

DOES GOD HIDE?

Janet Chester Bly

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"Why can't I see God?" a child asks.

A mom wonders the same thing. . .when she's desperate for help in doing marriage, or raising kids, or getting sure guidance in a critical decision.

When God's existence comes in question, he seems as mysterious as wind. But at least you see where the wind blows.

If God is so great, what's the point of concealed charms or shrouded charisma? Why is he masked in mystery? Must you wait until you die to know for sure if he's real or not?

Why can't proof of God be produced on demand? Wouldn't the whole world rush to his feet, if he suddenly appeared as he is? Isn't that what he wants? Why does he hover in a misty blur?

Why can't you see him right now?

On the other hand, if you did claim to see God, what would folks around you think? That you're super-blessed? Or that you're wacky?

Those Who've Claimed To See Him

The guy with the loopy grin slurs, "No problem for me. He appears whenever I take drugs."

But Adam and Eve truly could claim him as their close and personal friend. They visited with him every day. In their garden. Until they blew it. Broke The #1 and Only Rule. They're the ones who hid. . .in the dahlias. Walks in the cool of the evening gave way to games of hide-and-seek.

But others asserted they spied him too. Here's a few samples. . .

Stephen, as a crowd threw stones at him: "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-58).

Moses peeked at his "backsides" as he passed by (Exodus 33:19-23).

Jacob saw God in the form of an angel (Genesis 28:10-16). So did Samson's parents (Judges 13:22).

The visible appearance of God is called in theology a “theophany.”

What a person ‘sees’
are the effects of God’s unmediated presence.

Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary

The Bible says no one has ever truly seen God in *all* his display of glory and holiness, except Jesus (see Exodus 33:20 and John 1:18).

Why You Can’t See Him

But even if our gospel is veiled,
it is veiled to those who are perishing,
whose minds the god of the age has blinded

2 Corinthians 4:3,4 NKJV

Is the inability to see God. . .your fault? Or his choice?

Faulty View

Some claim: it is not God who hides. . .it is you who cannot see. You possess a very limited viewfinder. You need a more panoramic perspective, a wider sweep of vision, beyond your present cramped posture. If you had supernatural eyes, you could see God and his glory in and through everything.

You’re like a rider in a Bev Doolittle painting, trotting the streams, among the random boulders, the spill of rocks and vast varieties of trees – past the communities of life, oblivious to the creatures, the faces in the forest, the eyes that watch you. Like changing images that

suddenly move when you flip pages of drawings, you can’t see the movie until all the still images on film move fast enough.

It’s like trying to decipher a camouflaged smiley face in a puzzle maze of thick vines and jungle bushes. But once you do, you’re always able to see it. If you spy him even once, you know he’s there.

The problem is not that God can’t be seen or heard, but that you can choose to harden your heart. If you refuse knowledge of him to penetrate your stubborn mind, that’s a barrier impossible to break through. Except through a miracle. And with God all things are possible.

At best, your knowledge of God is the size of a seed. Spiritual knowledge spans the universe in comparison. That’s why you’ll need all eternity to explore his greatness.

The Bible says that there’s plenty of sufficient evidence to prove God’s existence, but some people insist on staying blind to that fact. In fact, they suppress the truth of God whenever and however they can (see Romans 1:19-21).

Consider this:

If a person opposes
even the possibility of there being a God,
then any evidence
can be rationalized or explained away.

<http://www.everystudent.com/features/isthere.html>

Living in Dark Shadows.

At present we see as through a glass, darkly...
1 Cor. 13:12 KJV

You can’t see him because it’s too dark where you’re at.

When depressed, when covered in the black web of despair, you lose your balance and bearings. You tell yourself, “It’s always going to be this way” or “there is no hope.” You’re trapped by what you think you see, while beyond you is the real world.

He’s with you, but you don’t notice. . . because you’re too busy with stress and stuff.

Because you don’t know what to look for. You miss him in this world because of inattentive living, a fidgety focus.

You’re blindsided when you receive a shallow education, rife with political correctness rather than a sweeping, impartial human history. You’re poverty stricken when you’re taught pathetic, ignorant opinions of God.

