaves and fish and in so doing fed thousands with them, Isaiah and John open what

they have with them: Their hearts, their human empathy. They are indignant, seeing creation as it is from the vantage point of heaven—His creation so corrupted that none is found worthy to stand before the Creator, pleading mercy yet upholding justice.

God uses their knowledge of Good and Evil (John's, and Isaiah's before him), set in the vantage point of heaven, as a down payment toward the solution of the dilemma.

Why didn't God just open the scroll? He was just declared worthy of glory, and honor, and power; why was He not then worthy to open the scroll? Well of course He was worthy to open the scroll, to look inside. But He knew that doing so would be the end of pretty much everything else. It is the very thing that makes John so sad.

The missing component in this scene, conspicuous by its absence, is simply all of God's creation (besides two dozen men and four angels)--what we might term God's Kingdom. The only way to prevent the destruction of all creation by a discharge from the throne was to include the rest of creation in the scene of praise to God on the throne who has power, glory, and wisdom. Since it was humanity (and that which they were given to steward) who excluded themselves by their choices, the scroll had to be opened by a human. But no human, dead or alive, could be found worthy to open the scroll. And God is not a human. He's overqualified for the task He assigned for the scroll.

He could have opened that scroll, discharged all the power of His authority, wiped the hard drive and not lost one iota of His worth. But God, my friends, is holy.

As if to highlight the problem, John is not answered by the angel who first called for a ‘worthy one’ to open the scroll, but by a fellow man, one of the 24 significant humans who finally sees and describes to John one who is worthy.

He’s a man, from David’s line, from Judah, Jacob’s son. This man is prophetically well qualified, a Lion of men. But he’s also a sacrificed lamb, not even full grown yet. And He’s already dead. And He is also positioned right there, on the throne. He’s not one of those giving worship—he’s receiving it with God!

The rich symbolism is very specific and intended to point toward the subject of the book, the revelation of the Christ as all man and all God; as slain yet risen; as human yet sinless. Not only worthy to open the scroll, He *is* the scroll, the very Word of God. Do you see how sharply the focus forms on Christ? Do you see how the rest of the details of the story serve only as backdrop context for Him?

From the moment that Jesus ‘takes the scroll’ the scene is radically transformed. The walls of heaven fall away as the men sing His praise

and declare his worthiness to open the scroll, for Christ is a man. The second century Roman playwright Terentius put it well: “I am a human being, I consider nothing that is human alien to me.”

They bring with them countless thousands of angels who declare His worthiness to receive power, and wealth, and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing, for Christ is also God. The angels and the men and The Christ bring with them, by default, every man and woman, every creature ever made, every sub-atomic particle, force and rule of physics; as all things fully and rightly declare praise; and finally, the tension is resolved by the work of this Worthy Christ who unblocked the flow of worship fitting the Holy and Worthy God. The discharge of heaven’s throne is fully absorbed by the response of the creation toward the One on the throne. It is a grand and inevitable climax that God has dedicated Himself to achieve, and it involves every one of us, even though it will not benefit every one of us.

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,” (Colossians 1:19 ESV) and yet, “...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped.” (Philippians 2:6 ESV)

God is holy. If he were not He would have started over without us who blocked the flow of the praise He deserves, but instead He suspended judgment, allowing the tension in heaven, “because in his forbearance

he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time,” (Romans 3:25–26 NIV.)

It is the holiness of God which comes closest to answering Einstein’s greatest question: “Did God have a choice in the creation of the Universe?” Yes, He did. But once He had spoken it, He no longer did. He bound Himself, fully committed and subject to finishing the project He had started, even though it meant placing His Word above all His name.

It is only a Holy God who can put His Word above His Name, the Lion in sheep’s clothing. And it is only the Word of God who is worthy to unravel the future. The Holy begets the Worthy exactly as the Father begets the Son.

Chapter 4 - Is God on Your Side? - Joshua and the Angel

So does that mean that our plight motivated all of Heaven, holding it in a temporal equilibrium?

Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10 ESV), but He was not motivated by our plight. Our plight is no motivation for heaven. It’s very easy to misplace subjectivity—who or what God is being subject to, and why. God is holy, but He is not holy toward *me*.

Jesus is not a tragic hero subject to the circumstances He finds Himself in—circumstances that the likes of you and I created. He is not a cosmic Hamlet lamenting: “(T)he time is out of joint. O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right.” (*Hamlet* - Act I, Scene 5.)

The humility of the Christ, His attitude as servant and sacrifice, is motivated by the holiness of God, and God is holy to one thing only—His Word.

The side of the Word

As I said, it’s an easy mistake to confuse this. Jesus’ disciples had walked and talked with Him, debated His legitimacy, witnessed some

personal and happy miracles, and put what they knew of their faith in Him. They had become familiar with the Word of God but in a typical human way; the way a child gets familiar with his teddy bear or his dad's bank account. It was only when He revealed His power over the elements that their response became legitimate. On a little boat in a storm that threatened to drown them all they were afraid; but after Jesus quiets the storm, "and the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, 'Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'" (Mark 4:39–41 ESV.)

It is right for circumstances to make us afraid on occasion, because life can be dangerous and God has equipped us with adrenal glands and responses to help us cope with these circumstances, and we all know that there is some circumstance somewhere in our future that will actually overcome us.

But if circumstances make us afraid, God must surely make us terrified! It's not good enough just to be aware of our desperate need of salvation, we must also become aware of the terrible power that God wields: power to open the scroll and wipe us all away.

We are not saved merely by God's presence. Grace may be His default response, but only because it is a direct result of His purpose. If God's default response was not grace but justice, then there would be no hope for us. The winds and the waves of life would be the least of our worries.

“What good would it do me to be able to explain the meaning of Christianity if it had no deeper significance for me and for my life; what good would it do me if truth stood before me, cold and naked, not caring whether I recognized her or not, and producing in me a shudder of fear rather than a trusting devotion?” Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Living Thoughts of Kierkegaard*. Edited by W.H. Auden, Penguin Great Ideas, 2008 ISBN: 9780141041445, p. 53.

No, there is nothing quite like the presence of God or His angels to put things into their proper perspective. The response of Isaiah and John on arriving in heaven are priceless examples. God used their knowledge of good and evil to evoke their response, despite the fact having knowledge of good and evil precluded them from also having a real heavenly perspective.

We must never confuse righteousness with innocence. Adam, before the Fall, may have been in heaven and may have legitimately walked nonchalant into the throne room of God. Since all was 'good' to Him;

without a knowledge of good and evil; how could he have responded the way John and Isaiah did?

“Never invoke the gods unless you really want them to appear,” G.K. Chesterton once wisely advised. “It annoys them very much.”

For all of us after Adam, seeing life from the perspective of heaven, through the eyes of a holy God, can only be achieved by faith. And yet there are moments like John’s and Isaiah’s where the perspective is thrust upon us. Here’s another one:

“When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, ‘Are you for us, or for our adversaries?’ And he said, ‘No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, ‘What does my lord say to his servant?’ And the commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, ‘Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.’ And Joshua did so.” (Joshua 5:13–15 ESV.)

