



When I was in college at Baylor University I started attending a weekly Bible study. Certainly, lots of reasons motivated us to attend. I was going for the teaching. The teacher was a relatively unknown guy named Louie Giglio. He was funny, interesting and clear. He was passionate and heart-felt. I'd never heard anyone explain the scriptures like him.

The night was structured like this: 45 minutes of singing, then 45 minutes of teaching. So I had to get through the singing in order to get to the "good stuff." As I attended more frequently and got more comfortable in the environment, I started noticing some perplexing actions. Lots of people seemed to be enjoying the singing more than me. I was singing the songs and clapping along, sure. But some appeared to go to another place as they sang. You could tell by the look on their faces. Another perplexing action for me was that no one ever directed us to do anything. This was strange for me since the music leader in my church always told us what to do. But at this Bible study, no one told us to stand or sit or clap our hands or raise our hands. The music would start and people would just respond. Sometimes I'd look around, see someone sitting, praying during a fast exciting song and I'd think, "hey get up." At other times I'd see someone stand up when everyone else was sitting down and I'd think, "that guy's weird; he should sit down like the rest of us."

As perplexed as I was, I was also curious and interested. Could I experience what they were experiencing? I wasn't interested in behaving differently. I didn't want to copy anyone. I was intrigued by what was going on in their heart that would cause them to act the way they did.

One night, after I'd been attending for months, we'd been singing for about 44 minutes and something new happened in my heart. It was a mixture of God's truths, the lyrics of the songs, my confession of sin and my desire to know God more, and I think my defenses broke down enough that I felt God's presence. No one had to explain to me that this was God's presence, I just knew. It was like his peace and strength and holiness were splashed on me. It was wonderful and amazing. About one minute later the singing ended and the teaching started. I thought, "oh no! let's keep going!"

That was my first experience of getting lost in adoration of God. Over the past 24 years I've grown more accustomed to this experience and it no longer takes me 44 minutes to get there.

The experience I'm describing is what the Apostle Paul is experiencing in Romans 11:33-36. The same thing happened to him. And the same thing should happen in each person who's a follower of Jesus. Have you adored God like this before? If so, how often does it happen for you? Would you like for it to happen more often? In today's sermon, I'm going to explain some of the stepping stones in the path of experiencing the presence of God.

To get us started, let's do a little self-reflection. How many of you would describe yourself as highly intellectual, meaning you love to analyze, think scientifically and critically? You experience the world more through your thinking than your emotions? How many of you would describe yourself as highly emotional, meaning you experience the world more through your feelings than your thinking? How many of you would describe yourself in the middle of these? Your answer to this question will help you this morning because it reveals part of what's influencing your worship and adoration of God.

Turning our attention now to Romans 11:33-36, John Stott describes Paul in these verses with this insight: "Paul's horizons are vast (through Romans 1-11:32). He takes in time and eternity, history and eschatology, justification, sanctification and glorification. Now he stops, out of breath. Analysis and argument must give way to adoration."

Before Paul goes on in Romans 12-16 to give the practical implications of the gospel, in verses 33-36 he falls on his knees before God in worship. Paul models for us that good doctrine and worship go hand in hand. In these verses today we're going to ponder the depths of God Almighty: The depth and riches of his wisdom; the depth and riches of his knowledge; his unsearchable judgments. All three of these are set up in verse 33.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

We're intrigued with deep places because they're mysterious to us. The average depth of the ocean is about 12,100 feet. The deepest part of the ocean is called the Challenger Deep and is located beneath the Pacific Ocean down by Guam. Challenger Deep is approximately 36,200 feet deep. Scientists say we know less about the deepest points on our planet than we do about the surface of Mars. So James Cameron, the film director, piloted a sub to the bottom of the Mariana Trench to check it out. He

made it down and back safely, observed some life forms, collected some rocks, then after four hours had to rush back to the surface. He couldn't stay there. It's too cold. The pressure would crush him in a second. There's no air to breath.

That's kind of like it is with God and his depths. We aren't designed to experience physically or spiritually the deepest places that God can handle. It reveals how much greater he is than us. We can marvel at him but we can't fully relate or comprehend. He is too deep for us. Wow!

