

**THE TWO  
PERSONALITIES  
OF GOD  
YOU NEVER  
KNEW YOU  
NEEDED**

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## Meeting the Personal God

The plane never arrived in Phoenix and I learned a new meaning of a certain three-letter word.

I sat on the aisle seat, my mom squashed next to me, and my 14-year-old sister watching the airport activity from the window. I was more than ready to trade the green grass of Maryland for the green bodies of cacti in Arizona.

We were restless with eagerness for our trip to my aunt's house in Tucson, but takeoff was well overdue, and we were still on the tarmac. The power flickered on and off, dimming the cabin in the late morning sun. Even the emergency floor strip lights fell dark. Even to my flying-inexperienced 16-year-old self, that didn't seem normal. Maintenance crew moved in and out and under the plane, pulling off this and that and looking busy.


Shouldn't the plane be operational before passengers boarded? Conversation hummed in the cabin, bins clicked overhead, paper tickets and magazines and air sickness bags susurrated. The auditory detritus of the flight that never was. We must be getting close to takeoff, I thought, because the next sound shook through my seat as the engines powered up.

From our position behind the aircraft's left wing, we had a perfect view of what came next. A blue flame, 10 feet long, shot from the engine and burned, never sputtering or going out, a flame like a steady blowtorch. We three glanced at each other, waiting for passengers in front and behind to comment on the eruption.

No one spoke a word.

My fingers gripped the armrest as an invisible band wrapped tightened around my chest. I could imagine the news story – not long from now - interrupting regular programming with breaking news. I could imagine my father, sitting alone

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among desserts and meals dropped off by family and friends to feed the sole member of our family in his time of grief.

“I don’t want to stay on this plane,” my sister whispered.

I heartily agreed but, get this, I didn’t want to look silly, so if it had been up to me, then I would have watched the engine blaze and hoped the ground crew noticed. Yeah. (But “fear of man” is a subject for another day.)

Thankfully, responsible adults still existed. My mom flagged down a flight attendant and informed her of the situation and we held our breath as she hurried away (you know how they can hurry without looking “alarming”?). Moments later the co-pilot stood next to our row.

“Sometimes jet fuel pools in the engine and makes it flame until the fuel burns off,” he explained.

Hmmmm. And you still want to fly this bad boy?

Despite the co-pilot’s assurances, a plane full of people emptied back into the terminal. Not long after, we were soaring into the blue sky in a new plane. We had left the ground behind, but I had brought something profound with me, something burning bright and clean and strong.

We landed in Phoenix and rented a car for our drive to Tucson, but my heart had yet to return to earth. I felt like I was floating. What I felt then was the personal touch of God. The goodness of God and His personal concern for me shook me with gratitude. Yes, He had saved everyone else on that plane. But He’d also saved me. His goodness was shared, yet it was also personal. My thoughts traveled sweetly with Him as we sped past yellow grass and a dark split in the earth that opened and widened further with every mile, like a smile slow to spread across a face.


The split in the earth yawned wider. The road wound higher. I traveled through the land of personal and now, as fog cocooned the car, I entered the stomping grounds of the profound. If God was personal, He was also vast, powerful.

## Meeting the Powerful God

We had a few hours to see it. After a quick overnight stay, we would head south.

This was our only chance.

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My eyes were hungry, but the weather wasn't cooperating. Did you know clouds only blanket this natural wonder a few days out of every year? Most visitors get a blue sky with panoramic views.

But this was the day of unusual things, and we must've drawn the weather lottery because our slim slice of time coincided with nearly white-out conditions.

At this elevation, the cloud cover wasn't just above us, but below and around. I could've felt cheated that we had blackout curtains over the window to a magnificent sight. But just as curtains shut out light, they also move in the opposite direction: reveal.

Revelation.

The three of us stood behind guard rails and waited. We didn't stand on a promise and we could've departed from the overlooks and toward Phoenix without a glimpse of what came next.

