

What
everyone
should
know
about
the **Bible**

V. GILBERT BEERS



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
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To *Arlie*, my bride of fifty-six years,
who has daily given me, our children, and our grandchildren,
a desire for the Word of God.

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What Everyone Should Know about the Bible

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Finding Your Purpose in Life

THE TOP 100
"PURPOSE-FINDERS"

1 Creation is “what” and the Creator is “who.” We know the Creator is there because we see his fingerprints and footprints everywhere. It is impossible to have fingerprints and footprints without someone to make them. We are thankful for the “who” as well as the “what,” but we worship only the Creator, not his creation.

Creation: Genesis 1:1–2:3 / pages 10–12

2 There are things we do not, should not, and cannot know about God, for they are too majestic for human understanding. But there are other things we must know, for they are too significant for us not to understand them. *Creation: Genesis 1:1–2:3 / pages 10–12*

3 Satan *cannot* steal your soul. He will have it only if you give it to him. Jesus *will not* steal your soul. He will have it only if you give it to him. The choice of who has your soul is yours alone. *Temptation and Fall: Genesis 3 / pages 13–14*

4 The best gifts given without a giver’s heart are unacceptable gifts. The smallest, most humble gifts, with a giver’s heart, are acceptable to the Lord. Cain’s gift was an acceptable gift from an unacceptable heart, which made it an unacceptable gift. Abel’s gift was an acceptable gift from the acceptable heart of a giver, which made it acceptable. *Cain Kills Abel: Genesis 4:1–16 / pages 14–15*

5 Obeying God is for our benefit more than for God's benefit. What if Noah had refused to build the ark? God would have lost Noah and the animals, but Noah would have lost everything. *Noah and the Great Flood: Genesis 6:9–9:19 / pages 28–29*

6 Half lies do not produce half consequences. Abraham's half lies about his half sister and wife Sarah brought full consequences. Half sins are full sins, with full consequences. *Abraham and Sarah Visit Egypt: Genesis 12:10-20 / page 36*

7 Since God made you, God can fix you. Sarah's God was, in her mind, too small, too limited, too incapable. She knew that God had made her, but she thought he couldn't fix her or give her a son in her old age. God can do anything, so if he doesn't work a miracle in our lives we should not build fences around him. *Abraham Is Visited by Strangers: Genesis 18:1-15 / pages 37–38*

8 The road to glory is paved with service. Before Rebekah could become Isaac's wife and thus the mother of all further covenant children, she had to first water the camels of Abraham's servant. No work, no glory. The crown never precedes the cross. The reward comes only after the victory, and that is achieved through dedicated effort. *A Bride for Isaac: Genesis 24 / pages 39–40*

9 God does not always want what he permits. He does not always will what he allows to happen. God did not want Job to suffer, but he permitted it so that generations of people could see what true faithfulness is. God does not want the suffering and deaths that come from hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, and other tragedies. He permits these things for reasons beyond our grasp and beyond the moment. *The Book of Job / pages 45–46*

10 Everyone wants to be desired, wanted, and loved for who he or she is. Poor Leah! Her father didn't want to keep her around the house, so he secretly forced a marriage. Her husband didn't want her, for he had worked seven years for another bride. Her younger sister certainly didn't want her as her husband's other wife, with all the complications that brought. Leah was "the unwanted one," but she had six of Jacob's twelve sons,

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SEVERAL YEARS AGO, in an adult Sunday school class at our church, the teacher asked us to put four names in chronological order: Moses, Joseph, David, and Nehemiah. Most of the class flunked. We considered ourselves a church in the center of Bible learning, not on the fringes. But most of the class didn't know this simple Bible information.

How would you do with that test? The name Moses sounds older than Joseph, doesn't it? But the kid with the colorful cloak came on the scene hundreds of years before the man who led Israel through the Exodus. What about Nehemiah and David? The boy who battled Goliath and later became Israel's second king was centuries older than the man who led a group of exiles back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city's walls.

