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DISCOVERING GOD'S
PROVISION FOR YOU IN CHRIST

ROY AND REVEL HESSION



We Would See Jesus

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Contents

Preface	7
1 Seeing God—The Purpose of Life	13
2 Seeing God in the Face of Jesus Christ...	31
3 Seeing Jesus as All We Need.....	43
4 Seeing Jesus as the Truth.....	55
5 Seeing Jesus as the Door	77
6 Sinai or Calvary?.....	99
7 Seeing Jesus as the Way.....	117
8 Seeing Jesus as the End	141
9 Seeing Jesus—for Others.....	163
Notes.....	185

Preface

THIS is a book that seeks to be simply about the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

We Would See Jesus is somewhat of an amplification of *The Calvary Road*, which was published in 1950 and which God has been pleased to bless to many various parts of the world. We believe that this book will be found to carry on from where the other left off. The first book dealt with various aspects of the Christian life and revival, such as brokenness, fullness, fellowship, and so on. It is, of course, helpful to have Christian experience dealt with aspect by aspect. We have since learned, however, that we do not need to itemize the Christian life; it is enough to see Jesus. Seeing Him we are convicted of sin, broken, cleansed, filled with the Spirit, set free from bondage and revived. Each aspect of Christian experience is made real

in us just by seeing Him. He is both the blessing we all seek and the easily accessible way to that blessing. If we concentrate on trying to make a certain aspect of things “work,” it will become a formula for us and will only lead us into bondage. But the Lord Jesus has come to take from us every yoke of bondage and to set us free to serve Him in freshness and spontaneity of the Spirit, and all this by the simple sight of Him which the Holy Spirit gives to the eye of faith.

We would see Jesus: this is all we're needing;
Strength, joy, and willingness come with the sight;
We would see Jesus, dying, risen, pleading;
Then welcome day, and farewell mortal night.¹

This, then, is the direction and theme of the present book—Jesus. However, we cannot pretend that it is a complete treatment of such a theme. The reader will find that much has not been touched upon. But as we have said, it is enough to see Jesus and to go on seeing Him. As we do so, we shall see everything else we need to see even as we need to see it, and all in its right relationship to Him who must ever be for us the center.

Two words occur again and again in the following pages, and they are used in a special sense. As we have not thought it right to interrupt the flow of thought with sections to amplify their meaning, we think it well to insert something here as to the sense in which these words are used. The first is the word “grace.” So often people speak of this as some blessing which we receive from God at special times. We have, however, sought to use it in the strictly New Testament sense of the word. There it is the great word of our salvation and of all God’s dealings with us; for it is written, “By grace you have been saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8). Nothing is more important than that we should apprehend its meaning in both our minds and experience. Missing this, we miss everything.

In the New Testament “grace” is not a blessing or an influence from God which we receive, but rather an attribute of God which governs His attitude to man, and it can be defined as the undeserved love and favor of God. Romans 11:6 says, “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.” The whole

essence of grace is that it is undeserved. The moment we have to do something to make ourselves more acceptable to God, or the moment we have to have a certain feeling or attribute of character in order to be blessed by God, then grace is no longer grace. Grace permits us to come (nay, demands that we come) as empty sinners to be blessed: empty of right feelings, good character and satisfactory record, with nothing to commend ourselves but our deep need, fully and frankly acknowledged. Then grace, being what it is, is drawn by that need to satisfy it, just as water is drawn to depth (by gravity) that it might fill it.

This means that when at last we are content to find no merit or procuring cause in ourselves and are willing to admit the full extent of our sinfulness, then there is no limit to what God will do for the poor who look to Him in their nothingness. If what we receive from God is dependent, even to a small extent, on what we are or do, then the most we can expect is but an intermittent trickle of blessing. But if what we are to receive is to be measured by the grace of God quite apart

from works, then there is only one word that adequately describes what He pours upon us, the word which so often is linked with grace in the New Testament: “abundance”! The struggle, of course, is to believe it and to be willing to be but empty sinners to the end of our days, that grace may continue to match our needs.

When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
Our Father’s full giving has only begun. . . .

His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.²

This, then, is grace and this is God! What a melting vision this gives us of Him!

The other word that needs a little explanation as to its use in these pages is the word “revival.” The popular sense in which this word is used is that of a general and more or less spectacular movement of the Holy Spirit, in which many are saved and the church built up. That this is a legitimate use of the word we would not deny, but we have used it throughout in the sense of the work

of God which He does firstly in the lives of believers. This work is both personal and immediate for each believer who recognizes the decline there has been in his Christian experience, who bows to the dealings of God with him, and who sees Jesus as all he needs and believingly apprehends Him as such. It is simply this that lies at the heart of even the most spectacular movements of revival. After all, what are such movements but the communication of this life to ever-increasing numbers of God's children? And what does God use to this end but the radiant testimonies of the revived themselves?

