



Where was
God when...?
Real answers to hard questions.

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Chapter 1

Omniscience (Mike Calhoun)

We've all been there, but some of us don't want to admit it. How could we be so bold as to question if God really cares? Many of us have walked through a time in our lives when we thought God had abandoned us. He saved us and had done nice things for us, but at that moment, He just wasn't there. There's a song by BarlowGirl that expresses that feeling perfectly. It says, "I waited for you today. But you didn't show."

We pray and feel like our prayers don't get above the ceiling. So we recoil inside as the hard questions envelop us in darkness. The questions are very real and the answers are not easy. But we are never going to find those answers if we aren't willing to deal with them head-on, looking to the Bible for answers. Are you ready?

God is infinite

As we try to work through these questions, one difficult truth is that God is infinite and we are not. He's got the big picture, but our vision is limited to a very small part of the equation. And so we doubt.

We ask things like, “God, why would You let this happen?” The answer is more than a Christian cliché that ends with happily ever after. This real, complex truth can be found in God’s Word, but it’s often not until we experience it that we realize this truth, when we see how it works in real life. Going through the process of personal trials and tragedy has brought me to the point of realizing that the only answer to some of the difficult questions of life is, simply, God.

I know that sounds like a cliché. It sounds too simple, but believe me, there is nothing simple about that answer. There are no easy explanations for some of the things that happen in our world, because our minds are so finite. So, in order to deal with reality, we have to go back to the attributes—or characteristics—of an infinite God. These attributes tell us what God’s character is like and help us understand the answers to some of our questions.

God is omniscient

Omniscience means *God knows everything*.

Now, let’s leave the explanation of that statement aside for a second and complicate it a little bit. If God knows everything, then why does He allow so many terrible things to happen?

- If God knows everything, why do I feel so alone?
- God, if You are really in charge, if You really know everything, then why do I question whether or not You even exist?
- God, if You know everything, then why did You let my friend commit suicide?
- If you know everything, then listen, God, I have a question for you. Why did You let that person abuse me?
- God, if You’re really in control and You really know everything, then why can’t I get rid of this secret sin?
- God, if You really know everything, why don’t You fix everything, and why don’t You just fix everybody? Because if I was God, that’s what I would do.

You're not the first one to ask these questions. I can tell you this: I have asked the same questions. But do you realize that even some people in the Bible asked the same questions? You are probably familiar with the story of Job. He was a man who went through some incredible hardships, including bankruptcy, the death of his children, and physical illness. Throughout it all, Job remained faithful to God. But in the midst of the difficulty, he also had three serious questions he sincerely asked God.

His first question was, "Why was I ever born?" He followed that one up with, "Why didn't you just let me die at birth?" And then his last question, "Why can't I die now?"

Maybe you've thought that way before. I'd like to share with you something I went through.

March 14, 2002, started out like most other days. I got up early, went to the airport, and caught a flight. On this day I was flying into Atlanta and then going up to Chattanooga, Tennessee. I had meetings all weekend, but I was going to begin my weekend by spending some time with my daughter. We planned to go to a Christian concert, attend her church together, and just hang out.

Little did I know that before I even caught the plane, my daughter Misty would already be dead and she'd be in eternity. She was in a 125-car pileup and was one of the only five people in the entire accident who were killed.

I recorded my feelings in a journal throughout the entire nightmare. Because I didn't know how to express my thoughts verbally, I wrote them down. One of the mornings right after she died, I wrote this: "I woke up at 3:55 this morning, and my first thought was, 'One week ago, I buried my baby. She was 24, but she was still my baby. It seems like it was just yesterday, but yet it seems like an eternity. Some days it feels like it is happening in the present. I sit here looking at her picture, and I still cannot believe that she is really gone, but I know she is. God, I just don't understand.'"

There are some questions that all of our Christian clichés just don't answer. A week from the day we put my daughter's body in the ground, I went for a long walk, still trying to wrap my mind around all of what I was experiencing.

It has now been several years since her home-going, and even though I love God, and I love the Bible and I read it every day, I'm still trying to wrap my mind around what happened and why.

There are some questions that don't have easy answers. I still believe the answer is God, but that doesn't mean it's easy. We all have to really wrestle with the truth about God right where we live, in the situations we face every day.

So, let me ask you a couple questions.

What is really the truth about God? If we're going to say that God is the answer to the hard questions, then what is the real truth about God? What does it mean when we say, "He is omniscient"?