Like all of us Joshua was given a set of impressive abilities, but inadequate for the tasks of his destiny. Like all of us Joshua allowed the

task to loom over him larger than the God he had come to trust. Like for all of us, God did not compare Himself with Joshua's circumstance in an attempt to show Himself bigger. Because God is not for us or for our enemies, God is for His Word, nothing less.

The God who serves

We seem to often imagine that God needs us in some way, like we have to do stuff for God that He can't do for Himself. But there is nothing we can do to serve God: "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28 ESV.)

The Subjective God is a completely different kind of God to our imagination. In the light of tens of thousands of years of religious history, it seems we never quite grasp this. Most every religious system ever devised by god or man has at its basis a trade: praise for prosperity. The gods say, "Praise me, sacrifice to me, and I will give you stuff." They start with Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, but move on to health, children, wealth, rest, and a long happy life. It actually does not end.

In history we find there are a few prerequisites to make a 'god' believable, to make people take them seriously:

1. The god needs to be powerful—more powerful than the neighboring gods, of course, and since there can only be one

winner tribe, there will always be a winning “god”.

2. And this god needs to deliver on its promises.
3. But it also needs to be fairly needy. It must be reliant on human praise, not just sporting with its subjects.
4. This god must prove itself in existence and motivation, preferably in some grandiose way.

And there are a handful of absolute irrelevancies for the common trade religions:

1. Relationship is irrelevant, besides in the occasional interaction as goods are sought or exchanged. This god does not need to live with its people. Temples are more like halfway houses on this god’s galactic golf course—we build them in the hope that he/they/she will at least stay for lunch.
2. Humility is irrelevant. Impressive gods are attracted to impressive people, families, tribes. Do something spectacular, have a spectacular ancestor, embellish the stories if needed because the best marketing attaches the best god clients.
3. Faith is also irrelevant if you are trying to impress a trade out of any god. What we refer to today as “faith” is usually nothing more than bravado.

But dealings with the Subjective God are of a completely different kind: “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever

would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6 ESV.)

He’s not going to come in showing off muscles and creativity. He does not lead with His power over all the elements. In fact if you want to please the Subjective God you don’t get to see Him, and you don’t get any irrefutable evidence to show those around you of His reality (although you will end up with plenty of empirical and relational evidence once you take the first step). You first have to believe that He exists; and if you believe that then you also have to believe that He’s not trying to trick you, or pretending like the Wizard of Oz. You have to believe that He rewards honest seekers, and only honest seekers. This God is more interested in what’s really going on inside your mind—where your real affections lie, what you actually believe. He is not interested in outward show and pretense.

The purpose of His law is to uncover what’s going on inside. What you do on the outside He regards as symptomatic. “If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’” (Romans 7:7 ESV.)

But gods of trade, those that would love to claim total objectivity, regard human action as stock in trade. What we actually think and feel are completely irrelevant to their marketing strategies.

And so God is not on your side, He is holy. But His holiness is a unique miracle, that allows for you, yes you, to be on God's side. It even allows for you to be an important part of God's side. What an unbelievable opportunity. John and Isaiah were both allowed to steer the conversation of heaven, yet by rights they should not have even been there. Abraham was engaged in changing God's mind over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and not only was his progressive set of requests allowed, they were also *heard*. One gets the feeling that if his nerve had held that two cities may have been spared!

Let's look at this conversation and consider how it started:

“The LORD said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has promised him.’” (Genesis 18:17–19 ESV.)

Never mind the laundry list of what this little sinner had done wrong, the Subjective God regards the weight of Abraham's opinion based on what His Word has determined Abraham will become.

Then there is Moses who seems to be able to change the mind of God.

On Mount Sinai God told Moses that He would send the people on with an angel to lead them. But we also see that God would not also go, He had had enough of their disobedience, complaining and fickle ways. Yet Moses is a sincere seeker and knew well enough that it's a fool's errand to collect the mail across your yard without the presence of God, let alone crossing the desert with a million recently freed slaves to conquer a land filled with giants. So he answers God with a request: "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?" (Exodus 33:15–16 ESV.)

And God agrees, pleased because Moses had made himself subjective to the ways of the Subjective God.

Moses continues: "Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people."

(Exodus 33:13 ESV.) He's not even as interested in God's will as he is in God's ways!

And so the Bible's narrative tells us of person after person who found the way to be on God's side: Rahab, Samuel, David, the list goes on and on with people made in the faith model of Abraham until eventually

Paul states the situation plainly: “By grace you have been saved— and [He] raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” (Ephesians 2:5–6 ESV.)

You are not just on God’s side—you are *inside the Word towards which God is subject*. But you are not there by action, you are there only in as much as you follow the example of Christ in sacrifice and in humility. It’s from that position that John, the author of the Revelation tells us:

“This is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.” (1 John 5:14 ESV.)

This is an infinitely better deal than a trade agreement with competing gods and their insecurities and impotence! The work has all been done except the work to believe and remain subject to the ways of the Subjective God.

The light shining in the darkness

In that regard there is one difficulty we come up against fairly often, and we’ll close this chapter with it.

God is interested in our inner life, in what we truly believe. And He uses a kind of light to see and show us what’s going on under the hood of our personal thought engines. The light He uses is His Word. We have already seen in Hebrews how it reveals the thoughts and intents of our hearts:

“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12 ESV.)

Joshua learned God doesn't pick sides—*He* is the side. That's a tough pill, because we're used to wanting to be the top dog. David realized that he is not even competent to know himself, “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!” (Psalm 139:23 ESV.) And Paul stated it with the kind of honesty the Word demands: “For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.” (1 Corinthians 4:4 ESV.)

But we would much rather be wielding this kind of light than being interrogated by it. We would much prefer to remain in darkness with our eyes open wide reading all around us but being read by none.

That is not an option for one wishing to remain on the side of God. If He is subject to His Word, and His Word is an open book, then so must we be. To refuse the light is to refuse Him. The knowledge of good and evil is a two-way street— he who wants to know must also be known. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12 ESV.)

Chapter 5 - People as Placeholders - The Purpose of Opposition

The first four chapters of this book were written as a foundation on which to build some practical application. The last four will focus on the application.

If God has a purpose, then so do I. If I have a purpose, then so does everyone around me, even those who do not acknowledge God. One fundamental reason for forming the nation of Israel and the record of the Old Testament is that God's purpose may be revealed and that you and I can find ours.

We can find our purpose in the light of God's stated purpose.

For many centuries, mankind in animist form had a sort of tribal identity. The concept of 'me' was barely a consideration compared to the tribe's value.

That worldview has been thoroughly eroded in the Western world. Our philosophies, all the way back to Socrates, can be summed up in the word "Selfie." It's hard to overstate how much of an obsession a self can be.

There's a deep connection between Christianity and individualism—in fact, I don't see how we could've escaped the death spiral of mandatory tribal group action without the combined influence of the Judeo-Christian worldview.

Democracy today is a celebration of the individual, but in most “tribal democracies” the term democracy is nothing more than a front for further exploitation of tribal people whose votes are anything but secret. The full weight of their ancestors goes with them into the voting booth, and they better vote right if they know what's good for them.