Suppose someone asked you to list ten important Bible stories. How would you do? Can you name all twelve of Jesus' disciples? How about the names of the Minor Prophets? Do you know the name of Abraham's wife? Could you outline the entire panorama of God's plans through the ages, with all of the principal events and people involved? That would be quite a challenge, of course. But that is what we will do here.

So who cares about all this? Why spend time on this information? Does it matter if we know that there are only two Bible books named for women? Is it important if we can't name the twelve tribes of Israel or recite the Ten Commandments?

A recent survey by a research group showed that 12 percent of Americans believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. Sorry, wrong ark. Does that matter? The right Bible information will not see you through a fractured marriage or the death of a loved one, but if so many people know so little about the Bible, it makes us wonder how many other misconceptions about the Bible are out there, especially about doctrines and teachings that do matter. You would be embarrassed to tell someone that Noah's wife was Joan of Arc, wouldn't you? You would also be embarrassed to tell someone that the epistles were female apostles, or that the birth of Jesus is recorded in the book of Exodus. Of course Bible knowledge is important.

Bible information alone won't help you endure the extra mile in your journey when life hurts. Knowing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel won't give you great comfort when you've just been diagnosed with cancer. But the more you know the Bible message and its people, its panorama and purposes, the more you will relate to the God of the Bible, his plans for your life, and how he will make the difference when you hurt. When you know more of God's book, you understand more of the God of the book, and that makes all the difference in the world.

What Everyone Should Know about the Bible will help you to see and understand the panorama of God's plan for the ages, the Big Story, and how this comes to focus on God's plans and purposes for your life, today and every day yet to come.

At first glance, the Bible may seem like a dusty book about people of long ago and far away, imbedded in a culture radically different from ours and written in a language far different from ours. That first impression fades quickly when you look more carefully and discover that the Bible is the greatest adventure story of all times. The Big Story is a tapestry woven from the threads of many Bible stories and events that reveal the people with whom God worked through the ages.

With a closer look, you will discover that the Bible is an autobiography of God, who has the lead role in the drama of the ages. It is God's story. That closer look will also reveal the powerful truth that this is your story, too. The stories of long ago may be about Abraham, Isaac, Ruth, and Nehemiah. The Big Story is about God and you. The Big Story is about God at work through the ages, creating and managing the great epochs of time. It is also the story of God's plans and purposes for you and me—yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

The Bible may seem ancient, but it is as contemporary as your last heartbeat. It may seem distant, but it is as near as your next breath. It may seem far away, but it can speak to you with a life-changing power that is spiritual dynamite. It is about your concerns, fears, needs, desires, and ambitions, and your plans and purposes for tomorrow. The Bible is the Handbook of Purpose for your life, for there you will find your purposes clearly presented.

God and you, you and God. That is the essence of the Big Story of the Bible. It is important to grasp the wholeness of the panoramic plan of God so it can shape the wholeness of the rest of your life. *What Everyone Should Know about the Bible* presents the Big Story of God at work in his universe *as it happened historically*, not as it is presented in the sequence of Bible books, for as you know, Bible books do not strictly

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follow the timeline of history. It is vital that you see the panoramic plan of God arranged sequentially through the ages, starting with that timeless time before time began.

The bottom line of the Big Story is Your Story—what this panoramic plan of God means to you and how his plan of the ages will shape your purposes today. Since God's Big Story is ultimately Your Story, it is vital that you discover the purposes God has for your life. That is truly a Big Story.



As with any book that seeks to tell you “everything you need to know,” you will get the most from this volume if you first discover how best to use it. In that light, consider this your brief owner’s manual.

Discovering the purpose of *What Everyone Should Know about the Bible*

This book comprises interlocking purposes: (1) to help you see God’s panoramic plan throughout the ages, the “drama” of God at work among us. This drama is divided into forty-nine “scenes”; (2) to help you discover your purpose in life from each scene; and (3) to introduce you to Bible enrichment material that will help you understand the Bible story as presented in each scene—important events, dates when things happened, what you should know about the books of the Bible, and questions you may ask. To capture the purpose in a phrase, we might say, “Discovering your purpose in life from God’s panoramic plan of the ages.”