Wisdom

The scriptures say his wisdom is deep and rich. Commentator William Hendriksen puts it this way: "God's Wisdom is his ability to select the best means for the attainment of the highest goal." This is way beyond our capacity. It's because of this that Paul asks, "*who has been the Lord's counselor?*" (v. 34b). No one! God's ways and his insights are perfect and he always knows the best means to accomplish his highest goal. What a relief that he's not overwhelmed with the challenges and problems we face. We get stressed out. We feel overwhelmed and afraid. But God calmly and lovingly sees it all and he always knows the best means for your life to attain the highest goal.

As evidence of that, God solved the greatest problem humanity will ever face—our enmity with God. All humanity before Jesus Christ was his enemy because of our sin. We were spiritually dead. We were doomed with no way to solve it. But God wasn't stumped. John Piper wrote, "The wisdom of God devised a way for the love of God to deliver sinners from the wrath of God while not compromising the righteousness of God." If God can solve the greatest problem, he can solve anything you're facing today. He always knows the way. His wisdom is deep and rich.

Knowledge

This verse says another attribute of God is rich and deep: his Knowledge. This is his ability to know everything, all the time. He is Omniscient. It's because of this that Paul asks, "*who has known the mind of the Lord?*" (v. 11:34a). No one! We can only begin to kind of understand it.

Think of it this way. My son got an Amazon Echo for Christmas. It gives answers by searching the web. We can't know these answers off the top of our heads; it's beyond us. At best, the best minds can know this after some analysis. But God knows it instantaneously. But Alexa's knowledge is limited. She gets stumped quite often. That's not like God, ever! He knows who's going to win the Presidential election. He is Omniscient. He knows everything, all the time—past, present and future.

We will never know the full knowledge God possesses. As finite, created beings, our minds aren't created with the capacity to comprehend eternity. But this does not mean our faith is a

mystery. What God reveals, we can grasp, to a degree. Think of how God gives his truth in the Bible.

Adam and Eve

God knew everything when he put Adam and Eve in the garden and told them, "*You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will certainly die*" (Genesis 2:17). What did Adam and Eve know about this situation?

- God said don't eat it.
- God said eat all the rest.
- God said you'll die if you eat it.
- They understood to a certain degree. But there was way more they didn't understand. They didn't know their one act of defiance would set sin loose into creation. But God knew and he knew the full implications.

The Latin phrase, *axiom finitum non capax infinitum*—"the finite cannot contain or grasp the fullness of the infinite"—was central to John Calvin's teachings. A person must accept this in order to understand God. We know this. That's why we go to God with our questions. That's why we read the Bible. That's why we go to him in prayer. We want to know him and his truth. We will never know everything he knows but we can fully know what he's revealed to us.

My theme verse for the year is Jeremiah 33:3. Phil Joel shared this verse with us back in January. God says, "*Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.*" The whole premise of the verse is God's Omniscience and man's limited knowledge. I don't even want to know everything God knows. That's more than I can handle. But I want to know more than I know now. I need to know God's rich and deep knowledge about where my daughter should go to school next year, how God wants me to live out my calling, how to lovingly respond to some family situations, what's God's vision and design for me and my family. Isn't it awesome that God's knowledge is so perfect? It doesn't have any gaps. Wow!

Judgments

Then this verse says God's judgments are unsearchable. We can't figure it out. We won't be able to follow the logic sometimes. It's truly beyond us. God's judgments are often referred to as his sovereign decisions. With his omniscient knowledge and perfect wisdom, he rules the universe with directions.

The title Most High is the name for God that designates God as the sovereign ruler of the universe. It was "God Most High" who delivered Abraham's enemies into his hands (Gen. 14:20). It was the "God Most High" who was Israel's Redeemer (Psalm 78:35). Daniel 4 describes how God Most High rules over the affairs of man. "*His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom*

endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" Because of this, King Nebuchadnezzar said, "I raised my eyes toward heaven, and praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever" (Dan. 4:34-35).

Kay Arthur said, "For if God is not sovereign, if He is not in control, if all things are not under His dominion, then He is not the Most High, and you and I are either in the hands of fate, in the hands of man or in the hands of the devil." For the Christian, the implications of this runs deep. Having God Most High ruling over our lives with unlimited wisdom and knowledge means that nothing ever happens without God's ultimate sanction or permission. That promise has carried many of you through the darkest times of your life.