In the West we have individual human rights—we have what we call “freedom” to be “whatever we want to be” as if the Tree of Knowledge brought us anything but bondage. And we think that if the Holy God is subject to anything, it must be the individual's free choice. We think if I find myself ‘in Christ’ without any rights, then I wouldn't want to be there. So we are inclined to try and find our purpose in life in the context of what we take for granted, what we call ‘human rights,’ even though we will never find freedom there, only a different kind of slavery.

If, instead, we look for our purpose inside a holy God's purpose; if we determine to “be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy,” (Leviticus 19:2 ESV) then we find freedom, purpose, and the kind of

individuality we can only dream of now—The kind of individual happiness we have just begun to remember having forgotten.

“A voice cries: ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God’” (Isaiah 40:3 ESV.) It is the work of The Subjective God who laid this runway for His Word to land on. We call it The Old Testament, or Israel, or the Judeo-Christian Worldview. Without it, we wouldn’t have Western philosophy or science; more importantly, we couldn’t have pulled ourselves out of the tribe into the individual.

We have, naturally, taken that too far, so now our individuality is our god and we think as a tribe of one among billions of others. But God calls us under His purpose to find our own.

You

Think for a moment about yourself. What kind of person are you? What are the things that define you and the things you wish defined you?

What you call ‘yourself’ is a soup of emotions, hormones, selfishness, genetic predispositions, limitations, abilities, disabilities, sin, hopes, cultures, experiences (both good and bad), motivations, and values—among a great many other things. Somewhere in the soup, your

essence—like a stock cube—is now diluted and cooked into everything else. It flavors everything but only that essence is truly yourself, the rest is not.

To be found inside the Subjective God is not the same thing as being overpowered by objectivity and so numbed to individual sense and will. That is the Buddhist philosophy. No, to be in Christ is to be more yourself than you could ever be otherwise. It is to know fully and at the same time to be fully known.

Sanctification by a Holy God is the intricate miracle of removing the stock cube from the soup; of un-diluting your true self from all the other stuff into which it has dissolved, bringing relational order to the chaos and horror of separation—individual by individual. “And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,’”
(Revelation 5:9 ESV.)

A multitude yes, but a multitude of individuals; and I suspect that when all the other stuff has finally boiled away, you and I will find that we consist purely and individually of purpose.

Different purposes

But that does not mean that we will all have the same purpose. Not

every one of us will be found to be in Christ, tucked inside the purpose of God. In fact, Scripture indicates that most of us human beings won't be. And those who are found in Christ are sure to have different individual purposes. We will be unified, like the three persons of God are unified, like a good mom and dad are 'one.' Thus Jesus prayed, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us," (John 17:20–21 ESV.)

So what about those who find themselves not in Christ—not on God's side?

Well, clearly they must be part of the full discharge of heaven, of the right response of worship to the true creator God that we see in Revelation 5 as discussed two chapters ago:

"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9–11 ESV.)

They too have a purpose, but they have a very different purpose. They are part of the opposition that true faith must face if it has any hope of

being true faith; and since true faith is necessary to please God, therefore so are unbelieving humans.

Scripture is full of them. Here are some quotes (my paraphrase) that resemble how they might have sounded today.

“Noah, what in the world are you building?” (Genesis 6:13–22)

“Why’d you change your name, Abram? I mean, you’re what—ninety? Do you and Sarai still...you know?” (Genesis 17:5)

“Just curse God and die, Job.” (Job 2:9)

“Come down from your cross; save yourself.” (Matthew 27:42)

If we never hear those voices from our peers how do we know that, or what, we believe? We don’t, the test is incomplete. You can only know what you believe when you face real opposition.

Now a strange thing happens as soon as we make that statement. It may be perfectly plain that opposition from real peers must be experienced in order to show faith to be real or not, but our first response is, “but that’s not fair, how can a loving God allow that?”

Do I really mean that the God of love created people just to go to hell? Well, that depends on your definition of a 'god of love.' What I can tell you is that the Subjective God did indeed create people who will go to hell for eternity.

A loving God, yes, but one subject to His Word, not to the rights of men. Even the collective rights of men are just a grouping of things we think ought to be individual rights. The cry for fairness is nothing more than another vain attempt to shine the light on God while remaining in the darkness ourselves. What about the rights of God?

So let's not appeal to justice—because the first thing justice will do is accuse us who appeal to justice.

There is nothing else for it, this is the way it is.

“Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—” (Romans 9:21–23 ESV.)

Those not in Christ, not on God's side, when faith is no longer required, when belief is no longer possible—they are not granted the benefit of a quick dismissal. But those made in God's image are not that easily unmade. They are sent to eternal torment, to continue dying, growing sicker and sicker, increasing in both entropy and pain, but never actually dying, alone forever. "It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out." (Mark 9:43 NIV.)

If we make ourselves subject to the Subjective God, then we're not in a position to make demands. But no sooner are we submitted to Him than we find, beyond all expectation, God's abundant grace that comes from His Word, because justice has already been applied to His Word. We find that there is a way for us not just to be servants in His house, but sons and daughters at His table. If we are as happy as we are surprised to discover that God is a Subjective God, then should we not also be willing to accept the horror awaiting those who choose a different path?

What kind of response should we have toward the human opposition we're bound to find on planet Earth?

Those that are lost

Jesus gave us ample examples and illustrations of what to expect. Generally He described three kinds of human opposers to faith. I'll use his "three lost things" parables from Luke to illustrate:

1. 'Lost coin' people. Like Nicodemus in John 3, 'lost coin' people are lost but they don't know it.
2. 'Lost sheep' people, like the woman at the well in John 4 or the woman caught in adultery in John 8. 'Lost sheep' people are lost and they know it, but they don't know how to get back.
3. 'Lost son' people—like the religious folks who brought the woman caught in adultery, blind as they were to the hypocrisy of dragging in just one person for a sin that, by definition, takes at least two. 'Lost son' people are lost and they know it, and they know how to get back. They are deliberately away from God.

Jude gives us a wonderful summary of our ethical response to these three kinds of opposers to faith: "Have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh." (Jude 1:22–23 ESV.)

To 'lost coins', have mercy, speak the truth in love. They must be born again, nothing else matters. Of the three they will offer the least resistance to real faith. You can recognize them in that they are genuinely curious about your faith.

To 'lost sheep,' snatch them from the fire. Rescue them. Sometimes it can seem unkind to point out the predicament of someone in a desperate situation, but their response may just hold a little hint of potential faith. 'And he said to her: "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' But she answered him, 'Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'" (Mark 7:27–28 ESV.)

To 'lost sons,' have mercy but mix it with the terror of the plain truth, so that they know where they stand and whom they stand against. It is possible to be either on God's side or against Him; but not both, because "The one who is not against us is for us," (Mark 9:40 ESV.) Make a sharp distinction between the person and their actions, as God did and continues to do for you.

The actions of a lost son are usually attempts to rid themselves of the truth that they know. They can be hurtful, personal, vengeful, mean, and utterly depraved. You may feel their sting because of your faith, but those actions are not directed at you, and because you are subject to God, and only as much as you are subject, you can deal with any persecution. If you remain humble yet truthful, you effectively step out of the way so that 'lost sons' can face their real opposition and perhaps be saved.

