



TRIUMPHANT

in

Tough Times

DEVOTIONS *for*
FREEDOM *in* CHRIST

NEIL T. ANDERSON

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Who Am I?

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

PSALM 8:3-4 ESV

What is man?” is an ontological question concerning the nature of “being.” Five centuries before Christ, Thales of Miletus was asked, “What is the most difficult?” He replied, “To know thyself.” Twenty-five centuries later, science is no closer to answering “What is man?” We know far more about the chemical makeup of the body, but that tells us nothing about who we are when absent from the body and present with the Lord. Psychology can describe but cannot unlock the mystery of the *person*. Being a carpenter, engineer, parent, or American citizen defines only what we do and where we live, not who we are. Biology is the study of plants and animals, but none bear the image nor likeness of God. Science cannot answer the most basic of all questions: Who are we, and why are we here?

However, Scripture can: “Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7 NASB 1995). When this happened, something new and totally different was introduced into the universe. God shared His divine and eternal life with Adam, who was created in His image and likeness.

The only “ology” that can properly explain who we are is theology. We are children of Almighty God, created in His image and likeness. Under God’s guidance and enabling presence, we are working out our God-given destiny. “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10 ESV).



The Holy Spirit's Guidance

*For all who are being led by the Spirit of God,
these are sons of God.*

ROMANS 8:14

A young pilot had just passed the point of no return when the weather changed for the worse. Visibility dropped to a matter of feet as fog descended to the earth. Putting total trust in the cockpit instruments was a new experience to him, for the ink was still wet on the certificate verifying that he was qualified for instrument flying.

The landing worried him the most. His destination was a crowded metropolitan airport he wasn't familiar with. In a few minutes he would be in radio contact with the tower. Until then, he was alone with his thoughts. His instructor had practically forced him to memorize the rule book. He didn't care for it at the time, but now he was thankful.

Finally he heard the voice of the air traffic controller. "I'm going to put you on a holding pattern," the controller radioed. *Great!* thought the pilot. However, he knew that his safe landing was in the hands of this person. He had to draw upon his previous instructions and training, and trust the voice of an air traffic controller he couldn't see. Aware that this was no time for pride, he informed the controller, "This is not a seasoned pro up here. I would appreciate any help you could give me."

"You've got it!" he heard back.

For the next 45 minutes, the controller gently guided the pilot through the blinding fog. As course and altitude corrections came periodically, the young pilot realized the controller was guiding him around obstacles and away from potential collisions. With the words of the rule book firmly placed in his mind, and with the gentle voice of the controller, he landed safely at last.

The Holy Spirit guides us through the maze of life much like that air traffic controller. The controller assumed that the young pilot understood the instructions of the flight manual. His guidance was based on that. Such is the case with the Holy Spirit: He can guide us if we have a knowledge of God's Word and His will established in our minds.



God Is Holy

*Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy
mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!*

PSALM 99:9 ESV

No other attribute in the Bible speaks more directly to God's deity than His holiness. "The Holy One" (Hosea 11:9 esv) is distinct and separate from all other things. He is "exalted over all the nations" (Psalm 99:2 niv) and lives above and beyond all creation. The stain of sin and evil that defiled the world never had any effect on God. He has always been morally perfect and separate (or transcendent) from the rest of His fallen creation. "The holy God shows himself holy in righteousness" (Isaiah 5:16 esv).

The sheer magnitude of God's glory and greatness does not diminish over time. Familiarity does not breed contempt of the Almighty. The holy angels, who have been in His presence since their creation, day and night do not cease to proclaim, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" (Revelation 4:8 esv).

The prophet Isaiah was given a vision of God seated on a throne. Above the throne were seraphim calling out to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (6:3 esv). Confronted with God's holiness, Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (verse 5 esv). We would all fall on our faces if such a manifestation of God were to come upon us. The only sin we would be aware of is our own. When we distance ourselves from God, we are less aware of our own sins and more aware of other people's sins.

God Is Omnipresent

If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

PSALM 139:8-10 ESV

God is everywhere present, even for nonbelievers: “What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Romans 1:19-20 ESV).

God is also present with every believer, but we are only partially present with Him even though our bodies are His temple. We don’t always sense His presence because of the daily responsibilities that occupy our minds. It’s possible to be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. A sinful lifestyle and unresolved conflicts will diminish a sense of His presence. Consciously or subconsciously, we have distanced ourselves from God, but He has not distanced Himself from us. He “will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5 ESV).

A peaceful sense of His presence comes when we repent and believe again that He is present and live accordingly. This is why we worship God, keeping His divine attributes fresh in our memory. We are the ones who need to consciously keep the divine attributes of God in our minds. He is looking for worshippers who live as though He really is omnipresent. David said, “I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken” (Psalm 16:8 ESV).



Overcoming the Kingdom of Darkness

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

GENESIS 6:5-6 ESV

Adam's sin cost him more than his life. Satan usurped his dominion, and according to Jesus, Satan became "the ruler of this world" (John 14:30 ESV). Satan's rule eventually became so pervasive that God was sorry He created mankind.

That may have been the end of human history if Noah hadn't found grace in the eyes of the Lord. The rebirth of humanity through Noah's family didn't fare much better. God had to deliver His people from slavery in Egypt. The Mosaic covenant promised blessings if they kept the law and punishment if they didn't. The fear of punishment can be a deterrent to sin, but it didn't last. So God sent prophets to call the people to repentance, but they were largely ignored and some even stoned. The kingdom of darkness will rule over those whose "heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick" (Jeremiah 17:9 ESV).

Not only are we cursed living under the law (Galatians 3:10), but the law has the capacity to stimulate the desire to do that which it intended to prohibit (Romans 7:5). Tell a child he can't go *there*, and the moment you say it, *there* is where he wants to go. God said Adam could eat from any tree in the Garden of Eden but that one! "Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law" (Galatians 3:21 ESV).

But God said, "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you" (Ezekiel 36:26 ESV). The New Covenant is grace based. The law is within us, and the sin that separated us from God is forgiven.

