

Knowing God

This, said our Lord Jesus, is eternal life: That they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. John 17:3

The great claim of Christians is that believing the gospel of the Lord Jesus they have come to know the true and living God

That, as John writes, Listening to Jesus, the one and only Son, they know the truth of God that God Himself has revealed

John 1: ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father's side—he has revealed him.

But to claim to know God is more than claiming to know the truth about God, just as knowing your wife or your friend is more than knowing about them.

Christians, believers in Jesus, claim they know Him in the sense that they are in relationship with Him where they are known by Him and embraced in His care. [Galatians 4:8-9; 1 John 2:3-4]

This was the promise of the new covenant

Hebrews 8: ¹⁰ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts.

I will be their God, and they will be my people.

¹¹ And each person will not teach his fellow citizen, and each his brother or sister, saying, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me, from the least to the greatest of them.

¹² For I will forgive their wrongdoing, and I will never again remember their sins. [Jeremiah 31:33-34]

And what God has promised, He has brought about through His Son the Lord Jesus for all who trust Him, the Lord Jesus who has brought us forgiveness of our sins through His death and so removed the obstacle to our relationship with God

Stop for a minute and think about that claim – to know God

To think about how good it is to say 'I know God'

Jeremiah helps us to see that when he says it should be our one boast, the one thing we should take pride in, want to be known for, find our identity in possessing.

Jeremiah 9: ²³ "This is what the LORD says:

The wise person should not boast in his wisdom; the strong should not boast in his strength; the wealthy should not boast in his wealth.

²⁴ But the one who boasts should boast in this: that he understands and knows me—that I am the LORD, showing faithful love,

*justice, and righteousness on the earth,
for I delight in these things.
This is the LORD's declaration.*

What do people boast in?

Wisdom – knowledge, the ability to find a way

Strength – physical prowess and beauty

Wealth – and the power it brings.

But all these things will pass away.

In this changing world they are insecure – our knowledge can become outdated, our wisdom leave us.

Strength wanes. There are the veteran's leagues – but that is an admission of loss

And wealth – a crash, a scam, a war

And all these things will be taken from us at death – naked we come from the womb and naked we depart.

But the one who knows God, who is in relationship with Him – always has a boast, something to find your identity in – that can never be taken from us, not even at death

Because of who the LORD is – almighty – who can bring all that is into being from nothing, the God who has life in Himself and gives life and can raise the dead, the God who shows faithful love, justice and righteousness

Never abandon His people, never fail in His word to them

And who will never stop being who He is

It is good to know God

Where we know God

The achievements and disappointments cease to be ultimate, cease to be the source of our identity and worth

Both are now received as coming from the hand of the God who rules all things, and who cares for us

They lose their power to crush us, or to puff us up

King David gives us a glimpse of how knowing God transforms our experience

Just one example.

In Psalm 63 he writes

*Psalm 63:³ My lips will glorify you
because your faithful love is better than life.*

It is true for those who know it – His faithful love is better than life, for it endures beyond this life.

But what does that knowledge work in David

A longing for God vv. 1-2 [cf. Psalm 73:25-26, Psalm 36:5-9]

More

*Psalm 63:³ My lips will glorify you
because your faithful love is better than life.*

*⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live;
at your name, I will lift up my hands.*

⁵ *You satisfy me as with rich food;
my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.*

⁶ *When I think of you as I lie on my bed,
I meditate on you during the night watches*

⁷ *because you are my helper;
I will rejoice in the shadow of your wings.*

⁸ *I follow close to you;
your right hand holds on to me.*

Praise v.5, joy v. 7, a sense of security v. 8

And what were David's circumstances as he wrote this

Lying on his bed in the palace, and all is right with the world?

This is how the Psalm is introduced

A psalm of David. When he was in the Wilderness of Judah.