It is God's place, not ours, to seek vengeance.

Those eager to throw stones in judgment had better be sure they will endure the same judgement because, "... all who take the sword will perish by the sword." (Matthew 26:52 ESV.) There is only one human worthy to open the scroll who, subject to its contents, survives.

The Subjective God does not trade blessing for praise. It is not up to us to pass judgement on anyone, for there is lostness in us who are being sanctified also. We are not holy yet, so "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls." (Romans 14:4 ESV.)

I think we should be very slow to label anyone but our own selves 'lost,' and equally slow to label anyone but ourselves 'saved.' We are in no position to label anyone by eternal terms. But we have been given the "keys of the Kingdom" (Matthew 16 and 18) by which we assess actions: first our own, then those of others, and then we respond with all the faith that all can be saved.

Our response should be humble but strong: "Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect," (1 Peter 3:15 ESV.)

Our response should always be with the same grace that was shown to us. We should be quick to ask for forgiveness if we respond inappropriately.

Above all, our response should not put our faith in jeopardy, because it is the very thing being tested. “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36 ESV.) None on this earth will ever be able to definitively prove the existence of God, and that is perfectly fine. To tell the truth, no one has ever truly proved anything definitively. And as long as there is no definitive evidence, even that which would satisfy the body of Science, there is hope because faith is still possible. And, as we know, the only way to please God is to believe first that He exists. In order to believe you need faith, “... the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1 KJV.)

It’s never been the Christian’s job to prove God’s existence through peer review—that’s a fool’s errand.

Faith needs resistance in order to be faith, and so we have opposition. Opposition is one thing, but evil is quite another. Can evil be said to serve any purpose?

Chapter 6 - Words Like Diamonds - The Purpose of Evil

Sir David Attenborough once made a comment in a TV interview about horror. The *Simulium* fly larvae, he explained, find their way under the skin of a host victim causing terrible itchiness until they reach the host's eyes and then they slowly, and painfully, blind them. He asked how a benevolent God could have created such a thing of horror. His point is that if God is benevolent then there ought not to be horror at all.

Is he right?

God could be malicious or cruel and is pretending to be just and merciful. Or God could be inept or weak. In other words, God could exist but without benevolence in the true sense of the word.

But there is no need to get bogged down in the questions of God's character based on our observations. God's benevolence, and His justice and love, can tolerate such a thing as horror meted out on His subjects. If God is Holy.

When we warn our children about some potential hazard we say things like: “You’ll take someone’s eye out with that,” or, “You’ll catch your death of cold.” Now the reason parents use these gruesome word pictures is that there really are eyes that have been whipped out of their sockets on the ends of sticks, and there really are children who have died from exposure. These expressions, and the real events they point toward, exist to help children grow into responsible adults who know how to take manageable risks.

It seems that the Word of God does the same: “And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched...’” (Mark 9:47–49 ESV.)

God does not warn us about little concerns like temporary pain, lifelong disability, and torturous death, because He’s not nearly sentimental enough for the things that keep the humanists busy. Rather, He *uses* those things; He created some of those things (like the *Simulium* fly) to warn us about horrors much worse—real and eternal horrors.

What would be the point of saying “where their worm does not die” if there is no worm that does die to compare it with? The whole point of

the sentence is for us to react with shock. “It’s bad enough to die of such a horrible thing... imagine never dying from it! It’s bad enough to die from burns... imagine never dying from them!”

These are the words of a benevolent God. They explain why there is horror on earth. The reason is because there is evil far worse than temporal horror; but they don’t answer the question of why there is evil at all, and what its purpose is.

Evil, like horror, exists because of the mercy of the Subjective God who wants us to grow up.

“Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4 ESV.)

Do we really want justice?

When we are wronged and we begin to cry for justice, we are meant to stop and ask ourselves if it is justice that we really want. Since we are guilty of the same, if not worse, and justice, if it is justice at all, must be complete justice, it must apply toward me as much as away from me.

Instead what we usually end up doing is demanding *fairness*, which is justice applied only away from us and toward those around us. In

other words, we demand that evils committed against us be repaid and that our own evil be overlooked. We call as evidence all the good things we've done as support for our amnesty claim, which is why the idea that we can measure our character by doing good for those who cannot help us is a very bad idea. We don't even know ourselves if we are falsely justifying the evil we do to our neighbors by the good deeds we do to those who can do nothing for us.

It's no good saying that God makes it too difficult—that if He just revealed Himself we would have every reason to believe; that we would simply behave correctly out of the evidence, no need for warnings and such. If it was that simple why would the rebellion in heaven have ever occurred?

For us there is a different path—we are to follow what we believe. When we absolutely *know*, it will be too late to have faith. If God revealed Himself, the potential for faith would be removed, and all hope for us along with it.

We have already considered Hebrews 11:6 that those who want to draw near to God must, in the first place, believe that He exists.

Forgiving and justifying

Instead of demanding *fairness*, and then lying to ourselves by calling it *justice*, we should *forgive* the way we forgive ourselves. It's not like this

is an unfamiliar process. We ought to love our neighbor the same way we love ourselves (Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 19:19, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8).

But “Self,” we often say, “you just did wrong to your neighbor, but you know, you do pay your taxes, and you donate to the NSPCA; and we both are sure you’ll do better next time. It’s okay self, I forgive you.”

The high ethical call of the Subjective God is to simply do the exact same thing for others we’re doing for ourselves all the time. All the evils of the world and other human beings are there to help us see that.

Our self abuse

Remember how far we have fallen from truth. In the first chapter I discussed how the knowledge of good and evil has revealed to us that there is a difference between the two, but left to our own devices we remain in the dark about which of the things we do are good and which are evil. The reason why eating from the Tree of Knowledge was sin was because God said it, and God said it because it was true. We knew too quickly what we were not yet ready to know, and it broke our relationship with God.

What is missing in our knowledge of good and evil is exactly our relationship with God. The knowledge we don’t have is the knowledge

of what is good *compared* with what is evil. We know that ‘good’ exists and ‘evil’ exists but that’s as far as we can go. Eve ate of the fruit and she knew right then that some things were holy and some were not—but which things were holy and which were not, neither she, nor Adam could tell.

They were ashamed to be naked, and so they hid. Did they hide because nakedness is by nature unholy (since the reproductive organs have more than one purpose)? Or because it made them *feel* unholy to be naked? Was it simply because they had disobeyed God, and that alone made them unholy? Was nakedness merely a reminder of their new status?

Did Eve sin by deciding, or even by considering, that the forbidden action was of greater value than the relationship with God who had forbidden the action? Did Adam sin by allowing Eve to perform the forbidden action without challenging her? If so, then both sinned before they took of the fruit; and their sin of omission (hiding from God, deciding to choose gain over relationship) was at least as great as their sin of commission (eating of the forbidden fruit).

“But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”

(Romans 14:5 ESV.)

