

The Majestic Truth of God's Glory

A member of Harvest Rock Church shared this story with me:

A few years ago, I was desperately seeking more of God. I spent hours praying and meditating on Scripture, but I couldn't seem to get filled. I wanted—indeed, craved—more!

I had been in my bedroom seeking God on my face for several hours when I felt a presence begin to intensify in the room. It is hard to describe, but it felt like a warmth and peace invading the atmosphere. In my spirit, I heard the Lord quietly speak: I want to come in here with you. May I get closer? I audibly replied, “Yes, Lord.”

The presence began to intensify. A sense of weight, a kind of heaviness, began to grow. I felt the warmth begin to surge around my body, as if I were being surrounded by a whirlpool of warm energy. It was exhilarating, and for a few moments I felt incredible peace and bliss, close to ecstasy. The presence kept intensifying, and suddenly I realized I was in the grip of Someone vast, beyond my comprehension.

I was overwhelmed by it all, and I cried out, “Lord, you’re frightening me.” Immediately, the presence pulled back and gave me space. I sensed at once both the Lord’s eagerness to be close to me and His desire to respect my limitations and not frighten me. It was a bittersweet moment, and I burst into tears as I suddenly understood how much more He longed for me than I did for Him.

This story makes me smile because it depicts a tendency we all have. We all want the Lord—until He actually shows up and we encounter His glory! Suddenly we are confronted by His reality, rather than just having knowledge about Him. At such

times, all our doctrinal decrees of what God is like and how He behaves simply evaporate.

It is easy to confuse our ideas about God with God Himself. Even our ideas based on Scripture cannot contain the reality of direct exposure to God and His glory. Kris Vallotton, in his book *Developing a Supernatural Lifestyle*, puts it this way:

Many people know the Bible and think they know the Lord. The goal of the Scriptures is to lead us into a relationship with Jesus. Having a relationship with God should never be mistaken for knowing the Scriptures. If knowing the Bible was synonymous with knowing God, the Pharisees and Scribes would have rocked!

If we want to know God personally and relate to Him intimately, we must be prepared to receive and experience His glory.

God and His Glory Inseparable

We simply cannot have a living encounter with God without encountering His glory. This cannot happen any more than I can visit you and leave my body at home. Everywhere I go my body goes, because my body and I are one. The same is true for God and His glory—they are one. When God shows up, so does His glory.

As God's presence invades our surroundings, His glory enters and often manifests itself. This experience may be beautiful and inspiring, as it was for us with the angelic visitation at Mott Auditorium. Or, an experience of His glory may be overwhelming or heart-rending or even mirthful. No matter what our experience, encountering His glory always impacts and changes us. It stretches our understanding of God and His ways and frequently challenges our current conceptions of Him. Although our words about God are safe and containable, God

Himself is not, and this is also true of His glory. It is untamable, unpredictable and frequently provokes controversy, especially when it violates our “norms” for God.

Just what is God’s glory?

Glory Defined

Most attributes of God are far too vast to define. This applies whether we’re speaking of God’s mercy and love or of His righteousness and judgment. The same is true of His glory. The Bible uses words for *glory* more than 350 times, making it one of Scripture’s primary themes and one with many dimensions.

To help briefly define glory, I consulted two professors at Azusa Pacific University who are members of Harvest Rock Church, the husband-wife team of Dr. Todd Pokrifka, professor of New Testament Theology, and Dr. Junia Pokrifka, professor of Old Testament Theology. In their thorough study of the concept of God’s glory in Scripture, the Pokrifkas identified two main categories of glory: God’s *eternal* glory and His *manifest* glory. Here is a summation of what they shared with me.

God’s Eternal Glory and His Manifest Glory

Very few passages in the Bible speak directly of or allude to God’s *eternal* glory, but many refer to His *manifest* glory. The distinction between these two categories of glory can be illustrated in terms of light. In fact, the Bible often uses the language of light to describe God’s glory.

Think of the sun and the sun’s light. The *eternal* glory of God is like the sun itself, far too fiery and brilliant for us to encounter directly or even to look at. But the sun’s light manifests itself to us in a variety of ways. It illuminates darkness, revealing the objects around us. It gives us spectacular light displays in beautiful sunrises and brilliant

sunsets. It warms us and even tans our skin. Everywhere the sun goes, the sun's light goes. But the sun's light is not the sun itself. Rather, the light we experience from the sun is a *manifestation* of the sun.

This distinction is helpful in understanding God's glory. His *eternal* glory is like the sun: It is His very essence, beyond our comprehension or ability to encounter. Yet His *manifest* glory is like the sun's light: a reflection of Him that we can encounter in ways we are able to perceive, whether through physical healing, a peaceful presence in our spirit, or an angelic visitation.

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