

Foreword by Dr. Robert Jeffress

SEEK THE PRAISE THAT COMES
FROM **GOD ALONE**

For an
AUDIENCE
of

One

R. T. KENDALL

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR OF *TOTAL FORGIVENESS*

In a world filled with people trying to make their names great, Christians should aim to make God's name great. R.T. Kendall's book *For an Audience of One* points out that in a world filled with people living for their popularity on social media today, Christians should concern themselves with God's glory for all eternity. If your soul is weary of this foolish and fallen world, it's time to start living for an audience of One. This is the one thing that changes everything.

—MARK DRISCOLL

FOUNDING AND SENIOR PASTOR, THE TRINITY CHURCH
AUTHOR, *WIN YOUR WAR*, *SPIRIT-FILLED JESUS*,
AND *REAL MARRIAGE*

Not too long before my daddy died, he called me to his bedside and said, "You must always remember to stay focused."

"On what, Daddy?" I asked.

"On the cross and the person of Jesus Christ," he responded.

I have had the privilege of knowing R.T. Kendall for several years. When he told me the title of his newest book, I thought that R.T. knows what he is talking about because, like my daddy, his desire is to always focus on the cross and the person of Jesus Christ. And this is what living a life for an audience of One is all about.

—GIGI GRAHAM

I cannot imagine a timelier book than R.T. Kendall's *An Audience of One*. In it he points us to the true purpose of every believer: we are to lay down every aspect of our lives, giving God all of the glory. The dying time is essential for every believer, but the duration is up to us. It took Israel forty years; it took Jesus forty days. These pages are filled with true humility. They hold the priceless wisdom of a man who has

walked faithfully with God over a lifetime. As you read this book, let R. T.'s words challenge and focus you. We cannot discover our significance on the earth until we've truly come face to face with our insignificance. Everything good in us is by His grace. I absolutely love this book!

—BILL JOHNSON

BETHEL CHURCH, REDDING, CALIFORNIA

AUTHOR, *THE WAY OF LIFE* AND *RAISING GIANT-KILLERS*

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AUDIENCE
of
One

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R. T. KENDALL



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Let us thus think often that our only business in this
life is to please God, that perhaps all besides is but
folly and vanity.

—NICOLAS HERMAN,
KNOWN AS BROTHER LAWRENCE (1614–1691),
THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

To Toby, Timothy, and Ty

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FOREWORD

NEXT TO THE apostle Paul, no evangelist has impacted the world for Jesus Christ more than the late Billy Graham. Included among the millions who came to Christ under his preaching was my own mother. For fifty-four years Dr. Graham was a member of First Baptist Church, Dallas, where I pastor, and he made an indelible mark on my life and ministry.

I am delighted that my friend Dr. R. T. Kendall has chosen Dr. Graham as one of the examples in his latest book. I have read a number of R. T.'s books over the years. His book on the life of Joseph, *God Meant It for Good*, is one of his most popular and was a blessing to me years ago. The present book, *For An Audience of One*, will almost certainly stand alongside his book on Joseph. It is R. T.'s unfolding of what he calls his "life verse"—John 5:44: "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (KJV). A quick way to grasp the point of this book,

as he himself puts it, is this: Billy Graham preached to millions but in fact preached for an audience of One. R. T.'s hope is that the reader will be persuaded to resist the praise of man and live as though only God was looking on. If we could live like this, truly our lives would be changed forever.

Born in Ashland, Kentucky, nearly eighty-five years ago, R. T. was a Southern Baptist pastor before attending Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He received an MDiv from Southern Baptist Seminary and went on to receive a DPhil in theology from Oxford University. His thesis, entitled *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1648*, was published by Oxford University Press. He was called to be the senior minister of Westminster Chapel in 1977, following men such as Dr. G. Campbell Morgan and Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Retiring from Westminster Chapel after twenty-five years, he has had an itinerant ministry all over the world and continues to write books.

It is my prayer that his latest book that honors Dr. Graham will be a motivation for you, as it has been for me, to live “for an audience of One.”

