

# the glorious christ

*Meditations on His Person,  
Work, and Love*

SECOND EDITION

**Kris Lundgaard**



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*As an apple tree among the trees of the forest,  
so is my beloved among the young men.  
With great delight I sat in his shadow,  
and his fruit was sweet to my taste.*

SONG OF SONGS 2:3

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*Drawing of The Tree of Life by Lenka Knoetze*  
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To Karen,  
still my princess



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## about this book

This book is about Christ.

It's for those who gaze on Christ as he is displayed in the Scriptures and relish everything about him we can know—all his loveliness and wonder.

It's for anyone who is in awe of Christ and who loves nothing more than to revel in his greatness and wallow in his beauty. It's for lovers of Christ who are so taken with him that they want to lose themselves in thoughts of nothing but the Lamb of God.

It's for people like me who for a long time have had this feeling deep inside that Christ should be everything to them, their highest joy and crown—yet have never been able to keep him in the center of their thoughts.

It's for people who want to be like Christ and try their hardest but fail.

It's for newborn babes in Christ, just tasting the wonder of Christ, learning to take their first steps in adoring him.

It's for lukewarm believers who have lost their first love for Christ—people whose affection for him is a flickering, fading flame.

It's for skeptics who wonder why all the fuss about Christ.

This book is about Christ.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,  
Christ when I arise.<sup>1</sup>

1. From “The Deer’s Cry,” attributed to St. Patrick, in *Selections from Ancient Irish Poetry*, trans. Kuno Meyer (London: Constable & Company, 1911), 27.

## author's note

I've adapted this book from one of John Owen's best-loved works, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*. His meditations are justly treasured by many, and I thank God for Owen's life and writing. Though I've presented his work my way, I've tried to keep Christ's glory central. Christ is the point.

I owe Maria denBoer and Thom Notaro thanks for their editorial nitpicking as I prepared the manuscript of the first edition. Barbara Lerch's unquenchable good cheer made that work pleasant. Amanda Martin has guided and encouraged me through this revision and updating of the text; I especially appreciate her sound judgment and patience as well as the service of painstaking editing that she and Aaron Gottier provided.

My friend Eric Manthei was a careful reader and faithful corrector and commenter as I prepared the revised manuscript. Thanks, Eric—you probably don't realize how important your work has been.

Paula, my bride, remains my favorite reader of all.

God has given Lenka Knoetze the ability to evoke joy with her drawing. Thank you, Lenka, for *The Tree of Life*. It makes me smile.

I still have my notes from a class on the English Puritans taught by J. I. Packer at Reformed Theological Seminary in 1988.

That's where Dr. Packer planted the seeds of my love for John Owen. He also had kind words for my original manuscript and helped me to smooth over a few rough spots. I could use his help now, but he's enjoying that direct vision of our glorious Christ that we all long for.

And Christ, my Lord Jesus Christ, is the glory of it all. I thank you, precious Jesus.

*For now we see in a mirror dimly.*

—1 CORINTHIANS 13:12

*We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.*

—2 CORINTHIANS 3:18 NKJV

*Our faith, therefore, at present beholds God as absent. How so? Because it sees not his face, but rests satisfied with the image in the mirror; but when we shall have left the world, and gone to him, it will behold him as near and before its eyes.*

—JOHN CALVIN ON 1 CORINTHIANS 13:12

*Lord, Thou art fulness, I am emptiness:  
Yet hear my heart speak in its speechlessness  
Extolling Thine unuttered loveliness.*

—CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

*We start our journey by  
discovering two unexpected truths:  
There's a glorious Being  
who longs for our company, and  
by seeing him we will become like him.*

# 1

## to see his glory

*A lotta cats copy the Mona Lisa,  
but people still line up to see the original.*

—LOUIS ARMSTRONG

### *Designer Imitations*

I was drunk the whole first semester. Not Bacchanalian drunk, or even frat-house drunk—that wouldn't do for a seminarian. I was drunk on the depths of God's Word as it was unfolded to my spongy mind all morning and into the midafternoon, every day, five days a week. I had no idea there was so much in the Bible, no idea how exhilarating it could be.