I'm going to give you some ideas, because when we talk about God knowing everything, I don't want you to simply say, "Oh, that's just one of those Bible things," and then move on. I want to take the time to help you understand what it means.

Saying that God knows everything means that He possesses perfect knowledge. That means He knows everything, and He knows it correctly. He doesn't just know *that* it is; He knows totally *what* it is and *why* it is.

He has no need to learn

God has never learned and will never learn. If He can learn, He's not God. You and I are constantly learning, but God has never learned anything. God perfectly knows Himself. Even at my age, I am still discovering myself, and some things I discover I don't like. But God never discovers anything about Himself since He knows Himself perfectly. And He never discovers anything about us He already doesn't know.

God knows instantly and effortlessly all things. As humans, we know a great deal, but we do not know the future. God knows everything from the beginning to the end, so He knows the future. He knows all the variables that are going to happen. Not only that, He knows all the variables that *could have* happened. That's a lot to wrap our minds around.

I wonder about the variables on March 14, 2002, when my daughter was killed. What if her dog had not run away and made her leave late for work? I wonder if she had been on time, like she normally was—would she have been ahead of the accident and still be alive? I wonder what would be different if she had stopped to get a cup of coffee.

As you know, I was flying to be with her, so what if I had gone the day before—would she still be alive? If I had been there, I could have said to her, “Why you don't take the day off?” I could have said to her, “I'll go find the dumb dog.”

See, we can chase those variables around all we want to, but here's the thing we have to understand: God is the only One Who knows all things and my mental gymnastics will only lead to more questions.

Isaiah 57:1-2 gave me great comfort after my daughter died. The message of those verses is powerful. It says that sometimes God takes young people to spare them from the pain, agony, and tragedy that is to come.

God is omniscient. He is never surprised; He is never amazed; He never wonders at anything.

One of my morning disciplines is to meditate on one of God's attributes. It's been a great journey of discovery and learning. I have found some very practical truths that are meaningful to me. One day I wrote, “God never says ‘oops’ or ‘oh no.’”

I am constantly saying, “Oh, no!” or “Oops, I wish I hadn't done that.” God never says that, because He knows everything.

God knows us completely. That's scary! God knows everything about us, from our beginning to our end.

I cannot tell you that my time of meditating on God has answered all of my questions, but I can tell you it has changed my perspective.

Jeremy Camp wrote a song where he reminds us that we can walk by faith, even when we can't see. But this faith is only possible when we put our trust in *Who God is*.

So what is omniscience? What does it tell us about Who God is? Let's start with what the Bible says about God and His omniscience. Let's examine some verses together to help us with this concept.

Isaiah 40:13-14 says this:

“Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD,
Or as His counselor has taught Him?
With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him,
And taught Him in the path of justice?
Who taught Him knowledge,
And showed Him the way of understanding?”

Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord? Who is His counselor? Who taught God? Where did God go to school? God doesn't have any class rings. Nobody taught God. If you look down to the very end of the passage it asks, “Who taught Him knowledge?” Nobody.

“Who showed Him understanding?” Nobody.

God knows everything already.

Isaiah 46:9-10 says:

“Remember the former things of old,
For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like Me,
Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,
Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand,
And I will do all My pleasure.’”

God says, “I know the end from the beginning. I know everything that is going to happen.” It's one thing to make this claim, but it's another thing altogether for such a statement to be true. When God

says He knows everything and is in control of everything, it's true. He does, and He is.

Here is a great passage that gives us some practical insight. Psalm 139:1-6 says:

“O LORD, You have searched me and known me.
 You know my sitting down and my rising up;
 You understand my thought afar off.
 You comprehend my path and my lying down,
 And are acquainted with all my ways.
 For there is not a word on my tongue,
 But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.
 You have hedged me behind and before,
 And laid Your hand upon me.
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 It is high, I cannot attain it.”

“You have searched me and you have known me.” He knows when we sit down; He knows when we get up, and what we're thinking. That ought to motivate us to godly living as well as give us great security. He says He knows everything about you. David wrote, “You're acquainted with all my ways.”

Matthew 6:8 says, “Therefore, do not be like them for the Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.”

God knows everything. He knows what you need. So let's put that truth to the test and look at a hard question. If God knew what I needed, then why did He let my daughter die?

I don't know, but I do know God. And I know that because He knows all things, He doesn't make mistakes.

Acts 15:8 says, “So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us.” He knows our hearts.

Psalm 147:4 says, “He counts the number of stars; He calls them all by name.” As humans, we are still discovering the universe, and just when we think we have it figured out, we realize there's more. God knows all the stars, and He's already taken care to give them all names.