—DR. ROBERT JEFFRESS
PASTOR, FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, DALLAS

SPECIAL RECOMMENDATION

I HAVE WORKED IN the harsh competitive world of finance for over forty years, and one thing I know for certain is that James Bond gets it right when he says, “The world is not enough.”¹ There is a longing and thirst for purpose and fulfillment in life that the world cannot give. We are a generation looking for likes yet longing for love. As we desperately search for fulfillment and seek to find the secret to human flourishing, we frequently go to the wrong places and people to find it. As I have mentored many young millennial leaders over the years, the thread woven throughout the fabric of all our conversations is the pressure to prove oneself and to get others to affirm and validate one’s worth. In doing so, we forget that we were created to live for an audience of One, the One who created, forgave, and redeemed us.

As I ponder this cultural landscape that presents itself

before us, I can think of no better or more urgent book to hold in your hands than this new book by my good friend Dr. R. T. Kendall titled *For An Audience of One*.

R.T. reminds us that there is no higher approval that a person can enjoy and rest in than to know he or she has pleased God, and such treasure lasts for eternity.

This book is the distillation of R.T.'s deep biblical knowledge and depth of understanding gained from his many years as a theologian, writer, and pastor and as an astute observer of Christians struggling in this area. I found his book incredibly insightful, specifically in three areas.

First this book is informative. With biblical precision and practical advice R.T. addresses the global epidemic of living for people's applause and approval and encourages us to focus on living for the audience of One. R.T. spends time deconstructing the world's priorities for approval and rebuilds our faith by exegeting the biblical texts that are case studies for us, showing how prominent people pleasing has been throughout the generations and informing us that we too are not immune to such vices—particularly as we are tempted toward pride and can often be desensitized to hearing the voice and commands of God.

Second I found this book reminded me of the need for greater intentionality when fighting the need to please. R.T. paints a hopeful picture of the strength a believer can have by following Jesus' example. Jesus was resolute and determined in living out His core story, to die for the sins of humanity. He wasn't intimidated by the religious leaders. He wasn't insecure because of their opposition; instead He intentionally moved toward Calvary, knowing that was what He came to do. In a world that is fighting for our attention, we must be intentional

in asking, What does God want for my life? And what does He want me to do, as opposed to everybody else's expectations? R. T. has spent his life prioritizing the pursuit of seeking the approval of God alone and resisting the temptation to conform or submit to the status quo. His favorite Bible verse addresses such a stronghold: "How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44).

Finally I found this book instructive. It is a much-needed resource that is grounded in practical application that will enable you to apply in your everyday life the biblical principles R. T. paints for us. R. T. exposes the idols that cause us to lean toward people's approval, and by exposing them, he reminds us that the devil loses his edge. I am often reminded of these idols that threaten to steal my focus from pleasing God alone, and when that happens, it's like drinking from wells of water that never truly satisfy: "broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jer. 2:13).

I have no doubt that as you turn the pages of this book, the words of R. T. will resonate with your spirit and remind you that the affirmation of others makes a wonderful supplement to the approval of God, but a terrible substitute. I am challenged and encouraged once again to continue to walk out my Christian faith for the audience of One and live for the applause of nail-scarred hands.

—KEN COSTA
AUTHOR, FRIEND, FINANCIER

PREFACE

I HAVE BEEN BLESSED with surprising open doors in my old age—both with writing and speaking. I pray daily to know when to say yes and when I must say no. I find it hard to say no. I also pray earnestly to know what book I should write next. I still have books in me, not to mention hundreds of unpublished sermons and Bible studies I delivered at Westminster Chapel during my twenty-five years there.

When I heard a sermon by Bruce Atkinson, a previous associate pastor of London's Kensington Temple, titled, "An Audience of One," I told him immediately I wanted that to be the title of my next book—based upon my life verse. A few days later I read a tribute to Billy Graham (1918–2018) by Sam Hailes, editor of UK's *Premier Christianity*, who stated that Billy's secret was that, although he preached to millions, he "lived for an audience of One." I have since discovered that Bill Johnson at Bethel Church in Redding, California, has spoken on the subject "living before an audience of One." That sums

up what this book is about. The “One” throughout this book of course refers to the Trinitarian God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This book is dedicated to our three grandsons: Tobias Robert, Timothy Robert, and Tyndale Robert. I was not prepared for how much they would mean to Louise and me or how much I would love them. I pray for them daily that they will be like the three Hebrew children—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who chose the burning fiery furnace over bowing down to Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image (Dan. 3). When all of them are old enough to read this book, it is my heart’s cry that the Holy Spirit will grip them to choose to live their lives before an audience of One.

