

Verses one through four and nine. Lord, our Lord. How majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory in the heavens. Through the praise of children and infants.

You have established a stronghold against your enemies to silence the foe and the Avenger. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place. What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them. Lord, our lord. How majestic is your name in all the earth.

You guys got the spin move. I hadn't done that prior to especially. See? Too bad it wasn't snoop dogg, right? I mean, it's me.

Hey, are you familiar with Simon and Garfunkel's song the sound of silence? Yes, of course you are. That is a beautiful, classic folk song that's been covered multiple times over the years by very many artists. It was written in the early 1960s by Paul Simon, and it wrestles with the idea of how hard it is to be seen, to be heard, to be understood. It wrestles with the idea of loneliness and feeling lost.

Some of the lines of the song are as beautiful as they are sad. Hello, darkness, my old friend. I've come to talk with you again a little later. He desires connection, but he just can't find it. Even in the midst of all these people around him.

My words, like silent raindrops, fell and echoed in the wells of silence. Darkness, silence. These two words are often used to describe our feelings of confusion and loneliness that are just surrounded by questions. And for some, these questions are deep questions about the existence of goddess and or the goodness of God. I was listening to a podcast the other day with Lee Strobel.

Lee Strobel is a former atheist who had this passionate pursuit of disproving the resurrection of Jesus. But he ended up becoming a strong believer in Jesus, and he wrote about it in the book the case for Christ. But in this podcast, he was asked, what is the greatest challenge today for people to come to faith in God? And without hesitation he said, the hiddenness of God. And he's referring, I think, to a philosophy of atheism, but he's also referring to a perceived experience, a perceived reality that many people have.

The philosophy divine hiddenness says if God really existed, he would be known, so known that no one could resist it. And because some people don't believe, then he must not exist. Now, I'm thinking that most people don't know about that philosophy of divine hiddenness, but their concern is they're feeling something. They're feeling the absence of goddess. And they just so desperately want to experience God, but all they get is darkness and silence.

It's not a new problem. The psalmists often just wrestle with God. And is he there? Does he care all these sorts of things? One of the darkest psalms is psalm 88.

And I'm almost guaranteeing you've never heard us sermon on psalm 88, because in psalm 88, like most of the psalms, he does not come back to praising God. He never resolves his complaint. Psalm 88 was written by a man named Heman. And from other scriptures, we learned that Heman is quite talented. He's blessed in multiple ways, and yet he really struggles with God.

He feels abandoned by God. And again, he doesn't ever come back to praising God. Some of the things he says are these, I'm overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death. You put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths of, why, Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me? Darkness is my closest friend.

Hello, darkness, my old closest friend. I've come to talk with you again. Human might say, I'm going to kind of flip this on its head and say, maybe darkness is our friend. Maybe darkness is our friend. When it comes to knowing God, I want to think, and I believe that Heman probably comes back to praising and trusting God at some point, as the other psalmist do.

Maybe one night, Heman goes out in the darkness, and he looks up and he sees the multitude of stars and he sees the moon. And maybe he has an experience like David in psalm eight and in psalm 19. Maybe he sees God in the stars. Lee Strobel makes the case that God is not hidden at all. He's not hiding.

He cites romans 120. For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and the sky through everything God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God. Strobel talked a little bit about the problem that we have is that we tend to ignore all the goodness of God around us, suppress it, and then we say, hey, God, if you're real, do this.

Hey, God, give me this. Show me a sign. And he doesn't, and we get disappointed and frustrated, and it ushers us into doubt.

David goes out and he sees the stars one night, and he's thankful for the darkness. He's glad of the darkness because it allows him to see the moon in starlight. Maybe he goes out late in the evening where he can see the sky. He's got a comfortable lawn chair. And maybe he's meditating on God in Genesis one.

And he's thinking about God creating all these things. And then he thinks about himself and he thinks about other humans. He remembers what Genesis one says, that God created us in the image of God, in the

image of God, male and female. And he's just thinking about all that kind of thing. And it's beautiful.