So then at what point did their actions become evil? I don't know, and neither did they. But we do know that the first human sin was to choose perceived gain over relationship out of a combination of desire and fear. We are so much more complex than we could possibly comprehend and evil's part in that complexity is a puzzle.

The whole Old Testament Law and its field-test subject, Israel, existed to begin to show us how deeply we have abused ourselves by the knowledge we were not ready for. What we know now as right and wrong, good and evil, is just the tip of the iceberg of what we know is going on inside us: a seething mass of desires and thoughts and imaginings and fears. We have no idea how to judge right from wrong, good from evil; yet we know our actions, perceptions, preferences, and such, are either one or the other. Oh yes, we know that! Knowledge alone is no remedy, particularly the knowledge of good and evil: "The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow." (Ecclesiastes 1:18 NLT-SE.)

The law and the nation (Israel), bought by blood and war, was necessary to lay a platform for the Word of God, a context for the rescuer. We would never have recognized Him without one. "A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'" (Isaiah 40:3 ESV.) And there is no diagnosis that helps those with free choice if they do not recognize the diagnoser.

Where evil is born

God knows the difference between good and evil, and he also knows just how deep our problem is, since He faced life among humans with all its horror, its evil and its temptations.

To fully unravel its purpose, we must begin with the fact that evil existed before humankind. If the purpose of God is to fulfill His Word, then evil is the fulfillment of everything that is *not* His Word and the *lack* of fulfillment of everything that *is* His Word.

“How you have fallen from heaven,
O star of the morning, son of the dawn!
You have been cut down to the earth,
You who have weakened the nations!
But you said in your heart,
‘I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
And I will sit on the mount of assembly
In the recesses of the north.
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.’
Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol,
To the recesses of the pit.
Those who see you will gaze at you,

They will ponder over you, saying,
'Is this the man who made the earth tremble,
Who shook kingdoms,
Who made the world like a wilderness
And overthrew its cities,
Who did not allow his prisoners to go home?'” (Isaiah 14:12-17
NASB.)

Isaiah’s poem about Satan describes where evil was born, and gratefully it was not with us. Our problem may be very deep, but it’s not *that* deep. Satan’s words reveal his intent to dominate, to take over management of heaven; but instead they became the contrast against which the holiness of God has become all the more radiant. God’s Word became like diamonds against the black velvet of evil. There is no real comparison between them—diamonds are not diminished in value or splendor because there is more velvet.

God allowed evil to exist. He allowed it to enter the garden and He allowed the free choice of mankind to make a real decision between good and evil.

There is another, much greater purpose for evil. Just as opposition from real people exposes real faith, so the existence of evil serves as a warning and exposes, and even highlights, good deeds of all

varieties—like diamonds on black velvet. The purpose of evil is for it to be overcome: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:21 ESV.)

Evil is not a *balance* for good. We are not striving to bring placid and pacifist good into balance with volatile and aggressive evil until all becomes one; no! We are eradicating evil as it is being eradicated in us.

The darkness has never understood

Our trouble is that we're trying too hard to define evil from the dysfunction of living in it. You cannot define evil outside of a clear understanding of good, just like you cannot define darkness without a clear understanding of light. Light is the visible spectrum of electromagnetic radiation; darkness is what we call the condition when there is none or very little light. It has no substance of its own. Which is why eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was wrong.

“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.” (John 3:19 ESV.)

We are to overcome evil with good. That is why it exists. And in doing so we find ourselves perfectly in line with the purpose of God, which is

to fulfill the Word of God. This is exactly why Jesus can say to us, “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

(Matthew 5:48 ESV.)

“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” (1 John 5:4, ESV.)

The purpose of evil

Remember Julius Caesar’s words: “*Veni, vidi, vici*” (“I came, I saw, I conquered”)? Can you remember offhand what exactly it was that he saw and overcame? Neither could I, I had to look it up. The phrase was written in a letter he wrote to the Roman Senate after he won a very short war against Pharnaces II of Pontus in the city of Zela in modern-day Turkey around 46 BC.

Pharnaces II of Pontus is not the point of the story, he’s the background, the black velvet against which Julius shines. Pharnaces II of Pontus makes Julius Caesar great indirectly.

Evil has the same significance for us, because it has the same significance for God. It is the *absence* of good, the absence of *purpose*, the absence of *holiness*.

Just as soon as God had uttered His agreement, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...” (Genesis 1:26 ESV) the existence of evil was allowed for a short time, so as to be overcome, so *as to make mankind in His own image*.

Since God is a holy God, subject to His Word, He would allow evil to fulfill His purpose in making us in His own image at the time of creation. Choosing good fulfills the Word of God, and without the capacity to choose good, how is the Word of God to be fulfilled?

Let's flesh this out a bit

The innocent do not *choose* good over evil. Good is, in a sense, their very essence. If they make a bad choice, we do not see that choice as evil because we see the person as *innocent*. This is most evidently seen in how we think of small children. We understand that the innocent simply do not know evil and their choices are not weighed in the same way we weigh the choices of an adult.

Innocence then is the absence of evil, but righteousness necessitates the *possibility* of doing evil. There has to be a *real* choice for an action to be truly righteous. Because righteousness, by definition, is a virtue, innocence is merely a state of being.

In his book, *The Sickness unto Death*, Søren Kierkegaard says this:

“To lack possibility means either that everything has become

necessary or that everything has become trivial.” Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Sickness Unto Death*. Translated by Alastair Hannay, Penguin Great Ideas, 1989, ISBN: 9780140445336, p. 42.

“Only the person whose being was so shaken that he became spirit by grasping that everything is possible, only he has had dealings with God.” Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Sickness Unto Death*. Translated by Alastair Hannay, Penguin Great Ideas, 1989, ISBN: 9780140445336, p. 40.

Righteousness is the knowledge of evil (and therefore the capacity for it) without committing it. The capacity for evil is necessary for righteousness to exist; and therefore the capacity for evil is necessary for mankind to be made in God’s image. This necessity of choice defines the role of evil.

But evil’s existence is not eternal. Evil and sin lead to *death*. There is an end. But virtues and love seem to be infinite—for who can exhaust love?

The nature of evil is temporary. You and I are less mortal than evil itself. So scripture says:

“Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” (1 Corinthians 15:24–25 ESV.)

Many assume Christ will begin to reign fully once evil is conquered, but the text reveals a different truth: Christ does not *begin* to rule when evil comes to an end, He is ruling now, *until* evil is gone. Then He will hand the Kingdom He received in Daniel 7 back to the Father.

When Adam and Eve fell into their trap, God had already achieved His purpose. We ought never to think of evil as some sort of balancer that will eventually be absorbed again into some or other harmony. It is there to be overcome and finally be ended.

Overcoming evil

“Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.” (Revelation 1:11 ESV.)

These were the instructions given to John at the beginning of the Revelation. Not long after John was given a short letter for each of these churches, each letter ended with an imperative to overcome some or other kind of evil.

To Ephesus: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” (Revelation 2:7 NIV.)

To Smyrna: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.” (Revelation 2:11 NIV.)

To Pergamum: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.” (Revelation 2:17 NIV.)

To Thyatira: “Only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 2:25–29 NIV.)

