

The Question

Philip Yancey, in his book *Disappointment With God* says many people seem to be asking God, "Where are you?" "Why are you silent?" "Why do you seem so far off?" Have you or someone you know ever asked God, "Why don't you just plainly tell me the answer to all my questions?" Or, "God, why did you allow that to happen?" Have you ever sensed a frustration with God or even fear or anger because you can't get an answer? Or at least the answer you desire? To answer these questions, I must ask one more question. What do I think about God?

In thinking about God, I was drawn again to the book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* by the Pulitzer Prize writer, Annie Dillard. She spent some time observing nature along Tinker Creek in Virginia's Roanoke Valley and wrote: "I have at the moment a situation which allows me to devote considerable chunks of time to seeing what I can see, and trying to piece it together. I've learned the names of some color-patches, but not the meanings. I've read books. I've gathered statistics feverishly: The average temperature of our planet is 57° Fahrenheit.

Of the 29% of all land that is above water, over a third is given to grazing. The average size of all living animals, including man, is almost that of a housefly. The earth is mostly granite, which in turn is mostly oxygen. The most numerous of animals big enough to see are the cope pods, the mites, and the springtails; of plants, the algae, the sedge. In these Appalachians we have found a coal bed with 120 seams, meaning 120 forests that just happened to fall into water, heaped like corpses in drawers. And so on. These statistics, and all the various facts about subatomic particles, quanta, neurons, and so forth, constitute in effect the infrared and ultraviolet light at either end of the spectrum. They are too big and too small to see, to understand; they are more or less invisible to me though present, and peripheral to me in a real sense because I do not understand even what I can easily see. I would like to see it all, to understand it, but I must start somewhere, so I try to deal with the giant water bug in Tinker Creek and the flight of three hundred redwings ..., with the goldfish bowl and the snakeskin, and let those who dare, worry about the birthrate and population explosion among solar systems. ... That there are so many details seems to be the most important and visible fact about the creation. If you can't see the forest for the trees, then look at the trees; when you've looked at enough trees, you've seen a forest, you've got it. If the world is gratuitous, then the fringe of a goldfish's fin is a million time more so. The first question -- the one crucial one -- of the creation of the universe and the existence of something as a sign and an affront to nothing, is a blank one. I can't think about it. So it is to the fringe of that question that I affix my attention, the fringe of the fish's fin, the intricacy of the world's spotted and speckled detail. ... This is the truth of the pervading intricacy of the world's

detail: the creation is not a study, a roughed-in sketch; it is supremely, meticulously created, created abundantly, extravagantly, and in fine.”⁴

And so, here I am, asking questions that are beyond me, instead of asking God to be near me. Asking about things that matter little, when I need to be asking God what matters most.

We sing, “Blessed be the name of the Lord, blessed be Your Holy Name.” Well, who is this God that we should just say, “Come what may in this life, I will sing, ‘Blessed be Your Name’?”⁵

Let me try to answer that question. First of all, it is my belief that there is a God who has always existed and that He created all things, everything -- from the vastness of the universe to the fringe of a fish’s fin that Annie Dillard writes about. It seems that God was extravagant in what He created, as seen in the various forms of plant and animal life. But His most extravagant act was the creation of man and woman, created in His image. Doesn’t that seem a bit preposterous, even outrageous?

That makes me ask the question: What is the image of God? I believe it is the capacity to love -- fully, unselfishly, no strings attached. Is it not humans only who have this God given capacity? To show affection? To experience tenderness? To know intimacy? To be attached and endeared? To give devotion and adoration? To have passion and compassion? To experience friendship and fellowship? To know kindness and goodwill? To be benevolent and sympathetic? In short, to give one's best for all things and all people? God is consumed with concern. Romans 5:8 says, *"God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him."*

So I ask another question: Why were we of no use to God? Is that not what the story of sin is about? Have you read Paul’s letter to the Romans where he writes about this? *"You know the story of how Adam landed us in the dilemma we're in -- first sin, then death, and no one exempt from either sin or death. That sin disturbed relations with God in everything and everyone, but the extent of the disturbance was not clear until God spelled it out in detail to Moses. So death, this huge abyss separating us from God, dominated the landscape from Adam to Moses. Even those who didn't sin precisely as Adam did by disobeying a specific command of God still had to experience this termination of life, this separation from God. But Adam, who got us into this, also points ahead to the One who will get us out of it."*

Yet the rescuing gift is not exactly parallel to the death-dealing sin. If one man's sin put crowds of people at the dead-end abyss of separation from God, just think what God's gift poured through one man, Jesus Christ, will do! There's no comparison between that death-dealing sin and this generous, life-giving gift. The verdict on the one sin was the death sentence; the verdict on the many sins that followed was this wonderful life sentence. If death got the upper hand through one man's wrongdoing, can you imagine the breathtaking recovery life makes, sovereign life, in those who grasp with both hands this wildly extravagant life-gift, this grand setting-everything-right, that the one man Jesus Christ provides? Here it is in a nutshell: Just as one person did it wrong and got us in all this trouble with sin and death, another person did it right and got us out of it. But more than just getting us out of trouble, he got us into life! One man said no to God and put many people in the wrong; one man said yes to God and put many in the right. All that passing laws against sin did was produce more lawbreakers. But sin didn't, and doesn't, have a chance in competition with the aggressive forgiveness we call grace. When it's sin versus grace, grace wins hands down. All sin can do is threaten us with death, and that's the end of it. Grace, because God is putting everything together again through the Messiah, invites us into life -- a life that goes on and on and on, world without end" (Romans 5:12-21 MSG).