In Jeremiah 38:17-20, Jeremiah is talking to Zedekiah. He says this, “Please, obey the voice of the LORD which I speak to you. So it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live.” God knows all things, so why would we not listen to Him?

Colossians 1:16-17 says, “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”

He created the world, and He holds it all together. That is what the passage means when it says, “By Him all things consist.” In the back of our minds, we have a nagging fear that the world is going to end. We fear terrorist attacks, meteorites, a nuclear holocaust, but God created the world, and He holds it together. One of these days God will say, “OK, that’s it. We’re done.” Then the God Who holds the universe in His hand is just simply going to turn it loose. But until then, we have nothing to fear because the world is in His hands.

One of the verses that I’ve come to know recently is Hebrews 4:13. It says, “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (NIV). Nothing ever happens behind God’s back.

So let me ask you this question: How does this apply to you? What difference does it make if God is really omniscient? If you are dealing with hard life questions, then you know there are no easy answers. Knowing that God is omniscient does not minimize your problems, but it will help you maximize your God.

I’m not saying to you, “Oh, it’s OK; it’s not a big deal,” because it *is* a big deal. But the only place we can find comfort and answers is in the person of God. That’s why we really want to understand these truths, and why we want them to be part of our lives. So how can you apply this truth to your personal life? I’m going to give you four words to help make this application.

1. **Security.** Consider what this means. Because God knows everything, because He knows us completely, that means that

God will never discover anything about you or me that will turn Him against us. Have you ever had a friend who, when he found out something about you, said, “OK, that’s it, we’re done”? Not God! There is nothing that will turn Him against us.

One of my favorite writers, A.W. Tozer, says this, “No talebearer can inform on us, no enemy can make his accusation stick, and no skeleton can come tumbling out of some hidden closet to turn Him against us.” Basically, what he is saying is that there is nothing that God could ever discover about us that would cause Him to abandon us. The reason why is because He knew all about us in advance.

Remember how Jesus died for us and paid the price for our sin? The Bible says that He loved us while we were “yet sinners” (Romans 5:8). He knew everything I was going to do. He knew everything you were going to do. He knew all the terrible things. He knew that as a believer, we were going to fail sometimes. In light of all that, He still cared for us.

2. Comfort. When we are faced with some unexplainable circumstance in our life, we can trust God and find comfort. There are times when there’s no human who can help you. A friend can put his or her arm around you, love you, pray for you, and do everything humanly possible. But there are times when the pain inside of you is so great that no one on the outside can do anything to help you on the inside.

You know what I mean. You’ve had those times when no person could help that ache inside you. Many times since the day my daughter went home to be with Jesus, my wife and I have journaled, and in many of those journals I’ve written sentences such as, “God, there is a hole in my soul. Every day there is this great big vacuum in my life.” I have some great friends, but they can’t fill that hole. Only God can!

3. Direction. In relationship to everyday living, I talk to Christians frequently who say, “I just don’t know what to do. I really want my life to count for God, but this whole thing of knowing how to live for God is tough. I don’t get it!”

Here's the good news—are you ready for this? God knows everything. If God knows everything, then He knows the dangers ahead of us as well as the joys. He knows the way and He can provide the wisdom we need. We need to trust Him to give us clear direction for our lives.

Here's what we need to do: we need to listen and obey. When He warns us, we need to listen. When He instructs us, we need to learn. When He comforts us, we need to accept it. We go to God for direction because He knows everything.

Do you know why some of us don't follow Him? We're just not sure He's got a handle on things. In our little finite minds, it doesn't make sense, so we wonder if He's got it all together. It doesn't make sense that a young person would die. It doesn't make sense that someone at a young age would have cancer. It doesn't make sense that we would experience pain. Because we are limited, it just doesn't make sense.

4. Conviction. Since God knows everything about us, that should convict us if we are living a hypocritical life. Some Christians are living a masquerade, thinking they have everybody fooled. Perhaps everyone around us is deceived, but not God, because He knows all things.

One day we will all stand before God and the real truth about us will be exposed. Here's something that we need to understand: because God knows everything, there's no sin you and I commit that He doesn't know. We think that just because there's nobody with skin on around us, we're getting away with it.

This is not to say that God is some evil spy watching us to try and catch us in sin. Remember, He died for our sin, motivated by His great love and mercy. The reason He pays attention to sin in your life is so that you can have uninterrupted fellowship with Him, which you can't with sin. His knowing about your sin makes it that much easier to make things right with God, since you can't hide it. God is omniscient; that truth brings comfort to those who honor Him and conviction to those who do not.

