

## Chapter 2

### No One Like Him

**“For *God* so loved the world...”**

*If only I could talk to the pilot.* Thirty seconds would do. Face-to-face. Just an explanation. He was, after all, the one bumping my wife and me from his plane.

Not that I could blame him. Denalyn had picked up more in Hong Kong than souvenirs. She was so nauseous, I wheelchaired her through the airport. She flopped onto her seat, pillowed her head against the window, and I promised to leave her alone for the fourteen-hour flight.

I had a simple goal: get Denalyn on the plane.

The airline staff had an opposite one: get Denalyn off.

Fault me for their fear. When a concerned attendant inquired about my wife’s condition, I sent shock waves through the fuselage with my answer: “Virus.” Attendants converged on our seats like police at a crime scene. Presidential news conferences have stirred fewer questions.

“How long has she been sick?”

“Did you see a doctor?”

“Have you considered swimming home?”

I downplayed Denalyn’s condition. “Give us one barf bag and we’re happy travelers.” No one laughed. Apparently bug-bearing patrons compete with terrorists for the title: “Most Unwanted Passenger.” The virus word reached the pilot and the pilot rendered his verdict. “Not on my plane.”

“You must leave,” his bouncer informed, matter-of-factly.

“Says who?”

“The pilot.”

I leaned sideways and looked down the aisle for the man in charge, but the cockpit door was closed. *Comard*. If only I could talk to him: present my side. We didn't deserve banishment. We pay our taxes, vote in primaries, tip waiters. I wanted to plead my case, but the man in charge was unavailable for comment. He had a 747 to fly, seven-thousand miles to navigate...and no time for us.

A few disheartening minutes later, Denalyn and I found ourselves back at the gate, making plans to spend an extra night in China. As an airline representative made a list of hotel phone numbers, I noticed the plane pulling away. Hurrying over to the airport window, I stared into the cockpit, hoping for a glimpse of the mystery aviator. I waved both arms and mouthed my request. “Can we talk?” He didn't stop. I never saw his face. (But if you're reading this page, sir or ma'am, perhaps we could chat?)

Can you relate? You may feel similar sentiments about the pilot of the universe. God: the too-busy-for-you Commander-in-Chief, the faceless skipper who passes down non-negotiable decisions. His universe hums like a Rolls Royce, but sick passengers never appear on his radar screen. Even worse, you may suspect a vacant captain's seat. How do we know a hand secures the controls? Can we assume the presence of a pilot behind the steel doors?

Christ weighs in decidedly on this discussion. He escorts passengers to the cockpit, enters 3:16 in the keypad, and unlocks the door on God. No Bible verse better expresses his nature. (We ought to submit it to *Webster's*.) Every word in the passage explains the second one. “For *God* so loved the world...”

Jesus assumes what Scripture declares. *God is*.

For proof, venture away from the city lights on a clear night and look up at the sky. That fuzzy band of white light is our galaxy, the Milky Way. 100,000 million stars.<sup>i</sup> Our galaxy is one of billions of others!<sup>ii</sup> Who can conceive of such a universe, let alone infinite numbers of universes?

No one can. But, let's try anyway. Suppose you attempt to drive to the sun. A car dealer offers you a sweet deal on a space vehicle (no doubt solar-powered) that averages 150 mph. You hop in, open the moon roof, and blast off. You drive non-stop, 24 hours a day, 365 days. Any guess as to the length of your trip? Try seventy years! Suppose, after stretching your legs and catching a bit of sun, you fuel up and rocket off to Alpha Centauri, the next closest star. Best pack a lunch and clear your calendar. You'll need 15 million years to make the trip.<sup>iii</sup>

Don't like to drive, you say? Board a jet and zip through our solar system at a blistering 600 mph. In 16.5 days you'll reach the moon, 17 years you'll pass the sun, and in 690 years you can enjoy dinner on Pluto. Seven centuries and you haven't even left our solar system, much less our galaxy.<sup>iv</sup>

Our universe is God's pre-eminent missionary. "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1). A house implies a builder, a painting suggests a painter. Don't stars suggest a star maker? Doesn't creation imply a creator? "The heavens declare his righteousness" (Ps. 97:6 NKJV). Look above you.

Now look within you. Look at your sense of right and wrong, your code of ethics. Somehow, even as a child, you knew it was wrong to hurt people and right to help them. Who told you? Who says? What is this magnetic pole that pulls the needles on the compass of your conscience, if not God?

You aren't alone with your principles. Common virtues connect us. Every culture has frowned upon selfishness and celebrated courage, punished dishonesty, and rewarded nobility. Even cannibals display rudimentary justice, refusing to eat their children.<sup>v</sup> A universal standard exists. Just as a code writer connects computers with common software bundles, a common code connects people. We may violate or ignore the code, but we can't deny it. Even people who have never heard God's name sense his law within them. "There is something deep within [humanity] that echoes God's yes and no, right and wrong" (Rom. 2:15 MSG). When atheists decry injustice, they can thank God for the ability to discern it. The conscience is God's fingerprint, proof of his existence.

Heavens above, moral code within; pings indicating the presence of an occupied cockpit. Someone got this plane airborne, and it wasn't any of us. There is a pilot, and he is unlike anyone we've seen.

"To whom, then, will you compare God?" (Is. 40:18) the prophet invites. To whom indeed? "Human hands can't serve his needs for he has no needs" (Acts 17:25 NLT). You and I start our days needy. Indeed, basic needs prompt us to climb out of bed. Not God. Uncreated and self-sustaining, he depends on nothing or no one. Never taken a nap or a breath. Needs no food, counsel, or physician. "The Father has life in himself" (Jn. 5:26). Life is to God what wetness is to water and air is to wind. He is not just alive, but life itself. God is, without help.

