

CHAPTER 2

Personal God

KEY IDEA

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

KEY VERSE

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. — *Psalm 121:1-2*

BEGIN BY RECITING THE KEY VERSE AND THE KEY IDEA TOGETHER AS A GROUP.

LESSON

INTRODUCTION:

The God of the Bible is the only true God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is the one all-powerful, all-knowing eternal God. But is he good? Is he involved in his creation? Does he love us? Does he have a plan for us? Is he interceding and intervening to move the events of our life and world toward his intended purpose?

“Contrary to the opinion of some, God does not have to be good to exist.” -Randy Frazee

What are your comments regarding the above quote?

KEY QUESTION: “Is God good?”

It turns out that the God of the Bible is good and he desires to have a personal relationship with us.

Two things God is not:

- > God is not uninvolved in creation with no plan. This is fatalism.
 - < If this were the case, then our choices and actions are irrelevant.
- > God is not involved in creating, yet uninvolved in our lives. This is deism.
 - < This would mean that bad things happen in our world because God, after creating the universe, stepped back with no further involvement.

But when we read the Bible from beginning to end, we can declare:

KEY IDEA: I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

GOD IS GOOD: ABRAHAM, SARAH, HAGAR & ISHMAEL

God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, but how can you father a nation when you have no children?

FROM GENESIS Chapter 15

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. ... "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her." ... Abram agreed to what Sarai said. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. ... So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Abram taking Hagar as a second wife was legal, according to the marriage code of that day, but not everything that is legal or that appears to be successful is approved by the will of God.

> God did not accept Hagar as Abram's wife, because Ishmael was not the promised son.

FROM THE TRANSFORMATION STUDY BIBLE

God has a perfect timetable for all that he wants to do. After all, this event was not the birth of just another baby. It was part of God's great plan of salvation for the whole world. However, as Sarai waited for something to happen, she became impatient.

A willingness to wait on the Lord is evidence that you are walking by faith.

Abraham and Sarah had tried to "help God out" by having Abraham father a child with Hagar. What resulted was a debacle for everyone involved. But in this story, we see the beginning of a pattern — God takes our messes and turns them into something good.

Satan wants us to think that our spiritual failings must become the permanent record for the rest of our lives, but this does not need to be the case.

> Like Abram and Sarai, we can confess our sins, accept God's cleansing, and then learn to live with our mistakes.

> God's grace can overcome.

Are you having difficulty regarding a past failure? What are you going to do to get back on track?

FROM Genesis 21

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.

The birth of Isaac reminds us that God keeps his promises, in his own way, and in his own time.

> In spite of their occasional failures, Abraham and Sarah believed God and God honored their faith.

In the story of Hagar and Ishmael, even though they were on the wrong side of God's perfect plan, in his goodness, God provided for and blessed them (and even their descendants).

FROM Genesis 21

Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob.

God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

God was with the boy as he grew up.

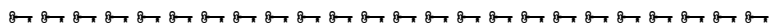
Hagar's experience in the wilderness taught her some important truths about God.

- > He is the living God who sees us and hears our cries when we hurt.
- > He is a personal God, concerned about abused people.
- > He knows the future
- > He cares for those who trust Him

In the lives of Sarah and Hagar, where do you see God's goodness extended to them?

FROM THE TRANSFORMATION STUDY BIBLE:

God did not abandon Hagar and Ishmael, for Ishmael was the son of Abraham, God's friend. ... everything God did for them was because of his faithfulness to Abraham. The Lord reaffirmed his promise that Ishmael would become a great nation, and he kept his promise. The Arab world is a force to be reckoned with today, and it all began with Ishmael.



GOD IS GOOD: DAVID

Another Biblical character in whose life we see how much God is involved and cares about his people is David as he journeyed through life and encountered the one true God. David composed many of the psalms found in our Bible. The songs that David and the other psalmists wrote express their personal and intimate relationship with God.