It's hard to see God when he competes with your obsessions or moral failures (Isaiah 54:8). There are times when you'd gladly not see him, or closer to the truth, have him see you, (Psalm 51:9). Moral choices force you to quail behind trees, hunker down in bushes.

Some sins are so entwined in your nature, you don't recognize them. You're saturated with self-interest. You often doubt the goodness of God because your little world is not, at this moment, fun or safe or cushy.

Without holiness no one will see the Lord.

Hebrews 12:14

You have this question uppermost in your mind, whether conscious or not, "But, God, what are you doing for me right now?" You judge God by what's happening to you, not by who he is, or where he's active in other people's lives.

Puffed-up pride's a big barrier. The arrogant cannot stand in his presence (Psalm 5:5).

But the most chronic error of all is to assign premature judgments to deep, ancient mysteries and secret counsels in sacred places.

In the real world, you learn to live with mystery. . .sometimes take it for granted, other times relish figuring it all out. You don't absolutely see lots of things, like electricity or x-rays or DNA or love, yet you trust their existence by certain signs. By informed faith.

Most folks enjoy the unfolding of a plot in a good mystery, the unveiling of a plan by a brilliant strategist. You hope it's worth the wait, so you can admire the craftsmanship. You 'ooh' and 'ah.' You appreciate the challenge. You also want a fair shake.

Sometimes it seems God's not giving that to you. That's because. . .

The World's Against You

John Eldredge points out in his book, *Waking The Dead*, that each of us is born smack dab into spiritual warfare. You're born on a battlefield. You contend with a fallen angel and his forces, who are insanely jealous of God and want to usurp his power.

It's not easy to see a holy God in a hostile environment or a tyrannical system. If you're alert at all to what's going on, you're overwhelmed by disease and war, famine and fear, ancient hates and rancid bitterness. Many voices you hear, most every word you read, interprets the notion that there is a good God over it all as an illusion, a false positive of your senses. The world's system defaults to a mechanistic view. If there's any God, the one who's got the biggest toys, the most known name, the largest votes is it. So, go and worship.

You're living in a time of great rebellion against the knowledge of God, especially as revealed through his Son, Jesus. It's almost impossible to see God when the evil one steals trust, kills joy, or destroys incentive. You have an enemy who's bent on doing as much bad as possible and get you to blame it all on God. He's very angry. And he knows his time is short.

Sight itself doesn't always present the best information to your senses. Sometimes I can create at the computer better with my eyes closed. I'm not distracted by other sensory perceptions. I keep my mind on the present thought alone. Of course, that's possible because I memorized the keyboard years ago in a high school class. Even when the letters rub off my keys, I can keep communicating my thoughts on the screen.

Think how insane it would be if you could suddenly tune into God as he is in the whole universe. You'd be overwhelmed and "deafened by the sound of God speaking in the heavens—through space and time, past stars and worlds beyond" (John Fischer). Your hearing is limited to a very narrow frequency band, to keep you from going mad. But to hear nothing at all is equally nuts.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities
—his eternal power and divine nature—
have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made,

so that men are without excuse.

Romans 1:20

The good news: When you're forever cured of sin, you will see God as he fully is.

His Choice

God is Spirit, and those who worship Him
must worship Him in spirit and truth.

John 4:24 NKJ

Spirits are like birds, according to some poets as Percy Shelley and John Keats. Graceful motion. Lightning-quick. A symbol of peace. Gentle. A good omen.

John said at Jesus' baptism, "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him" (John 1:32). Doves represent purity and meekness. They're clean birds, appropriate for a temple sacrifice.

God is spirit. You are flesh. The two can't co-exist or communicate, unless one becomes the other. Unless he takes up a form you recognize.

You don't see him because he transcends the aerosphere. . .he is not part of space because he is all of space. To see him, one would have to be able to take in at once all of time and the vast wild blue yonder. Some kind of un-transcendence is essential. You can't see him unless he allows you to. He's already given you some ways to detect him—through your senses. You might see him or hear him or both. He might assume your form. But there would still be way more to him than he had made known.

(the above adapted from

<http://www.everystudent.com/journeys/who2/html>).

It's difficult to comprehend him because he's not limited by time, like you are. He has no beginning, nor an end. That doesn't compute to your experience, your frame of reference.

