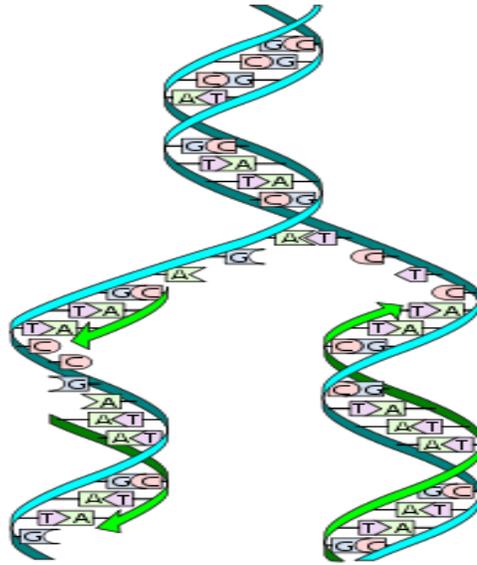


Carole and I moved into our Dallas apartment in late summer, 1964. The apartment was so small that it would fit on this platform. The kitchen had no counter space next to the stove. So, I decided to build one for my new bride. I found wood for the surface and two front legs, and I fastened the back of the counter to the wall. I thought this would be a good thing.

She came home from work and was delighted. She put a pot on the new counter, and the counter promptly fell to the floor in a heap. It wasn't fastened to the wall properly. Pathetic, pathetic, pathetic! I have not tried to build anything since.

Now, let me show you an image of a cell's DNA strand replicating itself.



How would you like to build one of those from scratch? When I think about that pathetic counter I put up in our kitchen, and then I think about the wisdom that thought up the double helix, I feel awe at the distance between “the maker of heaven and earth” and the little two-legged creatures who live upon the earth.

And I wonder: How can anything bridge that distance? We on this side of that gulf cannot bridge it. If the Maker of heaven and earth were willing to bridge it, how would He do it? How would we know He had done it? Why would He do it? Those questions did not begin with us, and answers to those questions did not begin with us.

### **Immanuel**

From earliest times the Maker of heaven and earth left clues to His existence and His nature that people could understand – at least a little. The clues signaled His desire to bridge the gulf between us. Then, among one people group the clues began to come more continuously and clearly. Alone among the nations of earth the Hebrews said there was only one God, and He had chosen them to bless all the nations of the earth – although they didn't have the slightest idea how they were supposed to do that.

Then, unexpectedly, from within that countercultural race of Hebrews a child was born to a peasant girl from Galilee. He spoke and acted in unprecedented ways. He antagonized the very people who, as we like to say, could have helped Him get ahead. They killed Him. He came back to life. And people started coming to the conclusion that He was the bridge the

Maker of heaven and earth had built to span the distance between Himself and us.

The Apostles' Creed bears witness to the bridge that God has built in five words: Conceived, Born, Crucified, Dead, and Buried. It is Humanity 101. We were all conceived, born, suffer, will die and be buried. We could not go to Him, but He has come to us by sharing our humanity. It is the grand miracle.

The New Testament bears witness to the bridge that God has built in the words of Jesus and His disciples. Jesus pointed us in the right direction when He said to His close follower, Philip, **"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father?"** (John 14:9)

The Apostle John summed up how the Church understood Jesus within a few years after His death and resurrection: **No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.** (John 1:18) "The eternal allied himself to us in our originated condition, and so provided us with a bridge to his eternity." (Augustine, quoted in Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, 283)

### Jesus Christ As Sacrament

But what kind of bridge is Jesus? I'd like to answer by placing in your mind the powerful word *sacrament*. A sacrament is a visible representation of invisible realities. Jesus is a sacrament. He is the visible representation of the incomprehensible Creator of all things. To have seen and heard Him and to read His story in the gospels is to see and hear God under human conditions. That is how we begin to know God. Here's an example of how Jesus reveals God to us. There are many more.

Would you perform an act of imagination? Call to mind what you cherish most in life. Now, call to mind your best friend. Would you sacrifice what you cherish most to help your friend? Would you sacrifice it for a stranger? Call to mind someone who is your enemy. Would you sacrifice what you cherish most to help your enemy? You don't want to do that. It's repulsive. You might be irritated at me for asking you to imagine such a monstrous thing.

We are to God what your enemy is to you. We can understand why **very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.** It is a mystery why **God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** (Romans 5:8) The apostle went on to say that **while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.** (Romans 5:10)

Jesus is the visible representation of the incomprehensible Creator of all things. To have seen and heard Him and to read His story in the gospels is to see and hear God under human conditions. What we see under those conditions is that at the heart of God is a heart of love. The Maker of heaven and earth remains incomprehensible, but we can relate to Him because, thanks to Christ, we now know that the power to love creates common ground between us.

### Knowing the Maker of Heaven and Earth

Christianity invites every one of us to know the Maker of heaven and earth. Make room in your soul for that possibility. God's desire is to bridge the distance that separates us from Him. Jesus did that. You need to personalize it. You can do that by answering some questions and taking action. I will propose three questions and one action.

Question #1: Do you want to know God? Do you want to know some of His

characteristics, purposes, and secrets? Think about that for a minute. Suppose you and I wanted to get to know each other. What would we have to do to make that happen? Getting to know another person takes time. It has awkward moments and easy moments. It risks and rewards. Getting to know God is like that. BVBC can help you, but only if you want it. Do you want to know God?

Question #2: Do you believe that Jesus makes it possible to know God? How intensely do you believe it? Jesus is the visible representation of the incomprehensible Creator of all things. I said BVBC could help you to know God. We will keep pointing you to Jesus Christ. Soak your soul in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. They will keep you reading for a lifetime. Read with awe. The gospels introduce you to your Lord, and your Lord makes it possible to know God.

Question #3: Why did God sacrifice what He cherished most for us when we were His enemies? BVBC can help you to know God, but only if you want it. I don't know that you will ever want it until you answer this third question. The answer takes you to the heart of Christ and Christianity. We are to God what your enemy is to you. And He did what for you? Think about it long and hard.

Action #1: Do something good this week for someone you don't like. One of the best ways to get to know God is to share and experience with Him. While we were God's enemies and couldn't care less about Him, He did something good for us. **He did not spare His own Son but freely gave Him up for us all.** (Romans 8:32) Doing something good this week for someone you don't like imitates in a small way the love of God. You begin to feel what He did for us. Your knowledge of the incomprehensible Creator grows.

You understand: I am not talking about being churchy. I am talking about knowing God. The Bible says: **This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, who you have sent.** (John 17:3) And why, exactly, does anything matter more than that to you?

Now, let's go deeper. Hebrews 12:7 says: **Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons.** We think of discipline as punishment, but think of athletes or soldiers in training. Think of a student mastering difficult math concepts or an author writing a book. The repetition, frustration, and break-throughs involved are the discipline Hebrews 12 has in mind.

Now Verses 10-11: **God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.**

Now, consider this: people who obey what they believe is the will of God will cause pain for themselves and for other people. When Christ said in the Garden of Gethsemane, **"Not my will but thine be done,"** He opened Himself up to the cross. When the Apostles decided that people did not have to become Jewish proselytes in order to be Christians, they deeply offended some of their fellow believers.

It is God's painful discipline, and it trains people for righteousness and peace; and it deepens our knowledge of the Maker of heaven and earth. Do you want to know God? Embrace His discipline.

**You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord.** (Jeremiah 29:13-14)