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GOD  
OF

PICTURES OF THE INTIMACY  
GOD DESIRES WITH HIS CHILDREN

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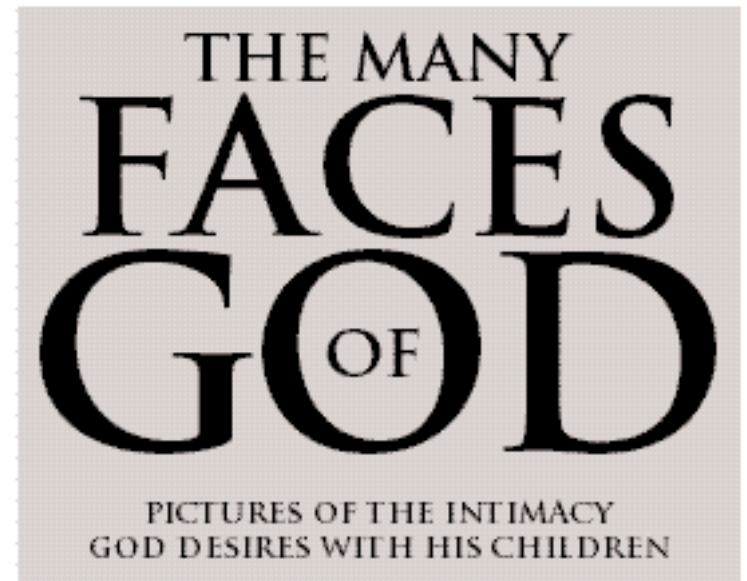
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This book was  
Edited by Gerald Wheeler  
Copyedited by Jan Schleifer and James Cavil  
Designed by The Idea Works  
Photos by Joel D. Springer, PhotoDisc, and Stockbyte  
Typeset: 11/14 Garamond Book

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

08 07 06 05 04            5 4 3 2 1

#### **R&H Cataloging Service**

Shewmake, Carrol Johnson, 1927-

The many faces of God: pictures of the intimacy God desires with His children.

1. God. I. Title.

231

ISBN 0-8280-1785-9

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INTRODUCTION:

***How Can I Visualize God?***

Few people attempt to draw a picture of God the Father. His Son, Jesus, who walked here on earth, yes, many artists depict Him. But God the Father? God is a Spirit who lives in a high and holy place. In the New Testament when Philip asked Jesus to show him the Father, Jesus told the disciples that if they had seen Him, they had observed the Father, too. Jesus also told them that the Holy Spirit was to take His place on earth when He returned to heaven. Evidently, to know one member of the Godhead is to know Them all.

As a child growing up in a Christian home that included morning and evening worship and weekly church attendance, I had a picture of God that was simple. I felt secure in His love, confident of His power and authority.

But when I began to study the Bible as an adult, I discovered I had seemingly unanswerable questions. As a young pastor's wife I remember telling someone that as far as I was concerned, the compilers of the Bible could have just left out Exodus through 2 Chronicles. All that shedding of animal blood; those horrible wars! I couldn't handle the violence of the Bible. It seemed to me that the majority of Scripture focused on war, while I longed for peace. Was God a deity of peace or of war?

In reading the Bible, I skimmed past the books of the

ancient prophets—even Revelation in the New Testament. Who could understand the significance of all those strange creatures? Schoolwork had come easily for me in childhood, and I seldom dealt with weighty subjects. I liked things to be quick and easy. Thus I left Daniel and Revelation and the majority of prophetic books for my minister husband to understand and to explain.

As a school librarian I valued order. Although I didn't know the answers to all the questions the students asked me, I knew how to find them. The whole library system existed to make it easy to locate answers. Why wasn't the Bible like that? Some books of the Bible seemed to have no relationship whatsoever with the others around them. Surely whoever edited the Bible could have arranged the books in better order! Even within a book, just when I seemed to find something that helped me in understanding a concept, the writer would change the subject. I had a hard time following through on themes—let alone discovering answers to my questions about God. What was it that held the 66 diverse books of the Bible together and made them a complete holy book? Somewhere I was missing a vital clue.

Our ministerial life was busy. I loved working for the Lord—but I knew I needed to find answers to some of my questions. As a result I spent wakeful nights in prayer. “Lord, show me truth or I will teach error,” I petitioned. When I had to wait in the car for my husband, I prayed. And when I waited for a doctor's appointment, I prayed. I wrote lists of God's character traits on scraps of paper. Constantly I searched Scripture.

It was then—in the midst of my busy life—that I discovered the missing clue to making 66 books written by numerous writers into one Holy Bible. For a class in continuing education I read the complete Bible, book by

book, with one specific question to ask of each book: What is the picture of God I find in this book of the Bible? Then I was to write a brief report answering that question.

As I explored the inspired books with this question in mind, I realized for the first time that an underlying continuity did run throughout the entire 66 books. In the very first book of the Old Testament I found a golden thread of intimacy between God and the human race that continued through all the rest, glowing even more brightly when it reached Revelation.

