SHOW ME YOUR GLORY

UNDERSTANDING the MAJESTIC SPLENDOR of GOD

STEVEN J. LAWSON

ENDORSEMENTS

"At the heart of all true spiritual vitality is a prioritization of knowing God. The Cappadocian Fathers, as they defended the deity of the Son and the Holy Spirit in all of their Triune glory, knew this as they emphasized the infinitude of God. Their younger contemporary Augustine was gripped by it as he sought to respond to the fundamental error that the human will is powerful enough to lay hold of God's salvific mercy by itself. John Wycliffe was ever conscious of the perfect moral excellence of God as he critiqued the institutional church of his day. Martin Luther, Hugh Latimer, and John Calvin were similarly in awe of the greatness of their God and overwhelmed by His lovingkindness as they stood fast for the gospel in the sixteenth century. And in that iconic age of revivals, the long eighteenth century, Jonathan Edwards and Andrew Fuller were motivated by the glory of God as the telos of all creation as they preached and wrote for their day. In like fashion, this small volume by Steve Lawson confronts our generation with this great truth of the glory of God in all of His divine attributes. Must reading for a man-centered day!"

> —Dr. MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN Chair and professor of church history, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Louisville, Ky.

"The longer I live, the clearer it becomes to me that unless one begins with the true knowledge of God, nothing else in the world, in life, or in the Christian life makes any sense at all. Those who begin below, with circumstances, and attempt to reason up, drawing conclusions about God (that He is kind or cruel, accessible or aloof, powerful or weak) inevitably err. Only as we begin with the truth of God (that He is sovereign, almighty, wise, good, and just) and reason down to our circumstances (be they good or bad), does life begin to make sense. Steve Lawson has provided us with a comprehensive survey of the attributes of the God of the Bible. His twenty chapters of roughly six pages each can easily be incorporated into one's morning devotions, providing his readers with a satisfying diet of biblical insight into the God of whom to know is life eternal (John 17:3)."

> —Dr. Теrry Johnson Senior minister, Independent Presbyterian Church Savannah, Ga.

"On the eve of His crucifixion Jesus prayed that God, the Holy Trinity, would be glorified through the cross. He then added, "This is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (John 17:3). Our experience and enjoyment of eternal life, as well as our progress in the life of faith are inseparably bound up with knowing God and bringing Him honor. Dr. Lawson, with a pastor-teacher's heart and skill, takes us by the hand in this volume and brings us face-to-face with God as He has revealed Himself in the Bible and supremely in His Son, Christ Jesus. In so doing, he will surely bring some to know and love God for the first time, others to know Him better, and all to be filled with worship, love, and praise for the One who alone can make us whole."

> —Rev. Mark G. Johnston Minister, Bethel Presbyterian Church Cardiff, Wales

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 $\mathbb R$ Reformation Trust $\,$ a division of Ligonier ministries, orlando, fl

Show Me Your Glory: Understanding the Majestic Splendor of God © 2020 by Steven J. Lawson Published by Reformation Trust Publishing a division of Ligonier Ministries 421 Ligonier Court, Sanford, FL 32771 Ligonier.org ReformationTrust.com Printed in York, Pennsylvania Maple Press 0000720 First Edition ISBN 978-1-64289-263-5 (Hardcover) ISBN 978-1-64289-264-2 (ePub) ISBN 978-1-64289-265-9 (Kindle)

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Cover design: Ligonier Creative

Interior design and typeset: Katherine Lloyd, The DESK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Lawson, Steven J., author.

Title: Show me your glory : understanding the majestic splendor of God / Steven J. Lawson.

Description: First edition. | Sanford, FL : Reformation Trust Publishing, a division of Ligonier Ministries, Orlando, FL, 2020. | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019058935 (print) | LCCN 2019058936 (ebook) | ISBN 9781642892635 (hardback) | ISBN 9781642892642 (epub) | ISBN 9781642892659 (kindle edition)

Subjects: LCSH: God (Christianity)--Attributes.

Classification: LCC BT130 .L35 2020 (print) | LCC BT130 (ebook) | DDC 231/.4--dc23

LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019058935

LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2019058936

This book is dedicated to:

John and Dori Anderson

I give thanks to God for these dear and faithful friends, who have been like family to our family. Their love and friendship have meant the world to me, which has greatly encouraged me through the many years.