It is plain, then, that our first responsibility is to be revived ourselves, and to give our testimony to those around us. We can then trust God to fit us and the life He is giving us into whatever corporate movement of His Spirit that He pleases.

May God grant that every reader have an abundant fulfillment of the longing, expressed long ago by the Greeks to Philip, "Sir, we would see Jesus" (John 12:21, KJV).

—*Roy and Revel Hession*

1

Seeing God— the Purpose of Life

*My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace,
Nor even blessing, but Himself, my God.*

—Frances Brook

WHAT is the purpose of life? This is the one question to which most of us are longing to find the answer. We find ourselves driven and pulled in different directions by inner urges, longings and desires, which we do not seem able to satisfy. We look enviously at others and imagine that their lives are much fuller and more satisfying than ours. We think that if we could gain this prize or enjoy that pleasure, we would be truly satisfied; but when at last we do achieve those

prizes or pleasures we find that we are no happier than we were before. And the older we grow, the more frustrated we feel, and we find ourselves asking, “What is the purpose of life? How can I find it? How can I be sure I have made the right choice?” These are questions to which many a professing Christian yet needs to find the answer, as well as the man who has no knowledge of God.

However, when we turn to the Bible we find a clear and simple answer to this fundamental question. It plainly states that there is but one purpose for mankind, and that purpose is the same, whatever our sex, our age, our nationality, or our status in society.

“What does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him” (Deut. 10:12).

“He has told you, O man, what is good; / and what does the LORD require of you / . . . [but] to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8).

“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30).

It appears, therefore, that the Bible answer to the question “What is the purpose of life?” is to know, and to love, and to walk with God; that is, to see God. Indeed, men in former times came to speak of “the end of life” as being the “vision of God.” The divines who in the seventeenth century produced the Westminster Confession of Faith answered the question “What is the chief end of man?” with the words, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.”¹

Today, however, we do not hear much about the need to see God. It is only as we turn the pages of the past that we become aware of our lack of this emphasis, both in preaching and in living the gospel. We find that in former days, even in times of spiritual darkness, there were always some who were gripped by a consuming passion—the longing to see God. For them there was only one goal, to know their God. They were heart-thirsty, and they knew that God alone could satisfy their thirst. As we read of their search for God, we find some traveling along strange paths. We see them living in desert or cave, or withdrawing to the monastery. In their desire

for that holiness “without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14), they might strip themselves of every earthly possession or mortify their bodies by self-inflicted torture. They were sometimes fanatical, sometimes morbidly introspective. We look back on some of them now as poor, misguided souls who were in bondage to legalism and asceticism. But let us always remember that these things were done in the longing and search for God, and that their emphasis was on personal holiness in order to see God.

At the present time the situation is very different. We have much more light on the Bible and the message of the gospel, and we look back rather despisingly on many of these seekers of old. But the solemnizing fact is this, that the coming of more light has not brought an increasing passion to see God. In fact, it seems to have had the reverse effect. That deep hunger for God Himself is patently lacking, and it would appear that we have lowered our goal in the Christian life to something less than God Himself.

Two emphases stand out today. First of all, instead of stressing holiness in order to see

God, the emphasis is on service for God. We have come to think of the Christian life as consisting in serving God as fully and as efficiently as we can. Techniques and methods, by which we hope to make God's message known, have become the important thing. To carry out this service we need power, and so instead of a longing for God our longing is for power to serve Him more effectively. So much has service become the center of our thinking that very often a man's rightness with God is judged by his success or otherwise in his Christian work.

Then there tends to be today an emphasis on the seeking of inner spiritual experiences. While so many Christians are content to live at a very low level, it is good that some do become concerned about their Christian lives, and it is right that they should. However, the concern arises not as much from a hunger for God as from a longing to have an inner experience of happiness, joy and power, and we find ourselves looking for "it" rather than God Himself.

Both these ends fall utterly short of the great end that God has designed for man,

that of glorifying Him and enjoying Him forever. They fail to satisfy God's heart and they fail to satisfy ours.

To understand why the seeing of God should be the main goal of life and why He should make such a claim on us, we must turn our minds back to the very dawn of history.