God’s panoramic plan

If you want an overview of the entire drama of God at work, read *The Big Story* from scene to scene, skipping over the support material. This will give you a sense of the Bible as it unfolds chronologically. For example, you’ll encounter the story of Job where he likely appeared historically, about the time of Abraham. You will read about the “silent scenes” between Genesis and Exodus, and again between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. You will see the narrative harmonized in six Old Testament books that cover the same time periods—1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles—and again in the life of Jesus, as seen in the four Gospels. You will also see how Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther fit together historically.

Discovering your purpose in life from God’s panoramic plan

Another approach is to read *The Big Story* from scene to scene and discover how your own life fits into God’s panoramic plan by reading “Discovering My Purpose from God’s Plan” at the end of each scene.

Start at the beginning, and . . .

Another way to read this book, of course, is straight through from start to finish. If you do, you’ll soon recognize the other features within each scene: Questions You May Be Asking (clarifying things that need it); Great Events of This Scene (a list of stories within *The Big Story*); Significant Dates of This Scene (a Bible time line); Heroes and Villains (the stars of this scene); Did You Know? (high-interest information from the scene); and *What Everyone Should Know* about . . . each book of the Bible.

If you use this book as intended, you will soon understand “what everyone should know about the Bible.”

1

Before Time Began The Heavens Before Creation

Characters:

Angels; God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit; morning stars; Satan

Time Period:

The time of mystery before Creation

Dates:

Before time began, so there were no dates

Where Scene 1 of the Big Story Can Be Found:

Genesis 21:33; Exodus 33:20; 34:29-30; Deuteronomy 33:27; 1 Chronicles 28:2; Job 38:4-7; Psalm 68:19; 102:24, 26; 110:1; Proverbs 8:22-26; Isaiah 9:6-7; 14:12-15; 66:1; Ezekiel 43:7; Matthew 8:11; John 1:1-4; 10:30; Acts 7:49; Philippians 4:18; 1 Timothy 3:6; Hebrews 1:13; 10:13; 1 Peter 3:12; and Revelation 22:16

In Scene 1, Find the Answers to These Questions:

What happened before Creation? What was God doing all that time?

How old is God?

What does God look like?

Did Jesus live before he was born at Bethlehem?

Look for this in Scene 1

- > The morning stars may have been angelic beings.
- > God has eyes and ears.
- > Satan was once an angel.



The Big Story So Far

The time before time began, the vast, sweeping eternity before Creation, is often a mystery to us. We have many questions about this timeless time, and the Bible doesn't tell us much about it. Is pre-Creation a biblical secret? Actually, the Bible tells us more than we realize, but we must look for it.

It is important to understand something of this time, for our understanding reveals the nature of God and what he may have been doing during these eons of timeless time.



Questions You May Be Asking

Where did God come from? How old is he? When did he begin?

How long did God live before he created the universe? When was he born? How did God get started?

Some scientists say that the universe is from four billion to twelve billion years old. If that is true, and we don't know that it is, God has been around infinitely longer than those billions of years. God was already present, long before Creation. Does the Bible tell us how old God is? Is there any hint?

The Bible has significant things to say about this, but not in the opening story in Genesis. In Psalm 102:24, the psalmist, inspired by God, writes, "My God, who lives forever." Note that it does not say "My God who *will* live forever," which would suggest future eternity but not past eternity.

"Lives forever" means that God had no beginning and will have no end. He has lived from forever, lives now, and will continue to live forever. He was never born and he will never die. He always was and he always will be. That's what the word *forever* means. It is mind-boggling because our minds are finite and we can't grasp something infinite.

Genesis 21:33 and Deuteronomy 33:27 speak of "the Eternal God" who always was and always will be. Psalm 102:26 addresses God, saying, "You remain forever," and 102:27 continues, "You are always the same; you will live forever." The God who has no end also had no beginning. He always was. He has always existed. Eternal and forever speak of no beginning and no end. God always was and always will be. This is hard for our limited human minds to grasp, but it is not too hard for our trusting souls to accept.