To Sardis: “He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 3:5–6 NIV.)

To Philadelphia: “I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 3:11–13 NIV.)

To Laodicea: “To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelation 3:21–22 NIV.)

She (or he) who overcomes will be given the right to eat of the Tree of Life, and she will be protected from death at the exact right time, once she has been freed from the corruption of an everlasting dying. She will eat from God’s provision, with a new heritage and a new authority. She will regain her innocence without losing her knowledge of good and evil. She will also have a new purpose, a new everlasting home, and a new seat of authority.

“Let others complain that our age is evil; my complaint is that it is paltry. For it is without passion. People’s thoughts are thin and flimsy as lace, they themselves are as pitiable as

lacemakers. The thoughts in their hearts are too paltry to be sinful... Their desires are stodgy and sluggish, their passions sleepy... That's why my soul always reverts to the Old Testament and to Shakespeare. There at least one feels that it's human beings talking. There people hate, people love, people murder their enemy and curse his descendants through all generations. There people sin."

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*. Translated by Alastair Hannay, Penguin Classics, 1992, ISBN: 9780140445770, p. 27.

We really do not need to fear evil, or shun it, or mock it or point it out in others. Let's be real and obvious about it. Let us be people who confess at least as much as they forgive, if not more. Let us overcome it, as we were predestined to do. Evil has no power over or future part of a life surrendered to the Subjective God.

Chapter 7 - Make It So - The Purpose of Man

“... if we discover a complete theory... Then we shall all ... be able to take part in the discussion of the question of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason -- for then we should know the mind of

God.” Hawking, Stephen. *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*. Bantam

Books, 1998, ISBN: 9780553109535, p. 175.

Above, Hawking describes the popular humanist answer to the question: what is the purpose of mankind? It's great fun watching the activities generated toward finding a unifying theory. It must be both exciting and frustrating to be working in that field, and I have a lot of time and respect for those that do. But I do wonder why Hawking, and others like him, believe that we will find either our purpose or our origin that way.

It seems to me that at every stage of the search we find wonderfully useful truths that enable us to do amazing things. But it does not move us closer to finding a purpose. In fact, I think that every scientific discovery does two things: It gives us power we never had before the discovery; and it asks a lot more questions than it answers. This is as it should be. But it's humbling to admit it; so humbling that I don't think

the collective consciousness of Science has ever publicly acknowledged that our discoveries, as great as they are in themselves, have uncovered a lot more questions than answers.

It's perfectly true to say that we know more about the universe than we ever have; but it needs to be stated, at the same time, that we also know how little we know than we ever have. If we don't say that, then "we know more about the universe than ever before," means very little.

What we do know is that we are extremely desperate to find a purpose. Paranoid, in fact. The fact that purpose does not appear in Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs does justice to how superficial the hierarchy is.

The search is hardwired into our existence, and every human will use whatever toolbelt they have to search for a purpose. Fame and legacy, intelligence and science, tradition and religion, money and power.

There are those fortunate individuals who seem quite content with life as it is for them in the present. They are not very many, and I suspect that they are content precisely because they have found an agreeable purpose, a satisfying pursuit. (That does not mean that it is an appropriate one.) Money and power and such often make little difference to these sorts of people, except to upset their satisfaction. But observation over time also shows that the satisfaction is almost never absolute and life long.

The rest of us seem bent on discovering this purpose. This obsession with purpose is the reason why despite being so prolific, Leonardo da Vinci, on his deathbed, said: “I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have.”

So why is this need for purpose hardwired into us? Because there can be little doubt that we have been cultivated toward finding a purpose.

Nature does not lead

There is something deeply satisfying about a well-kept garden. It's natural, yet it's not given its own lead to do whatever it is capable of in whatever direction it can. A well-kept garden is satisfying for one simple reason: nature does not lead. The object of a garden is nature, but it does not lead, it is submitted.

Of course nature never truly leads, she always defers either to entropy or to intelligent direction. There is something charming about a jungle also, but it's not because nature has deferred to entropy, no; that would be horrific, chaos; and more so over time. In a jungle, nature is also deferring to intelligent direction; just as she deferred to intelligent design.

There is something special, intimate and revealing about the relationship between the intelligent gardener and the result of his

labor, his well-kept garden, or jungle. His labor is involved in both facilitating and curtailing growth, and nature supplies the growth. There is a relational beauty that a third party cannot but appreciate. Someone tends this garden, someone maintains this jungle.

Thomas Edward Brown got this inference pretty clearly in his poem,
My Garden

A GARDEN is a lovesome thing, God wot!
Rose plot,
Fringed pool,
Fern'd grot—
The veriest school
Of peace; and yet the fool
Contends that God is not—
Not God! in gardens! when the eve is cool?
Nay, but I have a sign;
'Tis very sure God walks in mine.

It is exactly the same for us. We crave a purpose because we were created by a God with purpose. It was not God's intent that humankind would exist simply for the purpose of existing. If we had never lost our connection with God we also would not have lost our purpose. Yet we may not even have been conscious of having a purpose. It is in losing our purpose that we find ourselves to have had one, and in losing it we have died.

Coldplay's song, *Fix You* epitomizes our plight—describing the tears we shed when we lose irreplaceable things. You cannot fix your lost purpose from inside, because purpose, as I have discussed, does not come from inside, it can only be fixed from the outside; and by someone other than yourself.

There is one place, and one place only, where we can find our purpose: in Him. It is only the Subjective God who can, and will, restore it.

Before we fully grasp our individual purpose in its stark reality, there is something we need to get out of the way. It can easily mask our purpose as soon as it is revealed, if we let it. I'll call it *satisfaction*.

I can't get no... satisfaction

There are a few ways of evaluating a purpose. One of them is measuring satisfaction. In that regard it seems that success, comfort, fame, and wealth are diametrically opposed to the purpose of man since they bring very little satisfaction for people who find themselves achieving them. But just because someone is not satisfied does not mean that they have not achieved the purpose for which they exist; and conversely just because someone is satisfied does not mean they have achieved the purpose for which they exist.

So satisfaction is not a great way to measure purpose.

Jesus gave this warning in a parable:

“And he told them a parable, saying, ‘The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:16–21 ESV.)

Birds are great flyers. One could say that flying is part of the purpose of a bird! Would it not be nice if birds also *loved* to fly?

There is a joke in South Africa about the Hadedda, a species of Ibis. They are fairly big birds, and when startled they take off into the air and about 30 or 40 feet up they turn their attention to their vocal chords, and let out a very loud warning cry that sounds like someone in deep distress. The joke is that Hadedas are actually scared of height, and only when they get up to thirty feet in the air does their vertigo kick in, and they start yelling out of fright!

I have no evidence that birds are or are not satisfied by flying, or that Hadedas are scared of height. I can only make assumptions!

But wouldn't it be nice if we were satisfied by achieving our purpose? The real one? The God-given one? Yes, surely it would. But that does not mean that our purpose therefore has to be satisfying. This is besides the fact that what looks so very satisfying in one moment is not at all satisfying the next.