But just as God can be maddeningly reclusive at times, He often has a flair for the dramatic when it comes to His creations.

The curtain of clouds parted as if on cue. The Grand Canyon is viewed by millions of visitors every year, yet I felt like God's sole witness to His creative delight.

Seeing the vastness, not empty like space but crowded with peaks of glory, was like sunlight bleaching my heart. My heart was ready to be written on by God. Tell me more, Lord, because I had no idea.


Images on television and in books are limited by the confines of camera angles, print page sizes, and television screens that only stretch so far. But in person? The soul can only imagine.

There are no words. Well, there is one word. *Awe*.

The clouds closed again. Over the next few hours, the dense white cover would break open and shut again, and we would dance in and snap photographs. Later, we'd try to explain the unexplainable majesty and size, the limitless reaches of red rock because photographs put this place on a human scale where it was never meant to lay.

The cloud cover that obscured a longer view of the canyons was a gift.

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If we'd watched the crack in the earth open all the way up our long drive, knowing what was coming and witnessing the fracture break into impossible heights and depths, we would've had a finer view, but lost something, I think, in the sharp contrast between blindness and revelation: the space for awe.

The limits of time created preciousness because it was fleeting, uncatchable, uncontrollable.

God as His power feels this way, too.

## **Does God care about me personally? Why we need to know our Personal God**

On the plane, I felt God's personal concern for me. In the clouds swathing the canyon and in the sudden breaking open to glory, I felt His power.

But He also felt vast, high, unapproachable, unattainable.

As believers, we need both the powerful and the personal God. God has not two faces, like two sides of a coin, but all in all. He's not a powerful but a personal God – He's a powerful and a personal God. All in all, and One. We fail ourselves and our Father when we try to tease apart what was always meant to be one.

The powerful God – the high, unapproachable God of the canyon - must not eclipse our vision of the God nearby. The person of God is intimate, too.

A powerful God too often feels cold, distant, like a sun so bright but unapproachable, even dangerous. Power often blocks intimacy, and that was never God's desire. Jesus is proof of a personal God, yet the religious leaders of His day struggled to accept a personal God into their view of the all-powerful but aloof God they worshiped:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier [matters] of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” Matthew 23:23 NKJV

Without a personal picture of God, we give too much weight to externals: am I doing enough and doing it right? Am I paying tithe of mint and anise and cumin and letting the personal cultivation of justice and mercy and faith go hungry? Without a personal picture of God, we do something funny: we stop praying. God doesn't

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answer my prayers, so why bother? Does God care about me? Does He notice me on the tarmac and not just at the canyon?

The personable, personified God in Jesus is usually our favorite, and we don't require much convincing to focus on the powerful God's intimate nature. We are comfortable with our Friend God.

## **Can God really do anything? Why we need to know our Powerful God**

But we lose something when we shun the powerful God for our favorite view of Him. We enjoy the personal God because we feel known and beloved. We trust that not a sparrow falls apart from His presence.

But what happens when we push aside the vast, unapproachable light for the more comfortable Friend God? We lose reverence for Him.

Reverence tells our hearts that He is God and we are not and that is good. We lose reverence and bring God down to a human scale and imprint on Him our frailties: can God really do anything? Did He wind up the universe and depart, allowing matter and time to continue its eternal revolutions without Him? Does God ache over sin anymore? Will God really judge the earth one day, then make it new?

When His intimate, close nature clouds our vision and obscures His power, we often do a strange thing: we stop praying. Our souls doubt His power to make impossible changes in our lives. We love the God on the ground, but we need the God of the canyon, too.

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I could write: Let us hold hands with the personal God and the powerful God, but that would be inaccurate. It is God who holds onto us. We need to trust that the powerful God loves us on the small scale. We need to trust that the personal God works on our behalf on the grand scale.

The powerful hand of God is also the nail-scarred hand of our friend Jesus.

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