And this time is probably the time, as v. 11 of the Psalm refers to himself as King, when he was in the wilderness when he was fleeing from Absalom

That is, because He knows God, knows His steadfast love, can say God is His God, he is experiencing this joy and security – when he has been driven from his home, suffered the humiliation of fleeing, knows there are people who want to kill him, is camping rough in the wilderness dependent on the generosity of others, not just for himself but for those who depend on him

And he writes

*Psalm 63: ³ My lips will glorify you
because your faithful love is better than life.*

⁴ *So I will bless you as long as I live;
at your name, I will lift up my hands.*

⁵ *You satisfy me as with rich food;
my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.*

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⁷ *because you are my helper;
I will rejoice in the shadow of your wings.*

⁸ *I follow close to you;
your right hand holds on to me.*

Knowing God transformed his experience of his circumstances

And that same steadfast love, on which he could rely – that is the steadfast love everyone who knows God in Christ can also rely on

That's what Paul writes of believers

Romans 8: ³⁵ Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

***Because of you
we are being put to death all day long;
we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered.***

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Where we know God our experience of our achievements and disappointments is transformed

And where we know God Our experience of suffering is transformed. That what Paul says in Romans 5:1-8 – confident of His grace, assured of His love, we can rejoice in our suffering knowing that they will work in us endurance, character, and a hope that will never be disappointed.

Where we know God our experience of death, and of the anticipation of death, is transformed. To depart and be with Christ, says Paul anticipating his death, is better by far [Phil. 1:21, 23, 2 Tim. 4:6-8]. He could look forward confidently to what so many dread.

It is no wonder that Paul thought knowing Christ, and in knowing Christ knowing God – being at peace with Him, embraced by His steadfast love, was worth everything

Phil 3:⁸ More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them as dung, so that I may gain Christ

Worth everything as the source of enduring joy and thankfulness in all circumstances, of stability in turmoil, of peace when the world knows no peace [John 14:27], of hope when all human hope is lost, as it is in our death

Knowing God, finding eternal life in knowing the only true God and the Lord Jesus His Son, should be our boast as believers

Should be the source of that joy, and thankfulness, stability, peace and hope

But many things conspire to rob believers of that joy, to make them hesitant in their boasting in God, to obscure and devalue our privilege in knowing God

Our World, our society, tells us

God is unimportant, and so whether you know God or not doesn't really matter

Our world insists that it makes no difference what you believe about God. You can live a good life, or perhaps a better life, if you don't bother about God

And we are discouraged from talking about God, and so from being conscious of God

Our world deliberately seeks to shrink God's presence into insignificance

And the Devil is active with his lies in our society

Telling us our God is just one god amongst many, one set of human beliefs amongst many, and all just projections of human need or experience, with no real power

portraying the living God into just another dumb and lifeless idol

And our flesh, the heart we have inherited from Adam, discourages pursuit of the knowledge of God

We find it so easy to be distracted by the cares and pleasures of life

To find our identity, like those around us, in our sport, or our work, or our family

For the flesh want to be neither humbled nor holy, and knowing God commits a believer to both.

World, the flesh, and the devil – combine constantly to rob us of our appreciation of our privilege of knowing God,

With the result that often we believers, in my observation,

Live as poor people, people who think their resources in meeting trials are so limited, when we are rich in knowing God

Live as insecure people because we have tied our happiness and peace to things that pass, and not to knowing the eternal God,

Live As people who lack confidence in engaging the world, when those who know God can mock the worlds' idols as dumb and powerless [Psalm 135:15-18, Isaiah 44:6-20], and know that the guidance of those who deny God is foolish [Psalm 14:1]

Live with fears and anxieties

Of ultimate failure

Of abandonment

Of loss of things

Of loneliness

Of a future we cannot control

That rob us of the joy and thankfulness that those who know God can know in all circumstances, for He is almighty to keep His people and rules all things for their good

Seeing that, feeling that – that constant pressure to minimise and obscure the good of knowing God

The talks over the next few weeks are going to be about reminding us of the God we know in believing the gospel of our Lord Jesus, the God who has graciously revealed Himself to us in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus, the God who has graciously drawn us into relationship with Himself through that gospel as His Spirit has opened our eyes to its truth

So we think and live as those who know God

And the way we are going to remind ourselves of and refresh ourselves in that revelation of God in the gospel is by going through what is called the Nicene Creed for, as you are about to hear, it is a great summary of God's revelation of Himself in the gospel

The Nicene Creed

This is how it reads

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,

the only Son of God,
 eternally begotten of the Father,
 God from God, Light from Light,
 true God from true God,
 begotten not made,
 of one Being with the Father.
 Through him all things were made.
 For us men and for our salvation
 he came down from heaven:
 by the power of the Holy Spirit
 he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
 and was made man.
 For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
 he suffered death and was buried.
 On the third day he rose again
 in accordance with the Scriptures;
 he ascended into heaven
 and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
 He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
 and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the Lord, and giver of life,
 who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
 With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.
 He has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
 We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
 We look for the resurrection of the dead,
 and the life of the world to come. Amen.