I have attended many people's deathbeds. Never once have I heard someone say that they wish they had been able to afford more stuff, or that they had experienced more comfort, or were generally more satisfied. If someone has regrets they will be relational regrets 99.9 times out of a hundred.

I cannot stress how important it is to get this out the way. The satisfaction thing can be so misleading when we are looking honestly at the purpose of mankind.

Finding the slipstream

As you probably have already guessed, we are going to find the purpose of Man in the slipstream of the purpose of God. It is the very fact that God has a stated purpose that explains the driving need in man to find one also. And, as it turns out, that purpose is enormously satisfying; eternally satisfying, in fact.

But many things are satisfying. We cannot find purpose by a pursuit of what is satisfying, despite what the utilitarians say. But we can find great satisfaction when we discover our purpose.

“The glory of God is to conceal a thing, but the glory of the king is to find it out,” as if, according to the innocent play of children, the Divine Majesty took delight to hide His works so someone could find them out; and as if kings could not obtain a greater honor than to be God’s playfellows in that game.”

Bacon, Francis. *The Advancement of Learning*. Edited by Michael Kiernan, Penguin Classics, 2000, ISBN: 9780140433791, p. 103.

What a delightful thought that God would hide good things for mankind to find—and that it is a part of his purpose for us to find them. We can see this to be true in what we have found naturally. A hundred years ago we would not have guessed the value of silicone. Two hundred years ago we would not have guessed the value of the ugly black oil that comes out of the ground (from under the silicone). Seven thousand years ago we would never have guessed that hard, malleable, and durable metals are hidden in the rocks. And as it turns out, we are natural born discoverers, and we absolutely love to discover. And it seems as if God loves to hide things away, for the very purpose of discovery.

But our purpose is not just to discover, it is also to overcome, to create, to procreate, to invent, and to do it all with courage, fortitude and an eternal vision.

All of those things can be found in the slipstream of the purpose of God.

The Great Story

The purpose of God is to fulfill His Word. Francis Bacon was quoting from and expounding on His Word, and thereby fulfilling it. Every story of bravery, courage, romance, pro-creation, invention, heroism; fact or fiction; point to the Great Story of all of those things, The Word of God.

If you set as your purpose to fulfill God's Word as far as you are able, then you have set yourself on a path to discover your true purpose.

There's no avoiding it.

But if you set as your goal to find your purpose, then you have very little chance of finding it! Because then you call to your aid a god who does not exist, a god who you would not want to help you even if he could. You call on a god whose purpose is to help you find your purpose... what kind of sorry excuse of a god could that be?

No, no, my friends. It is us who must bend to the purpose of the God of all purpose, and in bending we will find great joy in it; but in refusing to bend we will find atrophy, fragility and eventually we will break.

Captain Jean-Luc Picard of the Starship Enterprise in the TV series Star Trek would usually give his orders with the age old nautical phrase, “Make it so.” It’s a wonderfully relational interaction between commander and commanded. I can imagine the same between God and us.

“Son, In a little while go and pray for that man.”

“Shall I go now Lord?”

“Not just yet,”

“OK, now?”

“Make it so!”

Before we conclude this chapter on the purpose of man under the Subjective God, you may find these FAQs helpful:

Q. Does man have a choice in his purpose?

A. Yes, I believe he does. But from God’s perspective it has already been made. “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.” (Isaiah 45:23 ESV.)

This is reiterated in Romans and Philippians. So everyone gets included in the acknowledgement of both the holiness and the worthiness of God. We are all there in Revelation 5, every last one of us.

“And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’” (Revelation 5:13 ESV - emphasis added.)

Of course I may be absolutely wrong about choice. Martin Luther would have disagreed with me, but it doesn't really matter. We all have the same purpose, and we all will fulfill it. The only difference is that some will go on in relationship fulfilling it, and others will go on in torment fulfilling it. Either way, it does not help to demand free choice as if it was a right. God is still God. Free choice does not save you unless you use it to choose to believe that the only one who can save you will save you.

Remember this verse?

“You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you

made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.” (Romans 9:19–24 ESV.)

Q: What part of us does our purpose demand?

A: All of us. But don’t make the mistake of thinking that those with greater abilities have a greater chance of finding and fulfilling their purpose. In fact the opposite is true.

“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.” (Luke 12:48 ESV.)

It is up to the multi-gifted to humble themselves, and identify with the poor, the average, the meek, because the gospel message is specifically for the poor, the average, and the meek. The Word does not just *suggest* humility, the Word *is* humility; and the Holy God is humble by definition. If we are to find our purpose, so must we be.

So God commissions those who are particularly good looking, wealthy, influential, or gifted in some way firstly to humble themselves away from their gifts and abilities; and then employ those abilities to their full as they seek to fulfill the Word.

And He also commissions the poor, the average, the meek, and the needy to discover and to employ whatever they have been given as they seek to fulfill the Word—and not to bury their talents. Because humility is simply accepting the role God has for you, which is why Moses could say, “Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.” (Numbers 12:3 NIV.)

“The proper motto is not ‘Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever,’ but ‘Be good sweet maid, and don’t forget that this involves being as clever as you can.’ God is no fonder of intellectual slackers than any other slackers.” Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. HarperOne, 2001, ISBN: 9780060652920, p. 215.

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” (Romans 12:3 ESV.)

And yet:

“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.” (1 Corinthians 14:1 NIV.)

Q: What about satisfaction? Can I get any?

A: Yes you can! A great deal more than you could even imagine, by God’s grace. When we find our purpose by seeking His, it is the most satisfying thing that you could imagine to do.

We tend to think that Epicurus and the Utilitarians are right, that satisfaction—and thereby purpose—is to be found in getting precisely what you want. I’m not sure why we believe this when everything in our experience tells us it’s not true.

In an interview some time before his tragic death, Philip Seymour Hoffman once said, “I would definitely say pleasure is not happiness.” Indeed it is not, and time and time again we see those who have the means of pleasure do not find satisfaction by it.

“For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4–5 ESV.)

Sadly we have known this since Solomon:

“I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure: enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all

that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 ESV.)

No, satisfaction is not a product of pleasure, neither is it a product of having one's perceived needs met. But satisfaction, or gladness, or “blessedness” (as the scriptures call it) can be found. Sheryl Crow is not entirely wrong when she says, “If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad.” I think that pleasure, true pleasure (not that trickle-feed stuff we get from video games, gambling, and sugar) is a product of happiness and satisfaction. You cannot find pleasure by seeking for it directly, you can find it by finding happiness or satisfaction. But happiness and satisfaction also cannot be found by seeking directly for them; they are found by finding your purpose. And as we have just discussed, you are not going to find your purpose by searching directly for it.

All these things—purpose, then satisfaction and happiness, then great pleasure, are found by finding and following the purpose of the Subjective God.

Resistance

When Jeremiah complained to God about how bad men prosper, and

so damage the land, God answered him with these words: ““If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses?

If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?” (Jeremiah 12:5 NIV)

This is a question of justice, but it's posed by pleading for fairness. God answers it with the specifics of Jeremiah's purpose, with God's vision for him.

