

R.T. Kendall: The Most Comforting Thought I Can Think

“Can your [spouse] be your enemy?” That question came from a minister in Northern Ireland after I preached a sermon on praying for your enemies. “Yes,” I replied. That conversation led me to insert a chapter called “An Unhappy Marriage” in my book *Thorn in the Flesh*. Paul coined the phrase “thorn in the flesh” to describe an extreme form of God’s chastening, or disciplining. Paul said that God sent to him to keep him humble—to keep him from being conceited or admired too much (2 Cor. 12:7).

Paul admitted to needing a thorn in the flesh. If he needed it, how much more do I need it? Do you need a thorn in the flesh? Paul stated that he needed this because he had seen so many revelations and visions. These experiences of God could tempt him to boast a lot. So in order to keep him from being exalted too much, God sent this thorn in the flesh to him—a painful nuisance that would not go away even though he asked God three times to remove it.

In introducing his thorn in the flesh, the apostle Paul refers to one of his visions—when he was translated to the “third heaven.” Whether this experience was “in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows,” says Paul (2 Cor. 12:2b, NIV).

“God knows”—possibly a throwaway comment—forms the foundation for this book and especially this chapter.

Speaking personally, the very knowledge that *God knows* is what has served to motivate me to live for an audience of one. He is fully aware of what is going on, what I am thinking and what I say. The God of glory is my audience of one. When I

write, I am, of course, aware of you, my reader, but I am mainly writing for Him. It is His approval, not yours, I am after. When I preach, I am speaking before God, though I am aware of my listeners. When I speak to my wife, I am conscious of what I say, but I keep in mind that He is listening. When I speak to people—whether to thousands or to one person on a plane, on a train, at a ticket counter or on the telephone—I must remember that God knows what I am saying. He knows my true motive. If I did not believe that God knows what I am thinking at every moment, I would not need to watch what I say or do. The truth is, whether I like it or not, He does know. It is what motivates me to be a better person in all I think, say and do.

The knowledge that He knows is the most comforting thought I can think of. He knows when I am low. When I am mistreated. When I am spoken evil of. When I am lied about. When I am under financial pressure. When I am ill. When I am depressed. God knows. Hallelujah!

And yet, what is most sobering (often painful) is that God knows my *true* motive in what I do! I can play games sometimes with myself, but when I pause and reflect that He knows exactly *why* I am up to something, it often stops me from making a foolish mistake.

If you are like me, one of the more common faults we make is to run ahead of the Lord. Joseph and Mary did this. They went a whole day's journey, "thinking he was in their company" (Luke 2:44a), but He wasn't. It is so easy to assume the Lord approves of our plans merely because we truly want to please Him, because we have spent time with Him and have even sensed His approval in so much of what we do. And yet it is still very possible to go ahead of Him, thinking He is behind our plans. When we move ahead like this, we are on our own. It is a precarious place to be! {eo}

✘ *Adapted from For an Audience of One by R. T. Kendall,*

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Prayer Power for the Week of March 22, 2020

This week, let knowing that God knows it all comfort you as you face the enormous challenges we all individually and collectively face as a nation. Continue to pray that our leaders would have supernatural wisdom to make the decisions affecting our nation and the world. Thank the Lord that He has promised to be our healer and our provider as well as our Savior and Lord. Continue to pray for revival and that people, young and old, would call out to Him during this crisis. Read: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 5:7.