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Preface

HIGHER GROUND

Will never forget when I first became aware of the attributes of God.

As a young seminary student, I walked into the campus bookstore to browse through the books on the shelves. One particular book spine caught my attention, and like a proverbial moth to the flame, I was drawn to pick it up.

The book was *A Body of Divinity* by Thomas Watson. Curious about Watson, I read the book's dust jacket and found out that he was a Puritan who lived in seventeenth-century England. This intriguing book, I learned, contained his sermons on the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

I turned to the table of contents, and I was amazed to discover that the entire first page listed chapters about God. There was more of God in the table of contents alone than there was in many contemporary Christian books I had seen. In fact, the largest section of the two-page table of contents dealt exclusively with God Himself.

The table of contents listed individual chapters on the being and knowledge of God. It followed with chapters on the attributes of God: the eternality, unchangeableness, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, mercy, and truth of God. The book also touched on the unity, Trinity, and providence of God. The whole rest of the book flowed out of this profound teaching on God.

This was the first time in my life that I had seen a list of the attributes of God. I was immediately captivated by the theocentric emphasis of this book. Impulsively, I bought the book and took it home with me, little realizing the impact it would have on my life.

As I read *A Body of Divinity*, my view of God became bigger and bigger with every page. New categories of thinking about God were being planted in my mind. My heart was being deepened. My theology was being dramatically elevated. My worldview was being expanded. My Christian life was being steered in a radically different direction, toward higher ground.

What made the difference? I was seeing God for who He is. The attributes of God so clearly revealed His holy character that my life would never be the same again.

This book, *Show Me Your Glory*, is a humble attempt to set before you these same attributes of God that so revolutionized my life. My desire is that these same transcendent truths will significantly shape your life into who you must become. May you never see God the same way again, and may you therefore never see yourself, your salvation, or the world in which you live the same way again.

> Blessings in Christ, Steven J. Lawson Dallas



Chapter One

MAJESTICALLY AWESOME

The Glory of God I

I think the greatest weakness in our day is the virtual eclipse of the character of God, even within our churches.

-R.C. Sproul

I n the early years of Ligonier Ministries, when its outreach began to blossom and expand, a consultant was brought in to meet with its founder, Dr. R.C. Sproul. The goal was to develop a vision and strategy for this rapidly growing ministry. In the initial phase, the consultant asked Dr. Sproul two diagnostic questions. The first was this: "What is the greatest need of people in the world?" Without hesitation, Dr. Sproul answered, "People in the world need to know who God is."

Probing deeper to better understand the focus of the ministry, the consultant then asked, "What is the greatest need of people in the church?" Dr. Sproul again answered without hesitation: "People in the church need to know who God is."

Dr. Sproul was right. The greatest need of every individual is

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to know who God is. No matter who a person is—whether he is inside the church or outside of it, whether he is a true believer or a militant atheist—his most basic need is to know God if he is to know himself and understand the world around him. He must know who God is and what He is like. Every other knowledge that someone may acquire is a far distant second in importance. Everything in an individual's life is affected by his knowledge of God. A true knowledge of what He is like is *that* important.

NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT

The most important aspect of who we are is what comes into our minds when we think of God. The trajectory of our lives is directed by our understanding of God. Moreover, our eternal destiny hinges on our relationship to Him and who we believe He is. If we are to live as He intends us to live, we must know who He is and what He is like.

As our knowledge of God goes, so goes the direction of our lives. A high view of God will lead us to lofty worship of Him. A growing understanding of His character will lead to holy and righteous living in the pursuit of His will. Conversely, a low view of God will lead to diminished praise of Him. Inevitably, base views of Him will lead to low and empty living.

There is nothing more important in our lives than knowing God and living for the glory of His great and awesome name.

The apostle Paul wrote, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Living for God's glory must permeate every part of our lives—as we wake up in the morning, as we go to work, as we attend school, as we worship in church, as we serve the Lord, and as we go to sleep at night. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, every moment is to be lived for the glory of God.

THE FIRMEST FOUNDATION

Knowing God and beholding His glory is foundational to everything in our lives. To build on any other footing is to build on shifting sand. Either we live for the glory of God, or we do not live at all—we only exist. If we are to truly live as He intends, our hearts must be, first and foremost, directed toward the pursuit of God's glory. God's glory must be primary and all else a far distant second. To fail to live for the glory of God is to endure an empty existence. God must be the epicenter of our lives. We exist for His glory—God created us for this high purpose. This must be our chief end. Otherwise, we have squandered our lives.