INTRODUCTION

I NEVER WILL FORGET a story I heard years ago. A young prodigy—a pianist—gave his first concert at the Royal Festival Hall in London. His reputation preceded him; the concert was sold out on the day that tickets were first available. His brilliance at the piano exceeded all expectancy. When he finished his last piece, the audience went wild. They stood to their feet spontaneously and shouted and cheered.

The young pianist bowed quickly and hurried off stage. But the audience was begging for him to come back. The stage manager whispered to him, “Go quickly—they are yelling for you.”

But the young man wasn’t moving. Instead he peered through a crack in the curtain, anxiously scanning the audience.

“No, I can’t go out there,” he said.

The stage manager was bordering on annoyance: “Look, son, they are on their feet. Trust me; they don’t do this for everybody—go out and enjoy it.”

The boy continued to scan the audience.

Finally the stage manager cracked; he shouted, “Get out there—they are standing for you!”

The young pianist looked at him and whispered, “They are not all standing. Do you see the old man in the last row from the back? He is still seated.”

“Who cares about one old man?” said the stage manager.

The boy answered with a steely determination. “I care. That’s my teacher. When he stands, I can take that bow.”

The crowds were still cheering, two thousand people applauding his skill, his brilliance, the sheer magic of his music. But the young musician knew in his heart that none of that mattered unless his teacher—his mentor—approved.

In truth he was playing for an audience of...one.

The humility of this young prodigy is in contrast to a scene at London’s Heathrow Airport. There was a man in a hurry, but he was tenth in line at Heathrow. For some reason there was no agent working at the business class desk. This man was used to special treatment, used to being in the priority line. He also took himself very seriously. He seethed that he had to wait his turn. He suddenly broke all the rules of etiquette and fair play: he jumped to the front of the line. He said to the check-in person: “Madam, *do you know who I am?*” The shrewd lady immediately picked up a phone and made an announcement that came over the loudspeakers: “There’s a man at desk fourteen who does not know his name. So if you know who this might be, would you please come and help him?”

As it happens, that man was not me, but I’m afraid it could have been. I have done the equivalent of that more times than I want to admit. If I could only remember that God in heaven is watching my every move and listening to every word! As the old spiritual put it:

He sees all you do, He hears all you say; my Lord is
writing all the time.

—ANONYMOUS

Malachi speaks of a scroll of remembrance:

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each
other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of
remembrance was written in his presence concerning
those who feared the LORD and honored his name

—MALACHI 3:16

Think of these words: *the Lord listened and heard*.

If you and I could keep this in mind, that the Lord God of
heaven and earth—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is listening to
each word we say, I think it would change our lives. My most
unfavorite verse in the Bible is this—the very words of Jesus:

I tell you that everyone will have to give account on
the day of judgment for every empty word they have
spoken.

—MATTHEW 12:36

To put it another way: if we could intentionally imagine
an audience of One—Jesus Himself—is eavesdropping on our
every conversation, it could save us from a lot of regret and
stress. An unguarded comment, which James calls a “spark,”
can set a forest on fire (Jas. 3:5).

James went on to say that there are two kinds of wisdom:
1) wisdom from heaven—true wisdom and 2) “wisdom”—
namely counterfeit wisdom, which is from the devil. The dif-
ference is that wisdom that comes from heaven is “first of all
pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy

and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” The “wisdom” that comes from below invariably results in envy, selfish ambition, disorder and “every evil practice” (vv. 15–17).

Heavenly but practical wisdom is what the Book of Proverbs is mainly about. It has nothing to do with your education, intelligence, or being well connected. It begins with the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7; 9:10). Its importance can hardly be exaggerated:

The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will give you a garland to grace your head and present you with a glorious crown.

—PROVERBS 4:7–9

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The purpose of this book is fourfold:

1. to lead you to experience the conscious approval of God;
2. to lead you to experience the joy of knowing you live to serve the Creator of the world;
3. to lead you to have godly wisdom; and
4. to show the way forward that will save you from regret down the road.

In truth all those fourfold aims can be summed up very simply: it is so that on that final day you will not only not be

ashamed but full of joy as you come face to face with...an audience of One.