What about Jesus? He was born in Bethlehem about 4 b.c., wasn't he? If he was God, how could he be born, and if he was born, how could he be God?

It's very hard for us as human beings to grasp the Trinity, the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches us that God is

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one God, but three persons. We will fully understand it when we go to be with him. Until then, we have to settle for more faith based on less knowledge than we would like, but the Bible does tell us some important facts.

John 1:1-4 tells us, “In the beginning the Word [Jesus] already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.” This is a profound and clear statement about Jesus before Creation, and Jesus as God, the Creator of the universe.

Hundreds of years before Jesus came to Bethlehem, Isaiah spoke of him as the coming Messiah. “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Jesus has always been God—God the Son, one person of the Trinity. He always has been and still is the second person of the Trinity. He was there at Creation and long before Creation, and he is the Creator. He is not only called Prince of Peace, but Mighty God and Everlasting Father. Jesus said, “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30).

Jesus’ birth at Bethlehem was God coming into a tiny human body that would one day be offered as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. We sometimes call this birth at Bethlehem the Incarnation—God in human form. To die on the cross for our sins required a body, and Jesus came into that body that night in Bethlehem.

What does God look like?

The Bible uses terms for God’s appearance that are also used for our own appearance. Does God look like us, or do we look like God? Surely that is unlikely, because he is a spirit who is everywhere at once. So when the Bible speaks of the face of God, the hands of God, or the feet of God, attributes that we have, these are more likely functional attributes rather than physical attributes. However, it is interesting to note how many attributes are common to God and us.

God has a face, but because he is truly holy, we human beings cannot look at his face now. The brilliance of God’s face is so intense that we could not bear it. God said this to Moses when Moses went up Mount Sinai, “You may not look directly at my face, for no one may see me and live” (Exodus 33:20).

God permitted Moses to see his reflected glory, and even that was so brilliant that when Moses went down from the mountain, his own face glowed so much that the people were afraid to come near him (Exodus

34:29-30) and Moses had to put a veil over his face. We would not dare to look at the sun, which is God's creation, for more than a fleeting moment. If we cannot bear to look at one small part of Creation, how could we look directly at the face of God that is infinitely more glorious than the sun?

Does God have hands? God says that he has hands. He said to Moses, "I will . . . cover you with my hand," so that Moses would not die by looking into the face of God (Exodus 33:22).

What about feet? God told Ezekiel that he had feet. Ezekiel 43:7 says, "The LORD said to me, 'Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place where I will rest my feet.'" (Ezekiel 43:7). God also refers to his footstool, which presupposes feet, several times (1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalm 110:1; Isaiah 66:1; Acts 7:49; Hebrews 1:13; 10:13).

The Bible tells us that God's "everlasting arms" are under us (Deuteronomy 33:27). Other Bible references talk about God's arms, such as Psalm 68:19 and Isaiah 40:11.

Does God have eyes and ears? 1 Peter 3:12 tells us that "The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers." So the Bible tells us that God has eyes and ears, to keep watch over us and to hear us pray. Dozens of Scriptures tell us that our God listens to us.

Can God speak audibly? Most of the time, even in Bible times, he spoke to his people through Scripture or through his prophets. Today, most of us have never heard an audible voice from God. We rely on God's Word in the Bible to hear him speak to us.

However, many times throughout the Bible we read that God spoke audibly to his people. This presupposes a mouth and whatever else it takes for God to talk.

What about a nose or a sense of smell? What about taste? The Bible speaks of "a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable and pleasing to God" (Philippians 4:18). That tells us that God has a sense of smell, which suggests a nose.

God prepares feasts in heaven for his people, so we assume that he will dine with us (Matthew 8:11: "Many Gentiles will come from all over the world—from east and west—and sit down . . . at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven."). If so, God eats, and even feasts. Jesus, God the Son, ate after he arose from the dead, as well as before his crucifixion (Luke 24:41-42).