[Perhaps some of the language might jar – for example the word ‘catholic’, or the phrase

For us men and for our salvation
 he came down from heaven:
 by the power of the Holy Spirit
 he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

Men there is inclusive of all humanity, and was the way ‘man’ was used. It does not exclude any descendant of Adam.

It is retained for two reasons – firstly the Creed is an historic document shared by all the churches, and it cannot be changed unilaterally.

But secondly it keeps the link with the next phrase – ‘and was made man’. The Son became human, all that we are, by becoming a particular human, a man. The verbal link reminds us that in becoming a particular human, a man, he took on our common nature, what belongs to all ‘us men’ – and so He can save all of us.]

Creeds, as summaries of what Christians believe, have proved useful over the centuries.

Useful for instruction – if you understand what this Creed says you understand what is central to what Christians believe

Useful for mission, for being able to communicate what Christian’s believe to the surrounding society

And useful in giving clarity to issues in dispute – as this Creed does in speaking of the relation of the Father to the Son and rejecting the teaching that the Son is an exalted creature, and so in making sure that the faith is transmitted accurately

This creed

This particular Creed, the Nicene Creed, so called because it was first formulated at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., re-expressed at the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. and endorsed at Chalcedon in 451 A.D., is good to know for this is something that believers have been using to confess their faith from the fourth century as a summary of what all Christians believe. This is what the orthodox and the Catholic also confess. It is a reminder that believers are connected throughout the world and across the centuries in a common faith.

But we are using it because of its Structure and focus

Its structure is Trinitarian

It is a confession of God as one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and it speaks of the relation of the Father, Son and Spirit to each other in the One God

This Trinitarian structure is significant, for the doctrine of the Trinity, confessing the One true God as Father, Son and Spirit, is not an abstraction or a difficulty.

It is, as I hope you will see over the coming weeks, the guarantee of true knowledge of God – of being able to know God; it is the guarantee of salvation, of knowing you are saved by God; it is the guarantee of the character of that salvation as a relationship of love; and it is the guarantee that all the glory in saving is God's.

The creed helps us in knowing God by its Trinitarian structure.

And its focus is on the person and work of the Lord Jesus as the key to both our understanding of who God is and our relationship with Him. –[21 lines, 4 on the Father, 5 on the Spirit]

In both these things it reflects the emphasis of the New Testament.

For The Creed, or the work of theologians, does not create the doctrine of the Trinity. It seeks to express in ways that are understandable, particularly to those who have no background in the Old Testament, what we have come to know in the gospel.

And that is the first big point that is the foundation of all we will say about God

Christian revelation is the revelation of God as Father, Son and Spirit, One God, from the beginning, and so the Christian experience of being saved is Trinitarian

And the second foundational point is that the Christian experience of being saved is the experience of being saved by the LORD of the Old Testament as He promised – and so our understanding of God takes over in its entirety the revelation of God in the Old Testament

Let me demonstrate the truth of both those points for sometimes people say the church invented the doctrine of the Trinity, and sometimes people want to suggest that the Christian God is somehow a departure from the God of the Old Testament.

Firstly

Christian revelation is the revelation of God as Father, Son and Spirit, One God, from the beginning, and so the Christian experience of being saved is Trinitarian, of being saved by the Father, Son and Spirit

Long before the doctrine of the Trinity was precisely formulated believers were committed to confessing the One God, Father, Son and Spirit because of the teaching of Jesus.

It is the Lord Jesus who spoke of God as His Father, and of sending the Spirit.

Let me read parts of John 14 to you again

John 14: ⁶ Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

⁸ "Lord," said Philip, "show us the Father, and that's enough for us."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been among you all this time and you do not know me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who lives in me does his works.

¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Otherwise, believe because of the works themselves.

Jesus speaks of God as His Father, and of them being intimately related, such that to know Jesus is to know the Father, to see Jesus is to see the Father, to hear Jesus is to hear the Father's words.

Yet Jesus and the Father are distinct. Jesus is the way to the Father, not the Father. HE is in the Father, but not identical to Him.