Being motivated and governed by making the Lord Jesus Christ your audience of One will lead you to these four things. I guarantee it.

That said, there is one predominant, consistent truth that is an assumption on every page of this book: the God of the Bible is a jealous God. He is unashamedly and unapologetically *jealous*. That is who He is. This turns some people off; it turns some people on. It turns me on. I love it. It means He loves me and cares for me and ensures that no good thing will be withheld from me if I love His glory (Ps. 84:11).

What I want to convey in this book is that if we could *remember* to speak and act as though there were no one else present but Jesus Christ Himself, it could be life-changing.

The truth is, whether we remember this or not, God *is* watching and listening. And remembering. The day of judgment is what Paul calls the judgment seat of Christ: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

That will be the scariest day of your life and mine. There is no way to calculate how dreadful and full of anxiety we will feel when that day comes. But, like it or not, it's coming. Soon.

Walk with me now. I'd love it if you would consider that you and I are on a journey together. We may be aware of each other of course. But to the degree we are conscious that He is looking at us over our shoulders and listening to every single word...to that degree will we be given pause. To stop. Wait. Think. Just maybe it will help us to be "quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (Jas. 1:19).

Chapter One

WHAT'S IN IT FOR GOD?



Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded.

—ROMANS 3:27

The only evidence that I have seen the Divine Glory
is my willingness to forsake any claim upon God.

—N. BURNETT MAGRUDER (1915–2005)

WHAT DO YOU want most in all the world?" That was a question put to me by Sergei Nikolaev, my Russian translator, also a pastor, when I was visiting the Soviet Union in 1985. I immediately replied: "To see revival in Westminster Chapel."

"Why do you want to see revival in Westminster Chapel?" he asked. I was really annoyed that he asked this. What an impertinent question! After all, why wouldn't I want to see revival in my church? Wouldn't any pastor want this?

But Sergei wouldn't back down. He pushed me: "*Why* do you want this?" To my embarrassment I struggled to answer him. Not that he said it, but I could feel his thinking...that revival in my church would be more of an ego trip for me than I wanted to admit. I did not want to face what was a part of my true motive. I rationalized by thoughts and explained to him how wonderful it would surely be if true revival came to a London church. Whereas he probably thought Moscow was the center of the world, it is surely London!

I have thought a lot about his question and that conversation. It took me longer than I care to admit to see that my motive was not as pure, impeccable, and God glorifying as I thought. However, that conversation helped shape the wording of a prayer covenant I introduced to the members of Westminster Chapel several years later in 1994. We designed a prayer covenant to be prayed daily (three hundred people signed up) that included this petition: "We pray for the manifestation of God's glory in our midst along with an ever-increasing openness in us to the manner in which God chooses to manifest that glory."

There are two things to be noted by the wording of this petition:

1. Instead of praying for revival we asked for the manifestation of God's glory.
2. We knew from church history that God can manifest Himself in strange ways; I wanted our sophisticated Brits to be open to *any* way God may choose to show up.

Did God answer our prayer? Yes. Does that mean true revival came to Westminster Chapel? No. God manifested His glory mainly by passing us by! Oh yes. That is God's right to do! What is more, He went elsewhere, as I will show later. After all, whose glory was at stake? Mine or His? Ours or His?

For sixty years I have preached the sovereignty of God. The heart of this teaching is summed up in God's word to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Exod. 33:19; Rom.9:15). It is one thing to believe this theoretically—especially when it comes to God's prerogative to save whom He will—but to apply the same principle to ourselves when we so desperately wanted to see revival in Westminster means we had to practice what we preached!

When we pursue the glory of God, we must remember we are pursuing whatever glorifies, honors, and pleases *Him*. This means we must personally bow out entirely and respect what *He* is pleased to do. Whenever He is pleased to do it. Wherever He is pleased to do it. With whomever He is pleased to use. We need to be willing to affirm His right to pass us by and bless those He chooses to bless—even when that blessing does not include what we hoped for.

It is one thing to preach this, another to practice it.

In a word, I think my desire for revival was more personal

than I was willing to admit. My desire was not as honoring to God as I had convinced myself to believe. I think Sergei could see this when I couldn't.