His Creations

But he has provided evidence of his existence, his power, his incredible creativity. . .right out your front door. He has little patience with those who disregard the obvious.

For what can be known about God is plain to them,
because God has shown it to them.

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature,
have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world,
in the things that have been made.

So they are without excuse.

Romans 1:19,20

Check out the magnitude of it all. Admire the order and design. Enjoy the beauty—let it sink in deep to your psyche. Who turned the daylight on around you and placed the nightlight above you? What wisdom, what power resides behind this daily audacious display?

No matter where you go or what time period you live in, the expanse and the cosmos gush with knowledge of God. No words needed. But you must engage your mind and focus. .

God is known only by self-revelation--that is, you know only what he lets you know. He will have to open the eyes of your heart. . .to see him high and lifted up, shining in the light of his glory

Skeptics, atheists and agnostics will consider that a copout. However, God cannot be compelled to appear on demand. He may do whatever he wants. He's not governed by the natural laws of this earth. He's a citizen of multi-dimensions of existence. . .like when Jesus passed through the walls of the upper room after his resurrection (Luke 24; John 20).

You may not see God because you've been taught and trained not to see him. Your spiritual sense may be stunted or even withered. If a person refuses to believe that a man walked on the moon. . .or that there was ever a holocaust against the Jews. . .or that Jesus was a historical person. . .then any evidence to the contrary is dismissed as a fabrication.

God is hard to hold down. He can't be owned or controlled. "He's not a tame lion," C.S. Lewis opines in his Narnia tales.

.and propensity to believe. Without this foundation, you can't know the real truth about yourself, your world, or about God.

The knowledge concerning God,
revealed worldwide from the heavens,
is the foundation for a world-life view.

Renald E. Showers

There's a universal harmony that governs the structure and flow of the natural world. Author Randy Alcorn notes that the material realm, all good gifts, are instruments that communicate his love and character.

It takes incredible arrogance or ignorance to not be impressed with what it takes for non-living matter to exist. Years ago the government embarked on a failed experiment to create matter. The Supercollider included miles and miles of underground tunnel through which atoms would travel at supersonic speeds and then smash into each other in order to create a tiny particle. All that for the most microscopic bit of matter. And turned up *nada*.

<http://www.everystudent.com/journeys/something.html>

God discloses himself through his artistry, through earthy pleasures. . . the scent of a rose, the pound of waves on a seashore, robins chirping. "In the beginning, God created. . ." (Genesis 1:1). There you have it, plain and simple. . .and yet refuted by many. You believe it. . .or not. It's up to you.

The whole cosmos shouts that something or somebody's got to be out there, influencing all that awesome activity, all that showy display. It should be obvious to every thinking human that none of us had anything to do with it. Yet there's a magnitude of distinctive beauty everywhere we look that boggles the brain. It's the ultimate whodunit.

The glow of dew-wet grasses. The moon sparkled midnight snow. Nature gushes with exquisite artistry. His handprints mark every leaf and skeleton. His signature scrawls everywhere. There's no language barrier. Kings and pigmies in the bush can study his silent message, see the signs. A worldwide witness exists, available to anyone.

The grandeur of the Rocky Mountains, the warmth of a spouse's hugs, the sharp grief at the closing of a friend's casket. . .author Kurt Bruner calls these inklings of truth about God, "clues to a spiritual reality concealed from our eyes, but known to our hearts."

Has it ever occurred to you that the very fact that you have the ability to believe or not believe in God provides one tenant that he exists? Otherwise, you could be a dumb thing, with no capacity to conceive of knowing anything beyond your immediate lair or desire anything more basic than where you're going to get your next lunch.

It's clear that there's intelligence behind flora and fauna, hazelnuts and humans. Even your ability to study and appreciate and enjoy these things, confirms a genius at work in your formation.

It's amazing that though Earth has been trampled by armies, burned by firestorms, savaged by quakes, wonders still abound. Nature speaks to your senses—sight, sound, smell, touch.

Plato once said, "The creation, the universe, is beautiful because it perfectly reflects God's beauty who made it according to that beauty."