Does God look like us? Do we look like him?

Although we are made "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:26-27), we probably do not look exactly like God, and possibly do not look in any way like God. He has our five senses—touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight—

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but he surely has many more than just five senses. He may have five hundred or five thousand senses, or even more. We, of course, will also have many more than five senses when we go to live with God some day in heaven. Heaven will not be limited to our five senses, for there is much more there to sense and experience. God is all-knowing (omniscient), all-powerful (omnipotent), and present everywhere (omnipresent).

What was God doing before he created the universe?

Have you ever wondered what God was doing through the long stretch of timeless time before he created our universe? I have. What was he thinking? What was he planning? How long did it take? The Bible opens with the Creation story, but much had already happened before then. God had been busy long, long, long before that. Creation is merely the beginning of the story of our universe and the people who are unique parts of that universe.

How long did it take for God to plan his Creation? Could it have taken millions, or even billions of years?

How long would it take for you to design one snowflake? How about one billion of them, or a billion times a billion? We're told that no two snowflakes are alike, yet there must be multibillions in one acre of snowfall. How about all the snowflakes on the thousands of acres on one mountain? Multiply those billions times all the snow in the world for one day, or for one winter—then for thousands of winters. The number would be staggering. Trillions times trillions times trillions. Yet no two snowflakes are alike! How long would it take to plan countless snowflakes with no two alike?

Let's think next about a sunrise or sunset. I like to photograph them. But I'm standing in one small place at one moment of time in a very large world. Sunrises and sunsets are perpetual—one is happening somewhere in the world at every moment. The sun is always rising and always setting, painting literally billions of sunrise or sunset pictures each day. Multiply that times thousands of years. God is quite an artist, isn't he? How long would it take to plan all of these glorious paintings?

Think of the intricacies of other parts of Creation. Think of the planning needed for every leaf and for the design in each one. What about the billions of flowers and flowering bushes and trees? A billion times a billion leaves or flowers. How long to design each one?

Then, of course, there are stars, planets, and galaxies. Can you imagine planning for a trillion worlds or more? Each has its own unique features. Each needed intricate planning. Have you considered that our vast, seemingly endless universe may be only one small part of God's greater domain?

What about the design of every animal, every butterfly, every seashell? Was God planning all this marvelous stuff for eons of time before he said, “Let it now happen?” Of course he was. God obviously must have had awesome plans before he set to work creating our world. Creating a universe with such intricate uniqueness everywhere is one type of creativity—planning it all is a different type of creativity. The two fit hand in glove.

Then we come to the most complex, intricate marvel of all Creation—you, and billions of others like you. Each of us is different. There are about six billion people in the world today, and about 160 million more are added each year. By the year 2025, it is projected that there will be more than eight billion people alive on earth. How many people have lived since the days of Adam? Would it be safe to estimate twenty to twenty-five billion? That is a large number of unique Creations!

Each of us has a highly complex body, with miles of nerves and blood vessels, a heart that keeps on beating for almost a century, and more intricate design than the finest anatomy book can possibly explain. What about the DNA, the lifemap for each one of us? DNA is different in each one of us. How long would it take to design billions upon billions of unique DNA maps, unique sets of fingerprints, and unique iris prints for each of us?

How do we know God did his planning before Creation began? The Bible tells us that he did. For example, Proverbs 8:22-26 says, “The LORD formed me [wisdom] from the beginning, before he created anything else. I [wisdom] was appointed in ages past, at the very first, before the earth began. I was born before the oceans were created, before the springs bubbled forth their waters. Before the mountains were formed, before the hills, I was born—before he had made the earth and fields and the first handfuls of soil.”

The plans of God are intimately associated with the wisdom of God, whether plans for the Creation of the universe and us or the daily sustaining of our lives. That wisdom, and those plans, were already there at Creation. So is it unreasonable to think that in God’s infinite wisdom and planning, he knew your name and your entire lifemap even before he created the world?