God's omniscience means we have security, comfort, direction, and conviction. So, how are you going to process this in your life? What does this mean when you think about how you live every day?

Here are three things you can do with what I just said. You have to determine how you will apply and handle this truth.

You can compartmentalize. You can simply suppress the truth, saying that you don't believe it. You can try to block out the truth and say that you don't believe God is really like that. You can live in denial. When we do that, what we're really doing is creating our own version of God.

Instead of accepting Who the Bible says God is, we create our own God. We try to put God in a box.

If you and I try to bring God down to our level to fit in our little, finite minds—if we try to put Him in a box—it's not going to work. You can compartmentalize all day and suppress the truth. You can say, "Hey look, I don't feel comforted; I'm still confused. I'm just going to keep living like I want to." You can try to change your version of God to fit your reality, but I have news for you: God will never fit inside your box. Ignoring His truth won't make it go away.

You can spiritualize. You can acknowledge the truth. Now, this one sounds good, but in reality, this is just the adoption of Christian lingo. If you do this when terrible things happen in your life, you just say things like, "God is good." Well, He is. Or you say, "All things work together for good." It's easy to say these things, but in reality, you still don't have a clue what's happening. Don't get me wrong, God is good and He does have a bigger plan, but just using clichés will never be enough.

Vance Havner was one of the great preachers of the past. After his wife died, another preacher said, "I want you to know, Dr. Havner, that all things work together for good, and God is good." Dr. Havner replied, "Yes, God is good. That is true, and it will work out, but right now I am dying on the inside." I think Dr. Havner was facing life from a real perspective. God is good, but life still hurts.

When we simply spiritualize truth, we are acknowledging it with our head but not with our heart. To spiritualize truth is easier because we do not take the time to search it out and wrestle with it. If we want to really know God and really understand how to handle these tough situations, though, we need to not just give a mental assent. We need to spend time in the Bible, wrestling through these truths.

It's like believing a theory or a definition—you memorize it and move on without making any personal application. It's a generic thing, where one size fits all. But that is not the way God works in lives. He is interested in us personalizing our faith. He wants to show up in *your* life, for you to know Him better.

God has given my wife and me a ministry with hurting parents who have lost children in death. One of the very first things we say to them is, "We don't know how you feel." You may think, "Sure, you do know how they feel, because your daughter died," but everybody has to process and grieve differently.

It is a personal journey with different feelings, processes, and circumstances, and God deals with us individually. The only thing that is constant is God.

You can internalize it. To internalize the truth is to believe the truth and to decide to trust God. It is taking what God has said about Himself and His Word and trusting that it is true, even in the midst of a horrible situation.

I have had people say to me that they could not trust God because they cannot see Him. But that same person may readily trust other people or things.

Let me illustrate. Almost every week of my life, I go to the airport, board an airplane, and fly somewhere to minister. I usually don't get on the plane and say to the flight attendant, "I'd like to see the pilot." I have never knocked on the door and asked to see his credentials. I don't check to see if he's drunk or sober.

I simply get on the plane and sit down. I actually strap myself in. I trust the pilot, whom I have never seen and do not know. He has never done anything to prove that he cares about me. So why

is it so hard for us to trust God, Who knows everything and has proven His love to us by dying for us?

If you really want to get a handle on this truth and apply it to your life, then you need to internalize it. Begin by telling God how you feel and ask for His help. Ask Him to give you the strength to trust Him and keep the big picture.

There's another part to the story I told you earlier about my daughter's death:

I still don't understand all of it. I've prayed, I've read the Word. I have spent a lot of time considering this, but I still don't understand. I don't know that I will understand until I get to Heaven. But another one of the journal entries I made right after she died expresses my internalizing the truth.

"I went for a walk this morning to get some exercise. It was the first time since Misty had died. I meditated on Psalm 34, which says, "I will bless the Lord at all times, and His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Then I wrote these words, "Lord, all the time, yes, all the time, even during this time, I bless you and praise you for taking Misty home. My finite mind does not understand it, but as I have contemplated for many years Your attributes, I can say I believe that You are still all those things. I know that You are sovereign, You are holy, You are omniscient, You are omnipotent. I know that You are love. I know that You could have prevented this accident or incident. And I know that You, by Your design, allowed Misty to be taken home. My whole world has fallen apart. But everything I know about God is still true."

Can you say the same?