Hence, he always is. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting You are God" (Ps. 90:2 NKJV).

God never began and will never cease. He exists endlessly, always. "The number of His years is unsearchable" (Job 36:26 NASB).

Even so, let's try to search them. Let every speck of sand, from Sahara to South Beach, represent a billion years of God's existence. With some super vacuum, suck and then blow all the particles into a mountain, and count how many you have. Multiply your total by a billion and listen as God reminds: "They don't represent a fraction of my existence."

He is "the eternal God" (Rom. 16:26). He invented time and owns the patent. "The day is yours, also is the night" (Ps. 74:12 NKJV). He was something before nothing was. When the first angel lifted the first wing, God had already always been.

Most staggering of all, he has never messed up. Not once. The prophet Isaiah described his glimpse of God. He saw two six-winged angels. Though sinless, they covered themselves in God's presence. Two wings covered eyes, two wings covered feet, and two carried the angels airborne. They volleyed one phrase back and forth, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts" (Is. 6:3 NKJV).

God is holy. Every decision, exact. Each word, appropriate. Never out-of-bounds or out-of-place. Not even tempted to make a mistake. "God is impervious to evil" (James 1:13 MSG).

Tally this up. No needs. No age. No sin. No wonder he said: "I am God and there is none like me" (Is. 46:9 NIV).

But is God's grandness good news? When Isaiah saw it, he came unraveled: "Woe is me, for I am undone!" (Is. 6:5 NKJV). Competent pilots boot sick people off the plane. An all-powerful God might do likewise. Shouldn't the immensity of his universe intimidate us? It did Carl Sagan. A lifetime of studying the skies led the astronomer to conclude: "Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves."<sup>vi</sup>

Understandable pessimism. In the cockpit: God, who has no needs, age, or sin. Bouncing in the back of the plane: Max. Burger-dependent. Half-asleep. Compared to God, I have the life span of a fruit fly. And sinless? I can't maintain a holy thought for my two-minute morning commute. Is God's greatness good news? Not without the next four words of John 3:16. "For God *so loved the world.*"

Try that mantra on for size. The one who holds the aces holds your heart. The one who formed you pulls for you. Untrumpable power stoked by unstoppable love. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:3).

God does for you what Bill Tucker's father did for him. Bill was sixteen years old when his dad suffered a health crisis and, consequently, lost his business. Even after Mr. Tucker regained his health, the Tucker family struggled financially, barely getting by.

Mr. Tucker, an entrepreneurial sort, came up with an idea. He won the bid to reupholster the chairs at the local movie theater. This stunned his family. He had never stitched a seat. He didn't even own a sewing apparatus. Still, he found someone to teach him the skill and located an industrial strength machine. The family scraped together every cent they had to buy it. They drained savings accounts and dug coins out of the sofa. Finally, they had enough.

It was a fine day when Bill rode with his dad to pick up the equipment. Bill remembers a jovial, hour-long trip discussing the bright horizons this new opportunity afforded them. They loaded the machine in the back of their truck, secured it right behind the cab. Mr. Tucker then invited his son to drive home. I'll let Bill tell you what happened:

"As we were driving along, we were excited, and I, like any sixteen-year-old driver, was probably not paying enough attention to my speed. Just as we were turning on the cloverleaf to get on the expressway, I will never ever, ever forget watching that sewing

machine that was already top-heavy, begin to tip. I slammed on the brakes, but it was too late. I saw it go over the side. I jumped out and ran around the back of the truck. As I rounded the corner, I saw our hope and our dream lying on its side in pieces. And then I saw my dad, standing next to me, just looking. All of his risk and all of his endeavor and all of his struggling and all of his dream, all of his hope to take care of his family was lying there, shattered.

“You know what comes next, don’t you? ‘Stupid, punk kid driving too fast, not paying attention, ruined the family by taking away our livelihood.’ But that’s not what he said. He looked right at me. ‘Oh Bill, I am so sorry.’ And he walked over, put his arms around me, and said, ‘Son, this is going to be okay.’”<sup>vii</sup>

God is whispering the same to you. Those are his arms you feel. Trust him. That is his voice you hear. Believe him. Allow the only decision-maker in the universe to comfort you. Life at times appears to fall into pieces, seems irreparable. But it’s going to be ok. How can you know? Because *God* so loved the world. And:

Since he has no needs, you cannot tire him.

Since he is without age, you cannot lose him.

Since he has no sin, you cannot corrupt him.

If God can make a billion galaxies, can’t he make good out of our bad and sense out of our faltering lives? Of course he can. He is God. He not only flies the plane, but he knows the passengers, and has a special place for those who are sick and ready to get home.

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<sup>i</sup>Andy Christofides, *The Life Sentence*, (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Publishing, 2002), 11.

<sup>ii</sup> Guillermo Gonzalez and Jay W. Richards, *The Privileged Planet*, (Washington, DC: Regenery Publishing, 2004) 143.

<sup>iii</sup>Christofides, 11.

<sup>iv</sup> [http://liftoff.msfc.nasa.gov/academy/universe\\_travel.html](http://liftoff.msfc.nasa.gov/academy/universe_travel.html)

<sup>v</sup> John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1995) 115.

<sup>vi</sup>*Privileged Planet*, p. X

<sup>vii</sup>Bill Tucker, message to Oak Hills Church men's conference on May 3, 2003.