He will go to the Father.

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. ¹⁷ He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive him because it doesn't see him or know him. But you do know him, because he remains with you and will be in you.

Jesus speaks of the Father, and He also speaks of the Spirit – as another Counselor – that is a Counselor who will take the place of Jesus when He is no longer physically present with His disciples.

The Spirit is the Spirit of God, but not the Father or the Son. Yet where the Spirit is present, so are the Father and the Son v. 23

²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it you're going to reveal yourself to us and not to the world?"

²³ Jesus answered, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. ²⁴ The one who doesn't love me will not keep my words. The word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me.

²⁵ "I have spoken these things to you while I remain with you. ²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.

It is the Lord Jesus who teaches us God is Father, and who speaks of the Spirit as the Spirit of God, and of Himself as distinct from the Father and the Spirit. And central to what He taught us of God is what HE taught us of Himself and His relation to the Father.

He tells us that it is the Father's will he shares in the honour the Father receives, which is the honour creatures pay to their Creator

John 5: ²¹ And just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom he wants.

²² The Father, in fact, judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ so that all people may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

He Spoke repeatedly of Himself as coming from the Father

*John 10:*³⁴ *Jesus answered them, "Isn't it written in your law, **I said, you are gods?**"³⁵ If he called those to whom the word of God came 'gods'—and the Scripture cannot be broken—³⁶ do you say, 'You are blaspheming' to the one the Father set apart and sent into the world, because I said: I am the Son of God?"*

Of existing with God before time –

*John 8:*⁵⁸ *Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am."*

And while distinct from the Father Of being One with the Father

*John 10:*³⁰ *I and the Father are one."*

We will come back to this, but the Lord Jesus taught what the Creed summarises, that the God whom HE revealed and who saves us is Father, Son and Spirit,

One in saving, One in honour

And this is the way Christians from the beginning have thought about their experience

Some verses where we see Father, Son and Spirit – all involved in our salvation

Peter speaks of believers as those

1 Peter 1: To those chosen, living as exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.

Or Paul, speaking of our salvation

*Galatians 4:*⁶ *And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba, Father!"*

And this is the believers ongoing experience

*2 Corinthians 13:*¹³ *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

OF the Father, Son and Spirit all continuing to keep us.

Those believers who formulated the creed weren't seeking to invent a new understanding of God

But to articulate and protect what they were given

The Christian confession of the God who saves us, the confession which is there from the beginning, of our God as Father, Son and Spirit.

Christian revelation is, and Christian experience is, Trinitarian from the beginning

And the second foundational point is that the Christian experience of being saved is the experience of being saved by the LORD of the Old Testament as He promised – and so our understanding of God takes over in its entirety the revelation of God in the Old Testament. We see this throughout the New Testament, but

Consider the first Christian sermon

*Acts 2:*³² *"God has raised this Jesus; we are all witnesses of this."³³ Therefore, since he has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, he has poured out what you both see and hear.³⁴ For it was not David who ascended into the heavens, but he himself says:*

***The Lord declared to my Lord,
'Sit at my right hand
³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool.'***

³⁶ *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."*

There is God the Father – raising and exalting Jesus, the Son, and entrusting to Him the Spirit, and it is all in fulfilment of God's promises in the Old Testament – promises in Joel 2, Psalm 16 and Psalm 110.

Father, Son and Spirit, One God, fulfilling the promises the LORD had given His people

Or Paul's introduction of his gospel – Romans 1

Romans 1: Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God— ² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures— ³ concerning his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was a descendant of David according to the flesh ⁴ and was appointed to be the powerful Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead.

Father, Son and Spirit, fulfilling the promises given in the Old Testament, the Old Testament Scriptures of which Romans is full as it teaches us what God has done to save us.

And Peter and Paul and all the apostles had Learnt this from the Lord Jesus, as He taught them that HE was Sent by the Father to save, a salvation that was the fulfilment of God's promises. He came preaching the promised reign of God, came to the lost sheep of Israel, died as the promised King of the Jews

It is no wonder that John tells us The glory the apostles saw in Christ was the glory of the LORD – John 1:14

John 1: ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The glory Moses longed to see on the mountain [Exodus 33:18-34:6]

Knowing Jesus brought the salvation of the LORD promised in the Old Testament means that while it is awesome, it is no surprise when a true blue Jew like Thomas confessed the Lord Jesus God when convinced of His resurrection

And never thought in making that confession He was doing anything than worshipping the God of Israel

John 20: ²⁸ Thomas responded to him, "My Lord and my God!"