That night, he leans back and the darkness is deepening. It's a cool, crisp night. There's not a cloud in the sky. There's a new moon, you know, that little tiny sliver of a moon, and you can also kind of see the rest of it. Faintly.

He looks at that. It's getting darker. The stars are starting to pop out. One after one, the stars appear. They twinkle, and David wonders how many there are.

David's in awe. The stars and the moon are witnesses to God's glory and his power. And they usher David in to the presence of God. Inspired by God's spirit, I think David picks up his pen and he starts to write, this is just my imagination. But as he starts to write, he hears some children down the hill singing. Children singing.

He writes, Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. You have set your glory in the heavens through the praise of children and infants. You have established a stronghold against your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is mankind? That you are mindful of them, human beings, that you care for them.

You made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands. You put everything under their feet, all flocks and herds, the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky and fish in the sea, and all that swim in the paths in the sea. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. David beautifully brings together what theologians call the transcendence of God with the immanence of God.

Transcendence addresses the absolute otherness of God. He's so different, he's so beyond us, he's so comprehensible, so mysterious in so many ways. The imminence of God, on the other hand, says God is close. He's knowable, he's present, and he wants to be known, and he wants to be close. And as David contemplates the marvelous majesty of God in the night sky, I just imagine he hears some children singing, and he just, David just marvels at this thing of this mighty, majestic, almighty God choosing to use the weak and the simple to accomplish his will.

I think David recognizes and is saying God can and does use the weakest to overcome the strongest of enemies. God's power residing in us is made perfect in weakness. It's about God's power working in the frailty of humanity working in us. And as David looks at the stars and all their stunning beauty, he's amazed. It's like, how can this

happen?

Why has God chosen men and women as the crown of his creative work making us in his very image? What a stunning thought. As I sit here and as I look at all these stars and the moon and how is it, Lord, that you care for us? Why do you even think of us? You made us just a little lower than the angels and you've given us dominion over this earth and its creatures.

Why? Wow. Lord, our lord, how majestic is your name and all the earth. You know, space has always fascinated me. Growing up in Mitchell, I was familiar with Virgil Grissom from the time I knew anything.

And if you don't know Virgil Grissom or Gus Grissom was one of the very first astronauts. He was the second American in space. And I believe, and I'm not the only one that believes this. I believe he would have been the first man on the moon had he not died in an Apollo one accident in January of 1967. Virgil Grissom's parents were faithful members of the Mitchell Church of Christ where I grew up.

So I knew them from the time I knew anything. So I've always been interested in space. And then I went to Lipscomb and there I met my wife of 40 years. And as I first met her, I found out that her father was a NASA engineer and that she went to Virgil Igeron High School in Huntsville, Alabama. We gotta make this work.

And we had. But space still intrigues me. The vastness of space boggles my little mind. We live in a galaxy called the Milky Way. Our solar system, our sun and the planets.

We're just a tiny, tiny part of the Milky Way. Our sun is 93 million mile away. It would take 19 years to fly there. Our sun is just one of an estimated 100 to 400 billion stars in our little galaxy, the Milky Way. Our galaxy is 100,000 light years in diameter.

Light travels at 186,000 thousand miles a second and it's 100,000 light years in diameter.

That's unbelievable. Our solar system is 26,000 light years from the center of our galaxy. And here's the thing that really gets me. If you can almost get your mind around how big our galaxy is, scientists tell us that from our little neck of the woods of space, we can see that there are billions and billions and billions, if not trillions, of other galaxies. They can't see the end.

They just cannot see the end. We have a next door neighbor galaxy called Andromeda. Andromeda's our closest buddy in our neck of space, and it's 2.5 million light years away. Now let's come back to our galaxy for just a moment and talk about something you could see tonight if it weren't cloudy. But you can go out as soon as the clouds

clear one night and look at this.