Living for the glory of God is the beginning and end of all things. This divine glory is the blazing sun around which our lives must revolve. When we come to the end of our lives, all that will matter is an affirmative answer to this crucial question: Did we live for the glory of God? If we fail to live for God, we have wasted our lives upon the earth. But if we seek God's glory, our lives will have been well spent and lived to the fullest. Only in the pursuit of the glory of God will our lives count for time and eternity.

ONE COMPELLING PASSION

To best grasp this ultimate priority, I want us to consider a man who lived more than three thousand years ago for the glory of God. He stands as a timeless example of a life lived for God, and he is just as relevant today as when he first pursued God. This man was Moses, who led the exodus of the nation of Israel out of Egyptian

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bondage. He was the author of the first five books in the Bible— Genesis through Deuteronomy. Here is a man who dared to cry out to God, "Show me Your glory!" (Ex. 33:18). Here is a man living in the passionate pursuit of God's glory. Here is a man sold out to know more of the glory of God. This driving ambition of his life is an example for each of us and is worthy of our emulation.

Here is the background for this dramatic encounter that Moses had with God. The place is Mount Sinai, and Moses has already been to the mountaintop once. While Moses was meeting with God on the summit to receive the law, the people were down in the valley breaking His law by crafting an idol to worship. When he came down and saw what the people were doing, Moses, in righteous indignation, smashed the two tablets containing the inscription of the Ten Commandments. Leading these wayward people on this journey to the promised land would prove to be the greatest challenge of his life.

AN EARNEST PRAYER

If there was ever a man who needed to know more of God, it was Moses. If there was ever a time for this increased knowledge, it was now. How could he bear up under such demanding difficulties? How could he persevere under such distressing adversity? How could this man of God endure through the enormous challenges of leading millions of rebellious Israelites? The answer is simple, yet profound. He needed a deeper knowledge of God.

The same is true for each one of us. If we are to live life to the fullest, we must know the God who has made us in His image. If we are to meet the many difficulties before us, we must know Him who has an eternal purpose and plan for our lives. Otherwise, we will be reduced to a mundane life that misses the mark He has designed for us.

GOD IS GLORIOUS

The request Moses made that momentous day was extraordinarily daring: "I pray You, show me Your glory!" (Ex. 33:18). When he offered this audacious prayer, he had already seen the glory of God in ways that far exceeded what anyone else had beheld of the glory of God.

Before this encounter with God, Moses had already stood on holy ground at the burning bush. He had heard the audible voice of God say, "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14). At the time of this daring request, Moses had already witnessed the pillar of cloud lead Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 13). He had seen the invisible hand of God part the Red Sea and drown Pharaoh's hordes (Ex. 14). He had already seen water come gushing out of a rock (Ex. 17) and had beheld the fire fall on Mount Sinai and consume the mountainside (Ex. 19). Moses had already glimpsed these manifestations of the glory of God. Yet Moses still prays, "Show me Your glory!"

Moses is praying that he would see and experience a yet deeper knowledge of God. Moses understood he had only skimmed the surface of the bottomless depths of the majesty of God. He had barely placed the tip of his smallest finger into the vast oceans of the wonders of God. He must know *more* of this awesome God.

THE WEIGHT OF GREATNESS

When Moses prayed for an increased knowledge of God's glory, we must understand the meaning of this word *glory*. It translates a

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Hebrew word (*kabod*) that means "heavy" or "weight." In ancient times, the greatness of a man was determined by the weight of his assets. The richer the man was, the weightier was the accumulation of his silver, gold, and precious jewels. The word represented the greatness of a man in his surrounding community. The weight of his wealth determined the measure of the influence he had.

As related to God, the word *glory* represents the infinite weightiness of who He is. The glory of God reflects the sum and substance of His holy character. It encompasses His divine perfections, attributes, and essence. It includes His holiness, sovereignty, righteousness, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, truth, grace, mercy, goodness, love, and wrath. It is the godness of God. In short, the glory of God is the display of His infinite grandeur and vast greatness.