The story of mankind began when God, who is complete in Himself and therefore could have no needs, deliberately chose, it would seem, to be incomplete without creatures of His own creating. "You created all things, / and by your will they existed and were created" (Rev. 4:11). It was for this purpose and no other—that of existing for the pleasure of God—that man was brought into being. He was intended to be the delight of God and the object of His affection. On man's side, the basis of that original relationship was that it was completely God-centered. Man knew that he had only been created to delight God, and his only concern was to respond to the divine affection, to live for Him, and to do His will. It was his joy continually to submit his will and desires to those of his Creator, and in nothing to be

independent of Him. As he thus lived in submission to God, every need in his nature was satisfied by God.

As C.S. Lewis puts it in describing that early unfallen relationship, “In perfect cyclic movement, being, power and joy descended from God to man in the form of gift and returned from man to God in the form of obedient love and ecstatic adoration.”² Truly these were the “palmy days” of the human race, when man was as much at home in the unseen realm as in the seen, when the faculty within him called “spirit” was able to commune with God who is Spirit.

To insist, then, that to see God and be in living relationship with Him is the supreme goal of life is not to insist on anything strange or unnatural. It is the very purpose for which we were created, the sole *raison d'être* for our being on the earth at all.

More than that, however, for us to see God is the sole purpose of God’s redemption of the world by the Lord Jesus Christ; for man soon lost the divine purpose for his life, and needed to be redeemed. That loving, submissive relationship with God did not last long.

Those walks together in the cool of the day came to an end, for one day sin stalked into the garden.

Under the temptation of Satan, who suggested that by a simple act of transgression man could forsake the creaturely position and become “like God” (Gen. 3:5), man deliberately chose no longer to be dependent on God. He set himself up on his own, putting himself at the center of his world, where before he had delighted to put God. Thereafter he became a proud, unbroken spirit. No longer would he willingly submit to his Creator; no longer would he recognize that he was made for God. Moreover, on God’s side the foundation of His fellowship with man was destroyed, because God in His holiness could not have fellowship with man who was unholy. There could never be fellowship between light and darkness, between holiness and sin; and man instinctively realized this, for his first reaction was to hide from the presence of the Lord God behind the trees of the garden.

We too, descendants of those first sinners, are involved in all this. We are born with the

same God-defiant nature that Adam and Eve acquired the day they first sinned. We all start life as “I” specialists, as someone has quaintly put it, and our actions are governed by self-interest. Such is the rebellious attitude of man to God’s authority now that the Bible is driven to say, “No one understands; / no one seeks for God” (Rom. 3:11). The natural heart defies God and says, “Depart from us! / We do not desire the knowledge of your ways. / What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?” (Job 21:14–15).

Thus did man lose the original Divine purpose of his life. Had God chosen to leave man there, in his alienation and in all the miseries that would inevitably follow, no angel in the sky could have charged Him with injustice, nor even with lack of love. He had already showered upon man His love, and man had thrown that love back in His face. But the love of God was such that, when man had done all that, He yet purposed his recovery, and He stretched out His hand the second time, this time to redeem. To create, God had but to speak, and it was done. But to redeem, He had to bleed. And He did so in the Person of

His Son, Jesus Christ, whom He sent to take the place of death upon the cross which our sin had so richly deserved.

Redemption, however, was no last-minute thought, brought into being to meet an unexpected emergency. No sooner had sin entered the garden than God spoke of One who was to come and who was to bruise the serpent's (that is, Satan's) head, His own heel being bruised in the process (see Gen. 3:15), and to restore all the damage which sin and Satan had done. God thereby revealed that the sad turn of events had not taken Him by surprise, but that there was One in reserve to meet this very situation. Scripture calls Him "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8, KJV), because with God the remedy antedated the disease. And all this was done with the one purpose of bringing us fallen men with our sinful, proud, unbroken natures back to that relationship with God of submissiveness and God-centeredness that was lost in the Fall—that position where once more He can delight in us and we in Him.

If to bring us back into this relationship with God is the whole purpose of His

creation and then His redemption of us, we can be quite sure that this will be the one great object of all His present dealings with us. If an airplane designer designs a plane to fly at a certain altitude and finds that it will not leave the ground, he will bend every effort to make that plane do that for which he designed it. So does God bend every effort to bring us back to Himself.

An initial repentance on our part and our conversion to Christ is merely the gateway onto the road back to fellowship with God. It is only when we get on the road that God can start dealing with our self-centered wills, so that, painful though it is to wills that are, “inflamed and swollen with years of usurpation,”³ we come back to the place of submission and God-centeredness. If we will not from our own choice seek Him and want Him, He often may allow sorrow, suffering, trials, ill-health, smashed plans and failure, so that in our need we will find our need of Him. Such suffering, however, is never punitive, but wholly and only restorative in its intention. It is love humbling us and drawing us to the place of repentance and to God.

In the light of all this, we can see how far short the goals we set ourselves, goals such as service and activity for God and the finding of special inner experiences, fall from the great goal God has purposed for us.