You can go out and you can find the North Star. You're familiar with the Big Dipper. North Star is called Polaris also. But as a kid, you learn the Big Dipper constellation. It will guide you.

Just go down a couple and there's a north star. The North Star is 323 light years away. If you travel by jet, it would take you 5 billion years to get there.

You know, it's amazing to me that God who has such creative ability and such power, God who's so vast and so beyond anything we can imagine or comprehend, a God so transcendent, it's amazing that he creates us and is imminent. He is close, he's knowable. He wants to be known. And we know he cares for us because he tells us. And when you look at the beauty and the majesty of God's creation, then you look at us and how often we really mess things up, you have to wonder, like David, what is man and woman that you would.

Why would you care about us? Why are you mindful of us? Well, sometimes, can we be honest?

You wonder, does God really care? He seems so silent sometimes and it's so dark. But in that darkness, there's an opportunity.

If we look up and we can see the North Star and the other stars kind of jarred and reminding ourselves of some things God really does care about. 250 years after David writes psalm eight and psalm 19, Isaiah, the prophet, the 8th century BC prophet is called by God, commissioned by God, really to be a prophet of doom, to warn the people to turn back, turn away from their idolatrous ways. Well, they won't and they don't. So they're carried off into babylonian exiled. Isaiah 40 takes a big turn in the book.

In Isaiah 40, it begins by imagining the future in Babylon. The people are there. They're receiving their punishment for their rebellion. I think they wonder, is God here? Does he care anymore?

He surely doesn't care about us anymore. And so God corrects that. He speaks through Isaiah into this imagined future, and he speaks words of assurance and comfort. Essentially, he says, look up. As he speaks these words of comfort, he's pointing to the stars.

Lift up your eyes. Lift up your eyes and look into the heavens. Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name because of his great power and great strength, mighty strength. Not one of them is missing.

Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord. My cause is disregarded by my goddess. Come on. Do you

not know?

Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired and weary. And his understanding no one can fathom.

Though he is so transcendent and in so many ways incomprehensible, God chooses to be imminent, to be close and to be known. And here's what he says in the next verse. He says, listen, I know you're tired. I know you're weary. I know you're weak.

But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. And you know what? If you'll turn to me and put your hope in me, you'll soar like eagles, and you'll run and, you'll not, grow weary. A little bit later, in the same context of encouragement, he says this in Isaiah 43, don't be afraid, for I've ransomed you. I've called you by name.

You are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through the rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up. The flames will not consume you.

For I am the Lord, your God, the holy one of Israel, your savior. In the next verse, he says this. He says, listen, you are precious to me.

You are honored. I love you. I love you. Gazing upon a star, looking at the stars can usher us into the reality of God's unconditional love. The stars are numbered and named by God.

Trillions and trillions of them. The same. God knows your name, and he knows mine. He knows everything about us, and he loves us still. And you say, why?

I'm not sure. How could he love me? Well, I'll tell you why he loves us. Cause he chooses to. It's his decision.

He chooses to love us. It's not based on us. It's not based on how smart we are, how good looking we are, how much money we have. It's not about any of that stuff. It's not about our performance.

It's about God's decision to love us. And he does love us. The same God who numbers and names the stars knows all about our scars. He's concerned about them. He knows us.

He knows how we're made. He knows our grief. He knows your sorrow this morning. He knows the things you're struggling with. He knows your sins.

He knows it all, and he cares about it deeply. He loves you. Did you know the big dipper constellation in the north Star played a huge role

in the underground railroad? The Underground railroad is the name given to the process of slaves escaping the south before and during the Civil War. It was a series, a secret series of routes, places, and people who aided slaves on their journey to northern freedom.

There's an old brick house about 2 miles southwest of Mitchell, not very far from where I live. A childhood friend of mine grew up in that house. I've been in that house a few times when I was younger, and I've been told by a few people at different times that this house was a part of the underground railroad. And it makes sense because. And I contacted my friend this week, and I said, hey, tell me about that house.