Or that Paul teaches that it is in the exaltation of the crucified Jesus that the LORD fulfills what HE said in Isaiah 45 would only be true of Himself

*Phil. 2: ⁹ For this reason God highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,*

*¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee will bow—
in heaven and on earth
and under the earth—*

*¹¹ and every tongue will confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

For the salvation the Son brings was what the Lord Himself had promised to do.

To come to save

Some references familiar to us.

Ezekiel 34 – the LORD had promised HE Himself would be Israel’s saving shepherd

Ezekiel 34: ¹¹ “For this is what the Lord GOD says: See, I myself will search for my flock and look for them. ¹² As a shepherd looks for his sheep on the day he is among his scattered flock, so I will look for my flock. I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and total darkness.

Or in Isaiah 40, a passage Matthew, Mark and Luke apply to John’s announcement of Jesus, it is the LORD himself who promises to come with might to save and judge.

Isaiah 40: ³ A voice of one crying out:

*Prepare the way of the LORD in the wilderness;
make a straight highway for our God in the desert.*

⁴ *Every valley will be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill will be leveled;
the uneven ground will become smooth
and the rough places, a plain.*

⁵ *And the glory of the LORD will appear,
and all humanity together will see it,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

Or Isaiah 45, the passage Paul applies to the exalted Jesus, God says He alone will be exalted as the only Saviour and LORD of the whole earth

Isaiah 45:

²¹ *Who predicted this long ago?
Who announced it from ancient times?
Was it not I, the LORD?*

*There is no other God but me,
a righteous God and Savior;
there is no one except me.*

²² *Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth.*

*For I am God,
and there is no other.*

²³ *By myself I have sworn;
truth has gone from my mouth,
a word that will not be revoked:
Every knee will bow to me,
every tongue will swear allegiance.*

Or again, in Isaiah 59 – it is the LORD himself who promises to act for there was no-one else, no-one to re-establish the moral order. And HE promise His own arm will do it, who is also the servant of the LORD [Isaiah 53:1]

*Isaiah 59: The LORD saw that there was no justice,
and he was offended.*

¹⁶ *He saw that there was no man—
he was amazed that there was no one interceding;
so his own arm brought salvation,
and his own righteousness supported him.*

*¹⁷ He put on righteousness as body armor,
and a helmet of salvation on his head;
he put on garments of vengeance for clothing,
and he wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak.*

[The arm of the LORD – Isaiah 53:1]

What the LORD promised He Himself would do the apostles, taught by Jesus, confessed He had done in the Son, saving as HE said He would when no other could save.

the Christian experience of being saved is the experience of being saved by the LORD of the Old Testament as He promised – and so our understanding of God takes over in its entirety the revelation of God in the Old Testament.

I know we have covered a lot of ground today, and introduced some big, foundational, ideas

That Christian revelation is the revelation of God as Father, Son and Spirit, One God, from the beginning, and so the Christian experience of being saved is Trinitarian

And that the Christian experience of being saved is the experience of being saved by the LORD of the Old Testament as He promised, and so we inherit in its entirety God's revelation of Himself in the Old Testament

Next week, a little easier as we start to go through the phrases of the creed – starting with God as the maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, visible and invisible

Encourage you – go over the references and meditate on them,

I know many like to have their Sunday sermon self-contained, to go away with a nicely packaged and applied point

And not to go away with work

But the goal is knowing our God, the true and living God,

The God who has spoken to us in the gospel of His Son, whom to know is life.

I hope you are thirsty to know God, and willing to work to know Him better by meditating on His word

Had to put up a towel rail last week – some of us read the instructions for that kind of thing, and understand and remember first time; others, like me, read and re-read the instructions

But slow or fast, we put in the work to read and understand because we want to get it right

We are willing to put the effort in for such a small outcome – and this is so much more important

Knowing our God, the true and living God

So that we Honour Him – by confessing the truth of what HE has revealed of Himself

And live with Confidence in Him

So, is your boast the enduring One – that you know the LORD

Do you know what it is to say and mean whatever your circumstances – the love of your God is better than life?