PSALM 139:1-5, 13-18, 23-24

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

God knows us. He has searched us.

- > The verb used here means "to search with pain and care."
 - < The Jewish people used this word to describe digging deep into a mine, exploring a land, and investigating a legal case.
- > Our friends and family see our outside, but God sees the heart, and we cannot deceive him.

< He knows what is best for us and does all he can to guide us.

God's knowledge and guidance are for our protection. What should be our response to this?

vs. 13-18 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

The Lord did more than design and form our bodies; he also planned and determined our days.

> This probably included the length of life and the tasks he wants us to perform.

> The psalmist, in his worship of God, realizes that, even before his mother knew she was pregnant, the Lord was already showing his care for him.

< His personal life began in the womb.

< God had already laid out his course.

> Life is a journey and the Lord has prepared us for what he prepared for us.

> Our responsibility is to yield ourselves to him daily, study his Word to know his thoughts and walk in the Spirit.

Read Jeremiah 29:11. Compare it to Psalm 139:15-16. What does this mean to us today? Was Jeremiah's statement just a promise for the nation of Israel?

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

FROM JON COURSON'S APPLICATION COMMENTARY

Regarding Psalm 139:15: This speaks of our development in the womb. God put us together just the way He wanted us to be. Therefore, for you to bemoan your lack of athletic ability, your limitations academically, or your unique personality is to actually question the ingenious wisdom and ability of God.

What are your thoughts on the above quote from Jon Courson?

Do you think this thought could or should carry through even to those who are born with mental and physical defects?

vs. 23-24 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

The Psalmist David, after talking about the omniscience and omnipresence of God—that he knows us better than we know ourselves, and that he is always with us, ends this psalm by giving the Lord free access to his heart and mind, and a request to be led continually in the Lord’s perfect way.

Have you made this a sincere prayer in your life? Can you make this a sincere prayer in your life? Are there parts of your life you are not quite ready to give over to the searching eye of God?

Psalm 145 is the last hymn of David in our Bible. It is a song of praise that specifically praises the Lord for his goodness and generosity toward his creatures, especially to his people, both as a group and individually.

> One remarkable feature of this psalm is the way it uses so many different words for “praising”.

Reread Psalm 145. Note the different words used to bring praise to God. Then reread it again as a personal prayer from you to God.

145 I will praise you, my God and King, and always honor your name. ² I will praise you each day and always honor your name. ³ You are wonderful, LORD, and you deserve all praise, because you are much greater than anyone can understand. ⁴ Each generation will announce to the next your wonderful and powerful deeds.

⁵ I will keep thinking about your marvelous glory and your mighty miracles. ⁶ Everyone will talk about your fearsome deeds, and I will tell all nations how great you are. ⁷ They will celebrate and sing about your matchless mercy and your power to save.

⁸ You are merciful, LORD! You are kind and patient and always loving. ⁹ You are good to everyone, and you take care of all your creation. ¹⁰ All creation will thank you, and your loyal people will praise you. ¹¹ They will tell about your marvelous kingdom and your power. ¹² Then everyone will know about the mighty things you do and your glorious kingdom. ¹³ Your kingdom will never end, and you will rule forever.

Our LORD, you keep your word and do everything you say. ¹⁴ When someone stumbles or falls, you give a helping hand. ¹⁵ Everyone depends on you, and when the time is right, you provide them with food. ¹⁶ By your own hand you satisfy the desires of all who live. ¹⁷ Our LORD, everything you do is kind and thoughtful, ¹⁸ and you are near to everyone whose prayers are sincere. ¹⁹ You satisfy the desires of all your worshipers, and you come to save them when they ask for help. ²⁰ You take care of everyone who loves you, but you destroy the wicked.

²¹ I will praise you, LORD, and everyone will respect your holy name forever.

Do you now have a better sense of how God cares?