When we come to the last scene and move from the course of the world’s history into that timeless time beyond our time, the forever yet to come, we will look back and say, “All we have done here on earth is nothing compared to the infinite detail of the heavens and the new earth.” Before the dawn of Creation, God was planning all that, too.

Of course, God had other things to do before the Creation of the

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world, such as creating millions of angels and looking after all the other celestial beings that we may not yet know about.

Were there any other heavenly creatures there with God before Creation?

In Job 38:4-7, where God speaks of creating the world, he asks Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . as the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” What morning stars? What were they?

The morning stars are possibly other celestial beings. They were present when God created the universe, and they celebrated Creation with the angels. What were these morning stars, the celestial beings, like? Why were they created? What is their purpose?

In Revelation 22:16, Jesus calls himself the morning star. This would suggest that the morning stars may be Christlike beings, like *the* morning star, though of course much lesser beings than God the Son. They are angelic in nature, but perhaps not angels—Christlike in nature, but not Christ.

Angels were also in the cheering section as God created the universe. They were shouting, perhaps singing, for joy. This wasn’t Job speaking. It was God speaking to and through Job, revealing startling truths to Job and to us. There will be more about this celestial cheering section when we get to the time of Creation.

Another being was present in the timeless time before Creation. Satan was the first visitor in Eden, and the first to meet with Adam and Eve. He was on the sidelines when God created the universe, but he wasn’t cheering. He was plotting how he might destroy this beautiful work.

Where did Satan come from? Did God create this evil being?

God is a holy God, so he could not and would not create evil or an evil being. Scripture suggests that at first, Satan was one of the angelic heavenly beings created a long time before our universe, but then he rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven.

Many believe that Isaiah 14:12-15 speaks of Satan and his fall. Others believe that these verses are only about the king of Babylon: “How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world. For you said to yourself, ‘I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God’s stars. I will preside on the mountain of the gods far away in the north. I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High.’ Instead, you will be brought down to the place of the dead, down to its lowest depths.” Was Satan one of the original morning stars or some other angelic being? God called him “O shining star, son of the morning.” Is that another way of saying “morning star”?

This passage from Isaiah sounds much more like a description of Satan than merely of the king of Babylon, doesn't it? First Timothy 3:6 adds only a fleeting possible commentary on this: "An elder must not be a new believer, because he might become proud, and the devil would cause him to fall," which could also be translated "he [the elder] might fall into the same judgment as the devil." This alternate translation suggests that the devil was cast down from heaven because of pride, which harmonizes with the passage from Isaiah.

What was the celebration of angels and "morning stars" like?

As God prepares to open the curtain of human drama by creating the earthly stage for it, let's try to picture the pre-Creation celestial drama. For this, we must use our imaginations, working from what little we know.

In the dark shadows, perhaps somewhere in that primordial earth described in Genesis 1:2, as "formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters," Satan lurks, fallen from heaven and plotting how he might destroy the glorious work God is ready to begin. Since Satan had once been in God's presence, he knows about God's majestic plans for the universe. He is waiting . . . waiting . . . waiting to get even, or to try to do so. He will do everything possible to frustrate or even destroy God's beautiful plans—plans that could have taken billions of years of careful planning.

At the same time, a magnificent choir of angels and "morning stars," those other nameless, indescribable celestial beings, gather in the bleachers or ramparts of heaven to observe the most incredible act ever performed and eager to celebrate the majesty and glory the Creator had been planning for ageless ages.



Discovering My Purpose from God's Plan

1. *The time before Creation reveals the "who" of Creation but not the "what" of Creation, while God's handiwork reveals both the "who" and the "what" of Creation. We worship the "who" of Creation, but not the "what" of Creation. We give thanksgiving for the "what."*
2. *There are things we do not, should not, and cannot know about God, for they are too majestic for human understanding. But there are things we should know, and they are too significant for us to ignore.*
3. *Satan lurks in the shadows of your life as he lurked in the shadows of Creation, seeking to frustrate and destroy the glorious work God is doing in your life. Resist him!*

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