Richard Pratt's literary analysis of historical narrative was opening my eyes daily to the rich and unexpected significance of Abraham's sojourn in Egypt or Ehud's gruesome-yet-comic dispatching of Eglon.<sup>1</sup> I was eager to master Pratt's method and mine my own treasures from the Word. When the school released us for fall break, I went home to Little Rock and was invited (as a "visiting scholar," I suppose) to teach Sunday school. I tried

1. Genesis 12:10–20 and Judges 3:12–30 respectively.

in one hour to unload everything I'd learned from Richard in seven weeks.<sup>2</sup>

In my elevated state, I didn't notice whether anyone was tracking with me. All I knew was that I was giving them the best stuff from my favorite teacher. But I slowly became aware of something odd: I was pacing around the room as I talked. At one point I sat on a table and let my legs dangle over the edge. I started swinging them back and forth.

This wasn't me. Yes, it was my body, my typically tranquil body, but I was possessed by the mannerisms of Richard Pratt—a notorious buzz of peripatetic motion in class. I was unconsciously being conformed to his image.

Why?

When we admire someone, our hearts are warmed and softened. A warm and soft heart is like warm and soft wax, ready to take the imprint or image of something pressed into it, as a seal is pressed into wax. I'm sure you've noticed that when you find a friend you enjoy and admire, your face begins to make new expressions or your voice glides into a new accent. You might even start to laugh with your friend's laugh. Or you might sit on a table and swing your legs, not knowing why.

This happens because God designed us this way. We become like the people and things we love, whether good or evil. From our earliest days we are natural imitators who are shaped by the things we look up to: parents, friends, or heroes. The psalmist is talking about more than mere idols of wood and stone when he says, in Psalm 115,

Their idols are silver and gold,  
the work of human hands.

2. I still recommend Dr. Pratt's *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1993).

They have mouths, but do not speak;  
eyes, but do not see.  
They have ears, but do not hear;  
noses, but do not smell.  
They have hands, but do not feel;  
feet, but do not walk;  
and they do not make a sound in their throat.  
*Those who make them become like them;*  
so do all who trust in them. (vv. 4–8)

Simply put, we become what we worship.

So it was only natural, given my admiration of Richard, that I would start becoming more and more like him.

### *Ultimate Imitations*

The Scriptures tell us that, in the end, we who belong to Christ will be like him: “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). We who often live in frustration and weakness will one day become like the Lord Jesus himself. This is a miracle of God’s loving grace: even though we through sin disfigured his image, in which he made us in the beginning, God, who is rich in mercy, will through Christ undo our undoing and recreate us in the image of his Son.

That’s something to think about. We’ll be with him. We’ll be like him. Is there any friend more satisfying to be with? Is there any hero you’d rather be like? Is there anything better you can dream of?

But notice *how* it is that we’ll become like Christ. Read the end of 1 John 3:2 again: “We shall be like him, *because we shall see him as he is.*” In that day, God will remove the blinders of weakness and sin from our eyes and we will see Christ in all his

loveliness and majesty (Isa. 33:17). Because we'll see him clearly, we'll love him completely—for there is nothing unlovely in him. To the limit of our recreated capacity, we'll see the fullness of his nobility, excellence, holiness, righteousness, kindness, mercy, goodness—every beauty that could make us cherish him. And that fundamental principle in us, that we become what we worship, will be fulfilled. Adoring him wholeheartedly, with nothing to hinder us, we will be like him.

### *Our Dying Lord's Longing*

In just a few hours, you will die in agony. What's worse, you already know it, and you know that no governor in heaven or on earth will stay your execution. Your friends are gathered around you for a meal, which you know will be your last together before you're torn from them. What's more, you know that when the end comes, all of them will desert you.

That is what Christ faced. Of course, none of us could fill his shoes, but if I were in his place, I would have wallowed in self-pity. I couldn't have held back the resentment that would have swept over me as I looked into the eyes of those who would soon betray, deny, and desert me.

But consider our Lord's words at the table:

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. (John 14:1-3)

No chiding or resentment, no self-pity or self-absorption—only concern for his friends and a tender longing to be with them.

John 14:3 should make us fall prostrate, dumbstruck and incredulous. This is the Lord of glory talking, the matchless King of the universe who could have anything his heart desires, and he's talking about going home to fix up some rooms in his palace so his friends can come and stay with him. Jesus has shown love to his people in countless ways, but is any more marked by human affection than this?