“I will be your God,” the Almighty promised, “and you will be My people.” This coupling of God and humanity was as impossible to break as it would be for the sun to disappear and never rise again. Again and again throughout Scripture God reiterated this same yearning desire for a love relationship with humanity. At the beginning He emphasized its importance by wording it in “covenant” language—a legal document that cannot be broken. Later He incorporated His intense desire for intimacy with us into word pictures of various human relationships and the life of nature around us.

I have never been the same since that discovery. It's almost as though I see God with new eyes as I read the Bible. His longing for intimacy and understanding reaches out to me in every passage. It invades my meditation, my prayers, and my writing. True, my questions about God have not all received answers—but then I don't understand everything about my husband, either, and he is a human being like me. Thus I can expect that learning to know God will continue throughout my earthly lifetime—and doubtless through eternity. But my mental block in reading Scripture has vanished. Now I can explore the entire Bible with an open mind, realizing that God's purpose is to reveal, not to conceal. God teaches me some of His most precious lessons

from those books I once thought should have been left out!

As I begin writing this book I am excited about pulling together the many faces that God shows of Himself throughout Scripture. What I want to portray is the reality of knowing Him as a dear and intimate friend, closer even than any family member.

As I continue to read and study the Bible I realize that it isn't always easy to understand what God is like—especially for a beginner. Human words can never perfectly explain divine things. Three principles have helped me to face this dilemma.

First, the illumination of the Holy Spirit must always accompany the reading of the Bible. Only the Holy Spirit can put into our minds a perfect picture of God.

Second, we need to realize that God, understanding human nature so well, purposefully makes us search the Bible to discover His character. He knows that our comprehension will grow only as we exert our minds in the exploration.

Third, no one verse of the Bible ever stands alone. I look for other passages to clarify or expand what I think the verse in question is saying. And if I can find none, I may be misinterpreting the verse.

In one place God gives us one word picture that shows us one facet of Himself, then another portrait in some other place. It is only by putting all our small snapshots together that we begin to glimpse His fullness and majesty.

This book is the product of my personal search for the golden thread of God's desire for intimacy with humanity. It is my hope that you, the reader, will begin to taste the goodness of God for yourself, to feel His great love reaching out, and to respond with your own yearning for Him! May this book be the beginning of your individual exploration for the many faces of God.

PROLOGUE:

*The Longing God:  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*

Let's imagine God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit early in earth's history, long before the writing of the Bible, discussing how to reveal Themselves to sinful humanity.

"It's hard for humans to visualize God," the Son commented.

"It's true," the Spirit added. "They have difficulty imagining something they can't see with their physical eyes."

"We've taken care of that, remember?" the Father asked, looking lovingly at His Son. "Even before Adam and Eve rebelled against us, You offered, should it be needed, to become one of them and pay the price for their rebellion. That way You can reveal Us to them."

"Yes, but think how many generations of humans are going to live and die before the time is right for that," the Son observed sadly. "How are they going to know how very much We love and care for them?"

"If only they could all grasp the intimacy with Us that is already possible for them now by faith," the Spirit sighed.

"We need to put it into words that they can easily comprehend," the Father suggested.

"Word pictures!" the Son almost shouted. "That's the

idea. We'll choose humans who are faithful to Us—"

"And inspire them to put our thoughts accurately and poetically into human words," the Spirit finished for Him. "That's My job," the Spirit continued happily, "and I love it! I love wooing humans with divine love. I love it especially when they open up their hearts and let Me enter in and fill them with Our presence. Then it's not hard to help them understand how much We love them and want to have an intimate relationship with them."

"Yes, it's the others who are the problem," the Father said. "Those who turn their faces from Us and hold their hearts closed against Us."

"Let's find as many ways as they can possibly understand to describe intimate relationships, and put them into human words," the Son urged.

"We'll do even better than that," the Father replied. "We'll make every word picture a copy of an actual earthly relationship."

The Spirit was excited. "Of course, of course," He said, "that will make My job so much easier. I can just remind them of what they call 'real life'—and tell them that God is even more than that!"

"Let's give them a comprehensive picture early on," the Son suggested. "Something that will outline the whole of human history and offer them hope and expectancy."

"We can choose the descendants of one man and woman who worship the Creator-God to become a special chosen people to reveal Us to the rest of the world," the Father added.

The Son smiled. "I like that. Do You suppose We could give them a living illustration of Our ministry for them?"

"Perhaps We could have them make a model of the heavenly sanctuary that they could actually become in-

olved with," the Father proposed.

"Wonderful idea!" the Spirit agreed. "We can let Our glory rest upon it like a cloud."

The Father, deep in contemplation, turned to the Son. "And through that illustration We can describe the scope of Your ministry so they'll be receptive to You when You come to earth as a human being to save them from their sins. That should be encouraging and make them turn to Us more readily."