Professor George Smoot, who won a Nobel Prize in physics, worked with the COBE satellite detector NASA team when they made an important discovery. "What we found is evidence of the birth of the universe," he said. "If you're religious, it's like looking at God."

His Brilliance Personified

But who can live when he appears?
Who can endure his coming?

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For he is like a blazing fire refining precious metal,
and he can bleach the dirtiest garments.

Malachi 3:2 TLB

God's presence is the ultimate light show. He reveals himself in fiery clouds, burning bushes, flaming furnaces. Peering into his face without powerful eye guards could kill you. Even a glimpse could be terrifying. Even a brief view of divinity could cause paralysis, leave you awestruck. His holiness sears wayward souls. It's better to hear his voice than look into his eyes (Deuteronomy 5:26, Malachi 3:2).

God warns that no one can see him and live (Exodus 33:20), that is, his complete, actual being. Isaiah got a taste of that when he brushed up close to God's throne: "Woe is me!" (Isaiah 6:1-5, NKJV).

If you gaze at him too long in this flesh frame, your very soul burns.

Manoah cried out to his wife, "'We are doomed to die! We have seen God!" (Judges 13:22).

God understands that certain knowledge and sights would overload you.

I have much more to say to you,
more than you can now bear.

John 16:12

God seems silent sometimes. . .because he can only tell the truth. Maybe you're not ready to hear it, not able to endure it. When God seems distant. . .it could mean that he has already told you about the matter and he doesn't feel a need to repeat himself.

Some people accuse God of hiding. He says, "I'm here. You can see all of me you need to see."

God fills the universe, yet he's a gentleman. He asks permission to enter the deep places of your mind and heart.

Janet Chester Bly has authored 11 books on devotional topics, women's issues, and family, including *Awakening Your Sense of Wonder* and *Hope Lives Here*. She has also co-written 18 other books of nonfiction and fiction with her husband, Stephen, such as *The Hidden West Series* and *The Carson City Chronicles*. She serves as music director and teacher of special adults at Winchester Community Church in Winchester, ID. She enjoys instant gardening with hanging petunias, rustic country décor, and wearing dressy denim. You may contact her at address below or by e-mail: janet@blybooks.com or janetbly@connectwireless.us

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR STUDY GROUPS:

1.) On a scale of 1 (intolerable) to 10 (I'm okay with it), how do you cope with ideas or concepts you don't understand?

2.) Do you know someone who is 'blind' to God? If so, why is that?

3.) Have you ever seen or heard God? Explain.

4.) How do you describe God's invisible nature to your own satisfaction? Or to skeptics?

5.) Do you believe humans are capable of ever understanding everything about the universe? Why or why not?

6.) Read the following quote by John Navone and make a statement about what you think about it. How does it relate to the discussion of whether or not God created the world and everything in it?

"For some reason, the world has a structure such that the human mind can penetrate it by means of its own processes of thought. How can we account for this fact? It might have been the case that human beings had intelligence but that the world was not amenable to exploration by that intelligence. There could have been a lack of fit between the world and the human mind. . . All things can be known by us because they spring from God's thought. Because they originate in God's mind, things have not only their specific essence themselves and for themselves, but precisely because they originate in God's mind, they have as well an essence for us."

7.) Read Isaiah 33:14-16. Do you think anyone has a valid complaint that God does not reveal himself to humans whenever they want? Or that they can't see him here on earth in all his glory? Why or why not?

8.) Does the following statement make sense to you? Rephrase in your own words.

"If there ever was Absolutely Nothing, there would still be Absolutely Nothing today. Since there is something (you, for example), that means that Absolutely Nothing never existed. The Something that existed at the beginning must be able to exist without depending on anything else. . . totally self-sufficient. The Something that existed at the very beginning must have the ability to produce something other than Itself. . . or else that Something would be all that exists today. To produce Something Else out of nothing requires an incredible amount of power. So the Something must have great power at its disposal. <http://www.everystudent.com/journeys/something.html>

9.) Do you believe beyond any doubt that God exists? Explain.

Resources for further study:

Know Why You Believe, Paul E. Little

Creation, R.E.D. Clark

Evidence That Demands A Verdict, Josh McDowell

More Than A Carpenter, Josh McDowell