Now if God created us to walk with Him and we said we didn't want to walk with Him, that separates us from Him, and that is death. But, God didn't leave it at that. Basically He said, "If sin separates me from my creation, I will make a way for the penalty for sin to be satisfied by my own sacrifice. I will die for man, even though he may reject my sacrifice for him. But to whomever will believe me, and the One whom I will send, I will accept them back into my presence! I will rejoice in their homecoming! I will shout and cry and dance and I will throw a great feast and we will celebrate -- because my child was lost, but now he is found! He was blind, but now he can see!" God says, "Oh! how I love my child, my creation! Come my child, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you! Yes, prepared from the very beginning -- the Garden is being restored! A new earth is being readied! A new heaven is awaiting. Yes! I love you! I have always loved you! Come to me, all who are burdened. Come rest in my presence. I love you so much."

This is how I view the God to Whom we sing, "Blessed be Your Name." The questions we have of God as to why this? why that? why not something else? tumble down with my own falling down before the Master. I say with Job, *"I'm speechless, in awe -- words fail me. I should never have opened my mouth! I've talked too much, way too much. I'm ready to shut up and listen."* Job says to God, *"I'm convinced: You can do anything and everything. Nothing and no one can upset your plans. You asked, 'Who is this muddying the water, ignorantly confusing the issue, second-guessing my purpose?' I admit it, (says Job), I was the one. I babbled on about things far beyond me, made small talk about wonders way over my head. You told me, 'Listen, and let me do the talking. Let me ask the questions. You give the answers.' I admit I once lived by rumors of you; now I have it all firsthand -- from my own eyes and ears! I'm sorry - forgive me. I'll never do that again, I promise! I'll never again live on crusts of hearsay, crumbs of rumor"* (Job 42:1-6 MSG).

Do you remember the story of Jacob in the 32nd chapter of Genesis where a stranger comes upon him and they engage in a wrestling match? It turns out the stranger is an angel, a messenger from God, who cannot get the best of Jacob and finally has to use supernatural powers to throw Jacob's hip out of joint. But still Jacob won't let the messenger go until he is blessed. Upon the blessing, Jacob's name is changed to Israel, (which means God-Wrestler). Jacob wrestled with God and came through it. This is why verse 30 states, "*Jacob named the place Peniel (God's Face) because, he said, 'I saw God face-to-face and lived to tell the story'*" (Genesis 32:30 MSG).

Is not seeing God face to face one of our inmost desires? We sing about it -- we pray about -- we long to be in God's presence. When Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for us so that we could dwell with God, didn't that make our hearts jump and cause us to say, "Come Lord Jesus. Take us home."

Well, it wasn't always like that, you know. Remember when Moses brought the people out of Egypt and they came to the mountain where God was and Moses wanted the people to come meet God? They said, "Oh no. We're not going near the mountain, lest God slay us. No, Moses, you go up there to meet with God. We'll stay down here, thank you."

Remember when the tabernacle and then the temple were build, there was the Holy Place where sacrifices and intercession was made for the people? Then there was the Most Holy Place, also called the Holy of Holies, where resided the ark of the covenant and where the High Priest entered there once a year to make intercession for the people of God, but not without a rope tied to his ankle -- for if the sacrifice was not acceptable, or he was not properly clothed and cleansed, the Lord would slay him, and for fear of also being slain, the other priests could pull out the High Priest without coming face to face with God.

Do you also remember that when Jesus gave Himself up on the cross for our sacrifice, that the curtain, the vail, that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was torn in half and that not one person died, even though the ark of the covenant was exposed for any and all to see? Why not? Because Jesus became the last and final sacrifice for the sins of mankind. No one who comes face to face with God will ever die when they come in the name of Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the Master who gave His life a ransom for all, everyone, each and every, the whole, the entire!

Now again, remember how Moses' face shone after just seeing the back side of God on the mountain? Just imagine how our faces will shine when we see God face to face! Won't it be fantastic to be able to say, "I have seen God face-to-face and lived to tell the story!"

My beloved people, God loves you so much. He desires for you to dwell in His presence. He desires it so much that He said He is willing to forgive all you have ever done or thought, in ignorance or in rebellion. And how does he do that? It is a truly preposterous gift from Him. It's the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Lamb that takes away the sins of mankind.

The question is, Do you accept this outrageous gift?

Now that is a question you need to answer!

ⁱ[Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 1974, 1998 Perennial Classics division of Harper Collins Publishers, pp. 129-136.](#)

ⁱⁱ[Google "Blessed be Your Name."](#) Lyrics by Matt Redman