This prayer that God would reveal more of His greatness is what Moses must experience to find the strength to persevere. After leaving Egypt and coming to Mount Sinai, Moses is confronted with the mounting challenges of his ministry. He is facing the pressures of leading a group of rebellious Israelites through the wilderness. With an expanded knowledge of God, he can withstand any difficulty in the long journey that lay ahead. With a more intimate knowledge of God, he can persevere through the toughest times. If God will show him His glory, he can endure the fiery trials and afflictions that are to come.

GOD IS SELF-REVEALING

God chooses to respond to Moses' request with an affirmative statement. God said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion" (Ex. 33:19). God answered positively, indicating He would make His glory known to Moses in yet greater ways. When we come to God in humble submission, desiring to know more of Him, He delights to reveal more of Himself to us.

God says, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you." In this passage, God's glory is equated with His goodness. This aspect of God represents His moral purity. God added that He "will proclaim the name of the LORD before you" (v. 19). This means He will preach to Moses and expound His own glory. The word "proclaim" (Hebrew *qara*) carries the idea of raising one's voice and declaring. It is sometimes used to describe the roaring of a lion. God announces that He will bring an authoritative and powerful exposition of Himself to Moses. This will be a fervent and passionate proclamation by God to His servant. Specifically, God will preach on "the name of the LORD." The divine name refers to everything that God is—the whole of His nature, character, and person.

Moses can only know God to the extent that God chooses to make Himself known. The greater must condescend to the lesser. Moses can make no demands on God. Moses can only appeal to God to reveal more of Himself. This self-revelation of God is entirely at His sovereign discretion.

Likewise, each one of us can only know God to the measure that He allows us to know Him. Some of us will be more intimate with God than others. Some of us will pursue Him more than others. But each one of us must pursue Him with eagerness, knowing He rewards those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6).

SHOW ME YOUR GLORY

GOD IS AUTONOMOUS

At the heart of what God chooses to proclaim to Moses is the truth of His sovereign grace and saving mercy. God says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." This graciousness toward undeserving, sinful creatures is the apex of His glory. He will sovereignly choose to set His saving favor on whomever He will. In other words, God will deal with Moses in mercy, unlike the exercise of His wrath toward Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

God is autonomous. He will do whatever He pleases. He alone possesses the right of self-government and has complete freedom in His actions. God is self-ruling and self-determining. He is independent of the will of His creatures, both sovereign and free in His actions.

If you want to understand the glory of God, understand this statement: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." The apostle Paul quotes this verse at the very apex of his argument in Romans 9, teaching the freedom of the divine will: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (v. 15). Then Paul explains, "So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires" (v. 18). To behold God's glory to a greater extent is to perceive more carefully His electing grace and predestinating mercy. This divine disclosure is taking Moses deeper into the heart of God.

The mercy of God is His tenderhearted compassion for those who are helpless and hopeless in their sin. In a step of unmerited favor, God, who is "rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4), chooses to draw near to those who are ruined by their iniquities. The apostle Paul writes, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5). It is His mercy that moves Him to save those who are perishing. Peter notes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3). To understand the greatness of God's glory is to understand that He sets His heart on sinners whom He has chosen to save. He sees us in our state of utter ruin. For reasons known only to God, He chooses to have mercy on those who have no claim to it.

Has God in Christ set His mercy on you? Has God chosen to have compassion on you? If so, this is an extraordinary unveiling of His glory toward you.

GOD IS AWESOME

If Moses is to behold this greater display of divine glory, God must mercifully set restrictions on His self-revelation. If God manifested all that He is in His blazing glory, Moses would immediately die. He could not withstand beholding the full revelation of the glory of God. Finite flesh cannot look on an infinite God and live. It would be easier for Moses to look directly into the blazing light of the sun than to look on God in His dazzling glory. Therefore, God graciously gave Moses these constraints so he would not die.

God then explained why these restrictions were necessary: "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" (Ex. 33:20). Such a close encounter with God would strike Moses dead. Moreover, God is spirit, without any physical form. He is an invisible being without a body. The apostle John concurs: "No one has seen God at any time" (John 1:18). Jesus says, "Not that anyone has seen the Father" (John 6:46). Paul adds that God "alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). John states again, "No one has seen God at any time" (1 John 4:12).

The "face" of God represents the display of His glory. God does not have a literal face. Neither does He have arms, hands, feet, or body parts. When this language appears in Scripture, it uses anthropomorphic expressions in which infinite God communicates Himself to finite man in ways that we can understand. God is so far beyond our comprehension that He must speak to us in the most elementary terms. He must use metaphors to give us some understanding of what is beyond our grasp. To see the face of God means to know and experience who He is. If we knew more of His majesty, we would love and adore Him more.