Yes, it hurt a bit when God chose to show up in power at London's Holy Trinity Brompton in 1994. I was so sure that if revival came to the world, it would come to England. If revival came to England, it would come to London. And if it came to London, it would come to Westminster Chapel—the bastion of Reformed theology. Reformed theology is all about God and His honor and glory. Not only that, but we put ourselves on the line by going to the streets of Victoria and Westminster, handing out tracts and presenting the gospel to whomever would stand still for a few moments. We believed in the Great Commission, to go into all the world to preach the gospel to all creation (Mark 16:15), as much as we believed in the sovereignty of God. We equally believed in the manifestation of the Spirit as much as we did upholding the Word. In fact I got into deep trouble with some of my members by doing things such as witnessing in the streets as well as making other changes. Surely God would honor this!

As if this obligated God to us! Or that we were entitled to His blessing! I'm afraid it wasn't *entirely* His glory after all that I had in mind; I wanted my dad, my friends, and my enemies to see Westminster Chapel right in the middle of a great move of God.

Jeremiah, a godly prophet, said that the heart is deceitful above all things and incurably wicked (Jer. 17:9). Once you think you have a handle on your heart and motives as well as your ego, lo and behold, you find out you have not arrived after all. For example, I might have thought that since we at Westminster Chapel were praying for the manifestation of the

“glory of God,” God would surely honor precisely that; after all He is a God of glory! In other words, I might have thought I had some sort of a claim upon God that guaranteed that God would certainly honor such a noble petition! Wrong.

I have lived long enough to observe how God blesses people of all kinds of theological streams. For example, Reformed theology may be God honoring, but God is not obligated to honor *it*—or those who uphold it!

ANOTHER CONVERSATION

This takes me back to a pivotal conversation I had in 1956. I was seated in a church service next to Dr. N. Burnett Magruder, one of my early mentors. I said to him, “Dr. Magruder, I reckon that the highest level of devotion to God would be to die as a martyr for the gospel.” I wanted to see if he would agree. He smiled. He took out a sheet of paper, wrote on it and handed it to me. I was sobered. I carried his handwritten note with me for years besides writing it in my Bible. It said:

The only evidence that I have seen the Divine Glory is
my willingness to forsake any claim upon God.

Dr. Magruder was a graduate of Yale Divinity School where he studied, grasped, and was shaped by the theology of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)—also a graduate of Yale. Edwards is still widely regarded as America’s greatest theologian but is perhaps best known for his memorable sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” preached on July 8, 1741, in Enfield, Connecticut, at the height of the Great Awakening. What Dr. Magruder wrote on that sheet of paper reflects the thinking of Jonathan Edwards.

“Seeing” the divine glory is something John the Apostle referred to near the beginning of the fourth Gospel. “We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Seeing the glory of God in Christ was to affirm Him for being just like He is. In other words, loving God for who He is in Himself apart from what He might do for us.

I anticipate that some readers may need time to absorb this. I know I did. I have tried to plumb the depths of this principle for over sixty years. I am still not able to unpack this in a sentence or two. But here is a brief introduction to what it means:

1. As long as I believe that God owes me something, I have not truly affirmed His glory; I am still thinking of what He might do for me.
2. As long as I feel entitled to something from Him, I have not truly seen His glory; I am thinking of myself.
3. As long as I think I have a *claim* on Him so that He is obligated to answer my prayers and do things for me, I have not yet seen His glory; I am still thinking of myself.
4. But when I truly see His glory, I will release Him to do what He pleases to do—whether or not I am the recipient of His blessing.
5. I will honor what He does or does not do. Whatever He does. Wherever He does it. Whenever He does it. With whomever He chooses to use—even if He bypasses me.

There is a story that lies behind one of the great hymns written by the blind composer Fanny Crosby (1820–1915). She was addressing a group of people in a prison on a Sunday afternoon. She quoted Romans 9:15, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” She was making the point that God is not obligated to save anyone but could pass us by and be just. Apparently the power of the Lord was present. A prisoner cried out, “O Lord, don’t pass by me.” Crosby went home and wrote a hymn that begins with these words:

Pass me not, O gentle Savior,
Hear my humble cry;
While on others Thou art calling,
Do not pass me by.¹

In John chapter 6 you have the hard sayings of Jesus. At the beginning of the chapter Jesus had a great following—five thousand people. He fed them with five barley loaves and two small fish. But Jesus saw what their motives really were. They came, and He said to them, “You are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill” (v. 26). Everything Jesus said to them after that was offensive to them. The straw that broke the camel’s back was His closing comment: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them. . . . *From this time* many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him” (vv. 44, 66, emphasis added).