"Not only My ministry and life, Father," added the Son, "but We could let the model of the sanctuary illustrate their individual lives and the personal plan We have for their salvation. They'll be able to visualize how We can live within them through the Holy Spirit."

"Oh, this is a very good plan!" all Three responded with one voice and heart.

Of course, it didn't happen just like that. Yet the divine plan to reveal God to humanity is visible throughout inspired Scripture. And for anyone who has ears to hear and eyes to see spiritual things, God's great longing and love for a close relationship with each human is an open invitation to enter into intimacy with our Creator.

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PART I

*“I Am Your God and You Are My People”*

All-powerful God, Ruler of the universe,  
eternal, immortal, invisible—three in one—  
Can it be that You are truly seeking sinful humanity?  
Is it possible that You long for us?  
Call for us? Died for us?  
Have You chosen us to be Your very own?  
Can we truly be Your people?  
Is that possible?  
Do You delight in us,  
Sing over us?  
Can we even now—here on sinful earth—  
walk with You daily,  
hear Your voice,  
talk with You heart-to-heart?  
Have You a future plan for us  
to rejoice  
in Your companionship  
forever?  
Are You truly our God?



## CHAPTER 1

### *He Chose Us for His Very Own!*

**H**e did! Yes, He did! He chose us for His very own. Not only did God create our world and everything in it—designing humanity in the very image of Himself—but He also bought us back from the slavery of sin, the price being the death of His only Son, Jesus. That’s the value Heaven placed upon the human race. We were chosen from the very beginning.

When I discovered the central theme of the Bible—that the Creator of the world selected sinful humanity to be His very own—it overwhelmed me. It was easy for me to picture God delighting in the perfect Adam and Eve that He had Himself created in His own image—but it was incomprehensible to me that He could still love and cherish their sinful and rebellious offspring. Reading the Bible through, looking for—and finding again and again—the assurance that God’s love for His creation has never changed, despite their rebellion and sin, has made a vast difference in my spiritual life.

Although the picture of God that we find woven throughout the 66 books of the Bible is definitely that of a high and holy Creator God—one true God—yet we continually find Him stooping low to reach the weakest sinner. The prophet Isaiah says of Him:

“For this is what the high and lofty One says—  
 he who lives forever, whose name is holy:  
 ‘I live in a high and holy place,  
 but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit,  
 to revive the spirit of the lowly  
 and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”

—Isaiah 57:15

The incredible—and almost unbelievable—message of the Bible is that this great awesome God has a love for and a desire to communicate with the people He created. Not only does Scripture stress His Creatorship and power, but it tells us that He longs to have an intimate relationship with us. He redeemed us for a purpose: to relate with Him throughout eternity. The theme runs throughout Scripture like a golden ribbon: “I am your God and you are My people.”

Because of Adam and Eve’s sin-damaged hearts, and all humanity’s thereafter, we can no longer stand in the visible presence of divinity and live. But God’s grace devised a way for the repentant human race to commune with Him. With the presence of the Holy Spirit in their renewed hearts they are able to reach the courts of heaven through prayer—heart-to-heart in place of face-to-face. *God never leaves His people alone—He is always by their side.*

The Bible records that in spite of God’s grace so freely given, evil continued to flourish throughout the earth as generation after generation tried to fill their spiritual emptiness with selfish pleasures. Yet in every generation the Lord always had a few who were loyal to Him and represented Him to the world.

When the time came that almost every human thought was evil, God stepped into human history and destroyed the earth by a flood, saving only loyal Noah, his wife, three sons,

and their wives to repopulate the earth with people who would once again serve the true God (Gen. 6:5, 13, 18).

When the rainwaters stopped and the earth dried off, God promised Noah that He would never again destroy the earth by a flood. To make it easier for Noah and his family to remember His promise, God gave them a visible sign: amid the colorless landscape of the empty earth God flung a glorious iridescent rainbow across the sky (Gen. 9:12-16). The rainbow would forever guarantee God’s faithfulness to His people.

But even the Flood did not stop the increase of evil. God never uses force, but leaves human beings free to choose whom they will serve. Many of Noah’s descendants became as wicked as those God had destroyed. Yet He always had a remnant who served Him.

God took Abraham of the line of Shem, son of Noah, with his wife, Sarah, away from the wicked city of their ancestors to dwell as pilgrims in a country that God promised would one day belong to their descendants. To Abraham, God revealed His plan to establish from his descendants a people through whom He could spread the knowledge of the true God throughout the earth.

“I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you” (Gen. 17:7), He told Abraham.

Today we would call this a pact or treaty. The Lord made an agreement, signed by two parties, Abraham and God, and notarized by the universe. God is still honoring this covenant. He renewed it to Isaac, Abraham’s son, and then again to Jacob, his grandson—all worshipers of the true God. His purpose was to have a people through whom He could display His power, His splendor, and His love.