To concentrate on service and activity for God may often actively thwart our attaining the true goal, God Himself. At first sight it seems heroic to fling our lives away in the service of God and of our fellows. We feel it is bound to mean more to Him than our experience of Him. Service seems so unselfish, whereas concentrating on our walk with God seems selfish and self-centered. But it is the very reverse. The things that God is most concerned about are our coldness of heart toward Him and our proud, unbroken natures. Christian service of itself can, and often does, leave our self-centered nature untouched.

That is why there is scarcely a church, a mission station, or a committee undertaking a special piece of service, that is without an unresolved problem of personal relationships eating out its heart and thwarting its progress. This is because Christian service

often gives us opportunities for leadership and position that we could not attain in the secular world, and we quickly fall into pride, self-seeking and ambition. With those things hidden in our hearts, we have only to work alongside others to find resentment, hardness, criticism, jealousy and frustration issuing from our hearts. We think we are working for God, but how little of our service is for Him is revealed by our resentment or self-pity when the actions of others or circumstances or ill-health take that ministry from us!

Alas! In this condition we are trying to give to others an answer which we have not truly and deeply found for ourselves. The tragedy is that much of the vast network of Christian activity and service today is bent on propagating an answer for people's needs and problems which few of those propagating it are finding adequate in their own lives. We direly need to leave our lusting for ever-larger spheres of Christian service and concentrate on seeing God for ourselves and finding the deep answer for life in Him. Then, even if we are located in the most obscure corner of the

globe, the world will make a road to our door to get that answer. Our service of help to our fellows then becomes incidental to our vision of God and, ideally, the direct consequence of it.

This does not mean that God does not want us engaged actively in His service. He does; but His purpose is often far different from what we think. Our service, in His mind, is to be far more the potter's wheel on which He can mold us than the achieving of those spectacular objectives on which we set our hearts. He sees a sharp point in our makeup that is continually wounding others. He sees within our hearts the motives of self-seeking and pride. He, therefore, allows someone to come and work alongside us who will rub against that sharp point and round it off. Or He allows someone to thwart our plans and perhaps even step into our shoes.

If we are making service for Him an end in itself we will be full of reactions and will want to fight back or to break away and start an independent work of our own, and we become more self-centered than ever. But if we will bow to what God has allowed, and repent of

our sinful reactions, we will find that that very situation has led us into a deeper experience of His grace and of His power to satisfy our hearts with Himself alone.

In the same way, the inordinate seeking for inner spiritual experiences may also thwart the finding of our true goal, for if we make our purpose in life a quest for these things we tend to become occupied with our personal experiences or lack of them. This produces the sad situation of hungry, dissatisfied Christians seeking out one speaker or another, hoping that he will be found to have the secret; or going to this convention or that conference, trying new formulas for blessing, seeking fresh experiences, and falling either into pride or despair, according to whether they feel they have the blessing or not. This leaves the Christian still self-centered, occupied with himself and his experiences, and it can lead to much mental anguish through the confusion of our many teachings and emphases on sanctification and kindred doctrines. Yet, all the time the One who alone can satisfy the heart is by our side, longing to be known and loved and proved.

This, then, is the purpose of life: to see God, and to allow Him to bring us back to the old relationship of submission to Himself. We might wish that God would be content with some lesser purpose for us. As C.S. Lewis says, “It is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a less glorious and less arduous destiny. . . . It is certainly a burden of glory not only beyond our deserts but also, except in rare moments of grace, beyond our desiring.”⁴ But we must not rebel against this high purpose for us. Clay does not argue with the potter. It knows that the potter has every right to make it into whatever shape He chooses. Our highest good is achieved only in submitting.

It has been said that there is a God-shaped blank in every man’s heart. It is also true that there is a man-shaped blank in God’s heart. It is because of the latter that God yearns so much for us and pursues us so relentlessly, and it is because of the former that mere earthly things, even service, will never satisfy our hearts. Only God Himself can fill that blank which is made in His shape. If we will yield to this fact, some of us will have a

new outlook on life. We will have a new zest for life, even in the dreariest surroundings. As soon as the emphasis is changed from “doing” to “being,” there is an easing of tension. The situations may not change, but we have changed. If fellowship with God is our first concern, then we can have fellowship with Him in the kitchen, in sickness, in any kind of trying and difficult situation. Whatever lies across our path to be done, even the most irksome chore, is there to be done for God and for His glory. Gone will be the former striving, bondage and frustration. We shall be at peace with our God and ourselves.

One thing I know, I cannot say Him nay;
One thing I do, I press toward my Lord;
My God my glory here, from day to day,
And in the glory there my great Reward.⁵