You could make a case that the five thousand surely saw the glory of God when they saw the *miracles*. But according to Jesus, that was not what enthralled them; it was the food. It was a “What’s in it for me?” kind of following. When the

thousands turned away, Jesus asked the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Simon Peter spoke up: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God” (vv. 67–69). In other words, unlike the five thousand, Peter worshipped Jesus for *what he saw in Jesus*—that He was the Holy One of God. This is what John meant by “seeing” Christ’s glory (John 1:14).

We truly see the glory of God when we worship Him *not* for what He can do for us but for His being just like He is.

In a word: we have begun to see the glory of God when we voluntarily put ourselves out of the picture. I must not want Him to have 50 percent of the glory and me 50 percent. I must not want Him to have 90 percent of the glory and me 10 percent. I don’t even want Him to have 99 percent of the glory and me 1 percent. I want Him to have *all* the glory—100 percent.

Not to us, LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory.... Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever pleases him.

—PSALM 115:1, 3

Therefore until I *see this for myself* and *love it*, I have not really *seen* His glory. Jonathan Edwards taught that one thing Satan cannot produce in us is a *love for God’s glory*. If therefore you and I love God’s glory, really and truly love it, we may be sure that God has performed a work of true grace in us. For Satan would not, or could not, do that. The flesh cannot do that. Only God can do this.

The flesh hates the God of glory. To quote Edwards, “Men naturally are God’s enemy.”² So if a person struggles to love a God of glory, he or she is confirming our point; there is nothing

about this kind of God that we naturally like. Some people are at home with a God they can either control or who is certainly equal with them. This makes God a partner—on equal footing with us. There are people who love that kind of God. But to love the God of the Bible—a God who is all-knowing, sovereign, and omnipotent—is something that comes by the Holy Spirit changing us internally. This is why Jesus said that no one could come to Him unless the Father draws him (John 6:44); it is what the Spirit does.

Most theology taught today is anthropology; it is man-centered. You and I are living in the “me generation.” People only ask, “What’s in it for me?” No one seems to ask, “What’s in it for God?”

I would gladly spend the rest of my life getting people to ask the question, “What’s in it for God?”

For example, what was in it for God when Jesus died on the cross? The answer: it is what satisfied His justice; the blood of Jesus turned His wrath away. There is a big word that describes this; it is called propitiation. Paul said that God presented Jesus “as a propitiation by His blood” (Rom. 3:25, NKJV). John said that Jesus is “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2, NKJV). It comes from the Greek word *hilasterion*. It refers to the lid of the ark of the covenant. It is translated “mercy seat” in Hebrews 9:5. On the ancient day of atonement the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat is when and where the atonement took effect.

God’s plan of salvation has been designed in such a manner that “no one may boast before him” (1 Cor. 1:29). Paul said that we are justified by faith—faith plus nothing. Works are completely and totally out of the picture, says Paul, insofar as contributing to our salvation. He then posed a question, “Where,

then, is boasting?" He answers: "It is excluded" (Rom. 3:27). Had Abraham been justified by works, he had something to boast about—"but not before God" (Rom. 4:2).

If you ask, "Where do works come in?" the answer is:

1. They show our gratitude to God for such a free salvation (Rom. 12).
2. They demonstrate to the world that we care for their needs (Jas. 2).

The bottom line: God gets all the glory. We cannot boast that we did anything to bring about our salvation. He did it all—from start to finish; He enabled us to come to Christ and believe. It is faith alone in Christ alone.

The Bible is a God-centered book. The Holy Spirit wrote it (2 Tim. 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:21). It is designed to give God all the glory. "I will not yield my glory to another," He says (Isa. 42:8). This is why the doctrine of salvation removes any person from boasting if they are saved.

What I have described in this chapter is a bare glimpse of the nature of the true God—the One who watches over us day and night and who listens to all we say. What a privilege it is for us to have a heavenly Father like that! What is more, He only wants what is best for us. No good thing will He withhold from us when we do what we do and say what we say for an audience of One.