And he goes, yeah, that's what we've always heard. And he says it makes sense because there's certain places in that house that looked like a place where you would hide people, kind of little cubbies and secret places in the house. And then to confirm it further, I couldn't totally confirm it, but there was a census in 1850, and it shows that there was an unusually large number of freed slaves living in Marion Township, which is where that house is located, just a small little area, and there was an unusually large population of freed slaves. Harriet Tubman, fascinating woman. She used the North Star to liberate herself, and then she went south several times as a conductor on the Underground Railroad to liberate other people.

The North Star. The North Star was the key to navigation, to be free. The Big Dipper that points to the North Star was also called the drinking gourd, referencing a hollowed out gourd that people would drink, get water, and drink from. And so people pursuing freedom knew to look and find the constellation, the drinking gourd, or the Big Dipper, and then trace a line and find the North Star. They even had a song.

They sang, follow the drinking gourd, and that kept them on track, kept them motivated, and they found that star, and they followed that star to freedom. Here's the thing, darkness. Darkness was a friend to freedom, because the darkness allowed them to see the light, to find that starlight and that guiding light to shine to freedom. The next time you and I are tempted to say or sing, hello darkness, my closest friend. Why don't we just go outside and look up and find the north star?

Hey, human, look up. Hey, exiles, look up, look up. Oh my soul, why don't you just look up, look up, look up. And as you look up, imagine a moment of creation. God speaking galaxies of stars into existence.

And as he speaks, a hundred billion galaxies are born. In the vapor of his breath, planets form. Hello, darkness, my old friend I've come to praise again. Praise him, sun and moon. Praise him all you twinkling stars.

If trillions of stars were made to worship, so will I. So will I. It's interesting in revelation 22 that Jesus says, I am the bright morning star. And that bright morning star, Jesus is God in the flesh. He is the transcendent creator of the stars, who becomes imminent, becomes close, becomes knowable, as he identifies with us all the way to a peasant girl's womb, to a cross, to a borrowed tomb.

Lot of darkness and all that. On a hill he created the light of the world, stepped into darkness. On a hill he created the light of the world, was abandoned in darkness, to die in the darkness. He speaks words of love and forgiveness. And as he speaks, 100 billion failures disappear.

He gives his life for you and me. He wants you to know him. He wants you to turn to him. He wants you to leave behind these silly things that we all do that keep us away from him. Just come on, turn, repent.

He wants us to trust him. He wants us to reenact his death, burial and resurrection in the waters of baptism so we can have joy, peace and confidence even in the darkness. Silent darkness will still come from time to time, and I'm guessing there's several in the room that are in it today. If you are, make darkness your friend. Go out and look up, find the North Star and know that Jesus created it.

He knows its number. He knows its name. And he also knows your name. He knows your name. He knows everything about you.

He knows your joys and victories. He knows your sorrows and defeats. He is not hidden. He's not hiding. And today he's inviting you to come to him, or to come closer.

What are you going to do? Have you responded? Have you invited him into your life? Have you been baptized? Maybe so.

Maybe you need some prayer to get back on track. We're going to invite you in just a moment to respond to him in various ways. We have communion here that we'd love for you to take to remind yourself of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We have people around the room to pray for you. You can pray with somebody next to you if you feel led.

You can just sit back and worship and take in the words and the songs that we're going to sing. Whatever it is you need to do, do something today to draw closer to Jesus. Remember, if the stars were made to worship, so am I. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word that is so, so encouraging and invites us to know you.

You are so mysterious and so beyond us in so many ways, and yet you choose to reveal yourself in creation and then by revelation,



especially and specifically through Jesus. And we thank you for that path. We thank you for empowering us with your spirit. Help us, Lord, to look up and to see the stars and to know that you care. It's in Jesus name we pray.

Amen.

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