The very first job of fulfilling the Word of God is simply to believe it. It is to have faith, and how can you possibly have faith if there is no real resistance to that faith?

When you go to a zoo that takes particular care to hide the animals' food in the kinds of places they would have to search in if they were in their natural environments, then you find happier animals compared with zoos that just leave the food in a bowl.

The resurrection of Lazarus told in John 11:1-44 is a remarkable account. Jesus received news that his friend was sick, but instead of rushing to him, he lingered for two days before heading to Bethany, Lazarus' home. And he was at least two days' journey away because when he got there Lazarus had been dead for four days already.

But Jesus knew what no one else in the story knew. When He first heard of his friend's illness he had said, "this sickness is not unto death." (John 11:4 NKJ.) Later He seemed to contradict that statement, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe." (John 11:14–15 NKJ.)

How deeply satisfying must this resurrection have been? Made all the more satisfying by the intentional delay of the healer. To witness a man dead for four days to come out of his grave, in his right mind and healthy; to have it first commanded by Jesus who was not there at his death or burial. A delightful precursor to the fact of eternal life.

But before that, it was deeply disturbing! Jesus lingered, knowing full well of the emotional turmoil the family was going through. He lingered so as to make the situation worse. Jesus was not motivated by cruelty or indifference, but that those witnessing may believe. And He was "glad" not to have been there! I wonder if Jesus waited four days to be one more than the time He would be dead before His resurrection.

We are too easily satisfied by what turns out not to be satisfaction at all. The real deep lasting satisfaction comes within the purpose of God where one can be dead and yet living in the fullness of life.

Conclusion

The Light That Finds You

I remember watching Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. A photographer, L.B. Jefferies, is stuck in his apartment, leg in a cast, peering out at the lives unfolding in the apartment windows across the courtyard. He's a voyeur, safe in the shadows, piecing together life stories from the fragments of light and movement.

He thinks he's the one doing the watching, unraveling the mystery of a possible murder. But then, in a heart-stopping moment, the murderer looks back. The lights in Jefferies' apartment switch on, and suddenly, he's no longer the objective observer anymore—suddenly he's the subject being observed, exposed, and vulnerable.

The truth that he was chasing has turned the tables, and now it's chasing him.

This is the journey of the Subjective God. We started out like Jefferies, looking into the Bible, thinking we're the ones investigating God's holiness. We're armed with questions, perhaps a bit of skepticism, trying to understand why the God who calls Himself "I AM" would also call Himself holy—and why He calls us to be holy too (Leviticus 11:44–45).

We think we're in control, watching from the safety of our own darkened rooms and hidden behaviors—our assumptions, our philosophies, our self-constructed identities, our sin.

But as we gaze into Scripture, something shifts. The Word of God isn't just a text to be studied, it's a light that switches on and exposes us. We're not searching for the truth; the truth is searching for us.

This book has been a journey through the Bible. In the Law, we saw God's name, "I AM," declare His objectivity, yet His holiness revealed a purpose—He's set apart for His Word, a commitment so unshakable it cost Him everything (Exodus 3:14; Psalm 138:2).

In the Psalms, we glimpsed the surprising cost of that purpose: God placing His Word above His Name, choosing to become the victim to rescue us, the rebels (Psalm 45:4; Hebrews 5:8).

In the Revelation, we stood in the throne room, where God's holiness becomes Christ's worthiness, and only the slain Lamb, the Word made flesh, could open the scroll to resolve the tension of creation's incomplete praise (Revelation 5:9–13).

We wrestled with whether God is on our side, only to learn He's on the side of His Word, inviting us to join Him there (Joshua 5:13–15).

We faced opposition and evil, not as accidents but as black velvet against which the perfection of God's Word shines, calling us to overcome (Romans 12:21).

And we discovered that our purpose—Man's purpose—is found in the slipstream of God's purpose, not in chasing satisfaction or even purpose, but in bending to His Word, where true joy awaits us (1 John 5:4–5).

We thought holiness was about perfection, sinlessness, or divine grandeur. But the Bible kept flipping the script. Holiness isn't about being flawless, it's about being set apart for a purpose. God's holiness means He's wholly devoted to His Word, and His call to “be holy as I am holy” isn't a demand for moral perfection but an invitation to align our purpose with His.

It's not about escaping the chaos of sin but living purposefully despite it, trusting the One who's already paid the cost to make us His own. Just like Jefferies, we don't get to stay hidden in the shadows. If God won't take that stance, then neither shall we. The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). It doesn't just reveal God's purpose; it reveals us—our selfishness, our pride, our desperate need for grace. It cuts between our thoughts and our intentions.

We start this journey thinking we're the investigators, only to realize we're the ones being investigated. As Augustine put it, "I have known many men who wished to deceive, but none who wished to be deceived... Men love the truth when it bathes them in its light: they hate it when it proves them wrong... Men love to lie concealed, yet they wish that nothing be concealed from them. Their reward is just the opposite of their desire, for they cannot conceal themselves from the truth, but truth remains hidden from them."

Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin Books, 1961 ISBN-13: 978-0140441147), book X, chap. 23, 237.

The knowledge of good and evil, the fruit we grabbed too soon, left us knowing there's a difference between holy and unholy but clueless about which is which (Genesis 3:6).

We have become like Cain, lost in our own darkness, unable to pinpoint where the sin started (Genesis 4:5–6). But the Subjective God doesn't leave us there. His Word shines, not to condemn but to rescue, plucking us like brands from the fire (Zechariah 3:2).

This is the ultimate conclusion: to be holy is to step into the light of God's Word, to let it examine you as God lets His Word examine Him. It's to admit you're not the hero of your story but a sinner called to a purpose far greater than yourself. To be holy is to accept the imputed

righteousness of Christ as your own. Holiness isn't a badge you earn; it's a gift you receive when you bend to the God who bent heaven and earth to fulfill His Word.

It may well be a terrifying moment of exposure, because it demands vulnerability—acknowledging your sin, your need, your utter dependence on grace. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:31.) But it's also liberating, because the One who sees you fully is the One who loves you fully. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12.)

So, what do we do with this? We stop hiding. We stop pretending that we can find our purpose by fame, wealth, or even religion—any self-made means. We step into the light of the Subjective God, obeying the one who says, “Make it so,” inviting us to live out His purpose for us with courage, humility, and faith.

Holiness isn't a destination, it's a relationship; a lifelong dance of being known and knowing; of overcoming evil with good; of finding our place in the Great Story. It's the promise that one day the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

Until then, we live as torches plucked from the fire, burning with purpose, never consumed, because we're set apart for the One who is holy.

“When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:28 ESV.)

Be holy, as God is holy.

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About the Author



Alan Jones is the pastor of Firebrand Church in Port Orchard, Washington, where he has provided visionary leadership, preaching, and community-focused ministry since founding the church in 2014. Originally from Johannesburg, South Africa, Alan served as a pastor at Cornerstone

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He immigrated to the USA in 2009 with his wife, Meg, and their son, Daniel. With over 30 years of experience as a graphic designer and brand developer, Alan is also the founder of Alan Jones Design, blending his creative communications expertise and theological insights to inspire and engage diverse audiences.