GOD HAS A PLAN

KEY CONCEPTS OF THE QUALITIES OF GOD [PARAPHRASED FROM THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS BY RANDY FRAZEE AND BELIEVE]

> God is above us (transcendent)

< God is above all; and he is not bound by any of the circumstances or events controlling us.

< He has created everything, and therefore he has complete authority and is in complete control.

< So why does a God who has everything care about me?

FROM PSALM 8

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels [or God] and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet.*

< He cares because He chooses to.

(* *The word Elohim used in verse 5 can mean angelic creatures, but here it definitely means "God."* -- from Transformation Study Bible.

^ Instead of humans being a little higher than the animals, as science believes, they are actually a little lower than God.

^ The Lord gave Adam and Eve dominion over the other creatures (Gen. 1:26-27).

"We are co-regents of creation with the Lord!" – from Transformation Study Bible

> God is near (immanent)

< While God is above the world of all the things of life that overwhelm us, he also chooses to draw near to us.

< He comes down to meet us where we are.

< God is able to draw close to us, to care and love us; that is beyond our comprehension.

FROM PSALM 121:

He will not let your foot slip — he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you — the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm — he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

FROM THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS by Randy Frazee

Once we accept the fact that God wants to care for us, we are still left to ponder how he has the capacity to do so. I'm a runner and have been for quite some time. A few years back, my daughter introduced me to a smartphone app called RunKeeper. This app tells me how far I've run, my average time per mile, and my overall times, and it also shows me an overview map of exactly where I have run. If I showed you my history on this app, you would see maps of beaches, mountains, and all kinds of locations and terrains. Even more amazing, RunKeeper not only tracks and records my locations; it does so for ten million other runners as well. If humans can invent a piece of technology to track the steps of ten

million people simultaneously, is it really much more of a stretch to believe a transcendent and immanent God can track six billion of us? But he goes a step further. The app doesn't care about me; God does!

> God has a plan (provident)

< God is not just near us; he has a plan for our lives from the moment of our creation.

FROM PSALM 139

Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

< God's plan is good for those who trust and follow him.

PHILIPPIANS 1:6

[I am] confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

ROMANS 8:28

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

< These verses are for us today. God has a plan for everyone who will follow him.

We saw in the story of Hezekiah (pgs. 34-35 in BELIEVE) that God will hear our prayers and see our tears.

> He may not answer us in the way we desire, but he will sometimes alter the plan he has for us at the request of his children.

We saw in the story of Jeremiah (pgs. 35-37 in BELIEVE) that the prophet's words, though faithfully given, went unheeded.

> God knew that the people would not listen, but Jeremiah's task was simply to be faithful and courageous and to deliver the message from God.

> That's all he asks of us, our faithfulness and willingness to carry on the task(s).

GOD CARES FOR US

Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth. He was born as a human baby and lived among us. His arrival removes any doubt about the nearness of God in our lives. Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us."

MATTHEW 6:25-32

"I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.'"

These words about a loving Father show a God who is not out to get us, but rather to redeem us.

He is not out to destroy us, but to restore us.

FROM THE TRANSFORMATION STUDY BIBLE

...worry is sinful. We may dignify worry by calling it by some other name—concern, burden, a cross to bear—but the results are still the same. Instead of helping us live longer, anxiety only makes life shorter. The Greek word translated “to worry” literally means “to be drawn in different directions.” Worry pulls us apart. Until humans interfere, everything in nature works together because all of nature trusts God. People however are pulled apart because they try to live by depending on material wealth.

Is it true that worry pulls us in different directions?

Warren Wiersbe’s quote “Until humans interfere, everything in nature works together because all of nature trusts God. People however are pulled apart because they try to live by depending on material wealth.” is somewhat bold. What is your reaction to this statement?

After Jesus’ death on the cross, he ascended back to the Father in heaven. Then God the Holy Spirit descended on all who believed in Jesus. The dwelling place for God was no longer in temples built by human hands but in the very inner spirits of his people. From the inside out the Holy Spirit speaks to us, ministers to us, affirms us, directs us, challenges us and empowers us.