Here are the gracious restrictions the Lord gave to Moses: "Then the LORD said, 'Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock'" (Ex. 33:21). He needed to retreat a distance away so as not to be too close to the bright shining light of God's glory. He is told to hide himself in the cleft of the rock. This will provide a needed buffer between himself and God.

The Lord continues, "And it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by" (v. 22). The blinding glory of God will pass before Moses in an amazing display of holy radiance. The cleft of the rock will be like a shield for Moses. He will hide there so that he is not consumed. Further, God will place His hand over Moses as a covering. This will be a second buffer.

Then God says, "Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen" (v. 23). Here is a third layer of protection for Moses. He will only see the back of God. He cannot look directly into the face of God and live. Moses can only see a partial glory—or the divine afterglow. He cannot bear to behold the full revelation of who God is. Nevertheless, this protected view of divine glory is more than what he presently possesses.

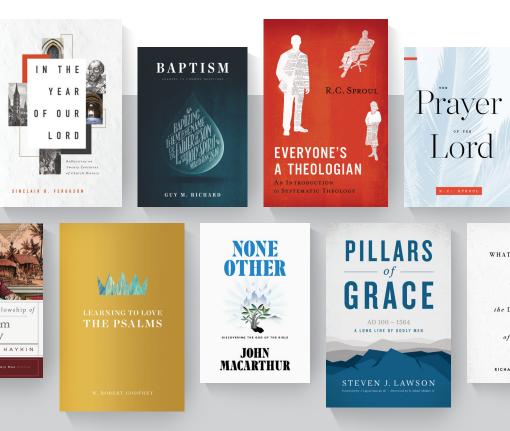
A CLOSER ENCOUNTER

Each one of us needs a closer encounter with this awesome God. We, too, face similar pressures in life, much like those that confronted Moses. How will *you* endure the demanding trials of your life? How will you persevere in the face of many hardships? How will we each survive in a world that persecuted the prophets of God and crucified the Lord Jesus Christ? How will you remain steadfast amid countless stresses? The answer lies in what Moses dared to request—a deeper knowledge of God.

Do you want to know God's will for your life? The primary key to discerning the path God has chosen for you is to pursue the knowledge of His glory. Do you have decisions to make? Do you have mounting challenges you are facing? Then pray this earnest prayer: "God, show me Your glory!" No matter where we are in life's journey, none of us has reached the full knowledge of God. We all need to pray this heartfelt plea. As we behold more of His glory and majesty, we will see more clearly who we are and our direction in the plan of God.

Is your spiritual heart sluggish and lukewarm? There is one sure cure. Every one of us needs to pray with Moses, "Show me Your glory!" A growing knowledge of God enables us to live with enlarged faith in the midst of the storms of life. The only way we will be anchored firmly in the will of God and not be swayed by the turbulence of this world is by personally experiencing the far greater understanding of the character of God. A deepening knowledge of God's glory will ignite our hearts with a blazing love for Him—and trust in Him.

Do you desire to know more of who God is? Do you long to have a deeper relationship with Him? If so, pray this prayer that Moses cried out. Ask God to reveal more of Himself to you. This is a prayer that God delights to answer. We publish books that proclaim the historic Christian faith to new generations. *These are books you can trust.*



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"Once we come to know God, we must seek to know Him more fully for who He is."

It's the most important question we can ask: Who is God? The wrong answer could spell our doom, but God has clearly revealed Himself and His majesty in His Word. Just as Moses asked the Lord on the summit of Sinai, we can approach God's Word with the ultimate request: "Show me Your glory."

In Show Me Your Glory: Understanding the Majestic Splendor of God, Dr. Steven Lawson takes us to the mountaintop of divine revelation by distilling the Bible's teaching about God Himself. Each chapter delves into the depths of God's awesome attributes, teaching that a deeper knowledge of our Creator can lead us into intimate fellowship with and reverent worship of the One who made us for Himself.

> Dr. Steven J. Lawson is founder and president of OnePassion Ministries. He is a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow, director of the doctor of ministry program at The Master's Seminary, and host of the Institute for Expository Preaching. He is author of numerous books, including *The Moment of Truth* and *The Passionate Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones*.





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