This truth is revealed in Romans 8:28: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* This isn't a mystery for us to unlock. It's an invitation to each of us to accept our limitations and accept God's perfect sovereign rule over our lives. He is way beyond us!

To conclude his outburst of worship, Paul gives one more phrase. *"For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen"* (v. 36). This phrase sums up the being and character of God. Three propositions teach us about his nature here: From him, through him and for him. "From him" means God is the source and owner of everything. "Through him" means God is the ultimate cause of everything. "To him" means that everything's ultimate purpose is for him. He is the Alpha and the Omega: the beginning and the end.

These verses are Paul's moment of "wow" as his response to God's plans and means of salvation described in Romans 1-11. He is overwhelmed. It's as if he's on his knees in humility. He sees God's place and he sees his own place. He is worshipping and adoring God.

I hope that as I explain these wonderful attributes of God that your heart is awed too. I hope Paul's example of being overwhelmed with God is inspirational to you. That it all stirs up a "wow" is your heart. If that describes your heart, then just wait a few more minutes and you'll get the chance to express that to God in prayer and singing. But before I end this sermon today I want to give some practical instruction to those of you who don't feel awed by God very often.

It's fair to ask ourselves, "What's my response to these wonderful attributes of God?" That's why I asked you earlier if you were a highly intellectual or emotional person. Your makeup and personality influence your response. It's helpful to be aware of that.

But it shouldn't define your response. God's glory and character should be primary.

John Piper wrote, "If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God, it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great." He's saying a person can fill their heart with the pleasures of life, the ambitions of life, and even the worries of life that our hearts get full. And a person tries to stuff a bit of God in there to make it all better and it doesn't work. We won't feel God's presence. There's something blocking the connection, the intimacy. Confess it to God. It's blocking the intimacy between you and God.

It can be like the relationship between a husband and wife. You know their character and you love them; that's why you married them! As a part of any good marriage, sometimes you kiss. That's like going to church and singing the songs. If you kiss but don't feel anything, that'd be like singing the songs and hearing God's word and not feeling anything. That's an indication that something is wrong in your heart. That would be a signal that something is holding you back, blocking the intimacy. No doubt that happens to all of us at times. But we shouldn't accept that as normal or right. When we kiss our spouse, we should feel love and when we contemplate God's character, we should feel adoration and worship him.

Here are three habits that have helped me and many Christians connect more deeply with the heart of God in worship and adoration.

Habit 1

Say "I'm sorry." Just as these words and this sentiment re-establish intimacy and connection in a marriage, they'll connect you with God too. It's amazing how powerful an apology can be. If we don't say, "I'm sorry" each time we let something go unresolved, imagine bricks of a wall start building up between you and God. Maybe you've allowed something to build a wall between you and God and you need to say "I'm sorry."

Habit 2

Get into a physical space that's safe for you, pick one worship song and let the words just wash over you like a wave. Don't sing. Just listen. Make the lyrics your prayer. Then listen to the song again. As you listen the 2nd, 3rd or 4th time, feel free to pause the song and take more time to pray. Do this once a week.

For me, this involves time of confession; times of thanking God; times of praising God for his attributes; and my heart gets to a place where I am totally surrendered to God. When this happens, something exciting is about to happen. The Holy Spirit, who lives inside of you, loves it when we get to this place. In fact, I think he rejoices! And as the Spirit of God rejoices inside of me, it's

natural to express that in some way with your body and words. All through the scriptures we see people kneeling, laying prostrate, dancing, singing, clapping and playing instruments. All of this is part of giving yourself the freedom to express what's happening in your heart. It's honest and authentic worship. Maybe you need to spend some times like this alone with God.

Habit 3

Read the Bible with the intention of hearing God speak to you. It's his living and active word and he wants to speak to you. Make that your single intention as you read the word for a while. You

aren't dissecting words or phrases. You're asking God, what do you want to say to my heart today? Maybe you need to spend some time reading God's word like this.

These three habits can help you connect with God. And when you get connected, the natural response will be worship and adoration like Paul models for us in these verses today.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.