In our BELIEVE book we find Romans 8:12-39. This passage full of promises. Take some time to list some of them:

What amazing love God has for his people! James, in the NT book he authored, reminded readers that God is involved in and cares about their daily lives — although they too had a role to play.

JAMES 1:2-4

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Expect trials—they will come.

- > Some come because we are human: sickness, accidents, disappointments, some tragedies
- > Some come because we are Christians. Satan fights us and the world opposes us, it's a battle.

What does it mean to “consider” in verse 2?

- > When we face the trials of life, we must evaluate them in the light of what God is doing for us.
- > “Consider” doesn’t mean we deny the difficulty in trials. It means we learn to see beyond the difficulties to the good results that might come through trials.

JAMES 1:12

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

- > The final result of faithful perseverance is the crown of life.

As believers, we can acknowledge God’s involvement in our lives, even during seasons of trial. We can seek God and ask him for wisdom.

JAMES 1:5-8

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

Someone has said that knowledge is the ability to take things apart, while wisdom is the ability to put them together. Wisdom is the right use of knowledge.

According to the above statement does wisdom bring knowledge or does knowledge bring wisdom? Can one be used without the other?

James not only encourages us to ask for wisdom, he describes how we are to ask for it.

How are we to ask for wisdom? _____

We must also be careful not to blame God for our trials and temptations and realize that every good gift comes from his hand.

JAMES 1:13-15, 17-18a

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-

grown, gives birth to death. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth,

“A temptation is an opportunity to accomplish something good in a bad way, out of the will of God.” -Warren Wiersbe

What do you think this quote means?

We may think of sin as a single act, but God sees it as a process that leads to spiritual death.

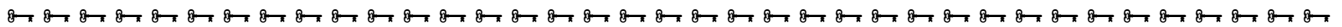
> *Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

One of Satan’s tricks is to convince us that our Heavenly Father is holding out on us, that he doesn’t really love us.

> When he tempted Eve it was with the idea that God did not really love her because He was withholding something good from her.

> When he tempted Jesus he also posed the question of God’s love (Matt. 4:1-4).

> Once we start to doubt God’s goodness, we will be attracted to Satan’s offers.



FROM *THINK, ACT, BELIEVE LIKE JESUS* by Randy Frazee

KEY APPLICATION: What difference does this make in the way I live?

How can believing this truth about God as a personal and good God — not only in our mind (understanding) but also in our heart — guide the way we live?

God’s ways are higher than our ways.

> In the book of Isaiah, we find God’s comparison of his perspective versus our own. He uses the distance between heaven and earth to teach us the breadth and depth of his being:

ISAIAH 55:8-9

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

We are tempted to make frantic decisions because we can’t see our way. We can’t see around the next bend in the road. God’s ways are higher than our ways, because he is seated above on his throne. When we feel that we don’t understand God’s instruction in his Word, we must remember that he sees things from above and we don’t.

God, who controls nature and history, knows and cares about us.

> Throughout the Gospels, Jesus conveyed God’s care for his children. In Matthew 6, he gave us the profound encouragement to live a life free of worry and fear, leaning fully on our faith:

MATTHEW 6:25-32

“I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.’”

These words about a loving Father paint a vivid picture of a God who is not out to get us, but rather to redeem us. He is not out to destroy us, but rather to restore us.

God is working out his good plan for our lives.

> ... If we truly believe God is involved in and cares about our daily lives, then we can know every morning as we wake up that his heart is to show us his plan...

> We can also know that in the tough times God will see us through and draw us ever closer to him. His heart is to keep us close to him, no matter what circumstances we may be walking through.

So, what do you believe? Do you believe God is good? Do you believe he is involved in and cares about your daily life? If the answer is yes, then live each day as though it is true. Ponder the difference this can make in your life.