Wanting to have his friends with him forever, Jesus later that evening turns to the Father to offer up his fragrant longings, just as the high priest offered incense in the temple. He restates his love for us as he makes a startling request: "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

Someone who doesn't know Jesus might read this verse and think him awfully taken with himself. But those who know Jesus rejoice at his request. We know that to be with him and to see his glory are all that can satisfy us—all that can bring us peace. Without these, no soul can truly rest. As a needle that's rubbed against a magnet and placed on a floating cork will twist and bob until it finds north, the heart of the believer, having tasted the love of Christ, will not rest until it lands in his embracing arms (Song 2:6). "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless till it finds its rest in you."<sup>3</sup>

When I found myself turning into a Richard Pratt impersonator, something more was at work than my admiration for him—something else was accelerating my transformation: The one I admired was also returning my affection. Richard didn't use his office hours to keep students at arm's length. He wanted us to call him Richard (school policy notwithstanding). To paraphrase

3. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Philip Burton (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 1.1.

Jesus in John 15:15, he no longer called us students but called us friends. When an ice storm left the seminary without electricity for a week, Richard and his wife Gina hosted three of us students and our families; during our stay, Richard would get out his guitar and lead us in family worship around his fireplace. When his unexpected affection met my admiration for him, nothing in me could resist the impulse to become like him.

In the same way, the tenderness Christ shows us draws us to him and impels our hearts to be like him.

### *Two Ways of Seeing*

Jesus asks the Father to let us see his glory. This request wells up from his love, because he knows that to see him is our greatest joy and gift—not just in the world to come, but now. It's the life and reward of our souls. When we see him, we see the Father (John 14:9). In the face of Christ, we see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:6). And as we reflect on him, we are transformed into his image: “But we all, with unveiled face, *beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord*, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18 NKJV).

The Scriptures distinguish two ways or degrees of seeing the glory of Christ. Paul makes this distinction when he says, “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). He is contrasting our lives “at home in the body” and “away from the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:6) with our lives in the world to come. In both, our joy is to contemplate the beauty of Christ. In this world we see his reflection “in a mirror dimly,” because we see him only by faith; in the world to come we'll see him “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

In John 17, Jesus longs for his people to be with him and to see his glory. Although he prays that our vision of his glory will be perfected in heaven, he doesn't ignore the sight of his glory

that we can have by faith now. And when we return his love, we of course want to know how we can see his glory now.

### *What Glory Can the Eyes of Faith See?*

When Jesus walked with his disciples on earth, they saw “his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). But what glory did they see, and how did they see it? They couldn’t have seen the eternal glory of his deity, because no one can see that in this world (1 Tim. 1:17). Nor did they see the splendor of an earthly kingdom, for Christ “emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7). He would have been more easily mistaken for a slave than for a king. He had no place to lay his head (Matt. 8:20), much less a palace. And the disciples didn’t see his glory shining in a handsome face: according to the Scriptures, the Savior didn’t save anyone with his good looks.

As many were astonished at you—  
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,  
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

.....  
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,  
and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;  
and as one from whom men hide their faces  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not. (Isa. 52:14;  
53:2–3)

How, then, did they see his glory? They saw his glory as the one “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). That is, they saw he was

the Promised One who had come to bring the grace and truth of God to his people. And they saw this only by faith, because the only ones who saw this glory were those who received him and “believed in his name” (John 1:12). They saw the glory of the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). This is the same glory we can see by faith today.

When we look on Christ by faith and see him as he is revealed in the Word, we love him more. Each view of him draws us deeper into delight. As John Owen puts it, “Herein would I live; herein would I die; hereon would I dwell in my thoughts and affections, to the withering and consumption of all the painted beauties of this world, unto the crucifying all things here below, until they become unto me a dead and deformed thing, no way meet for affectionate embraces.”<sup>4</sup>

### *The Treasures before Us*

Anything that Christ prays for must be good. When he prays for us to see his glory, we know there’s something extraordinary in store for us. As we begin to reflect on the beauty of his glory, we’ll find a trove of treasures before us.

### **Gazing on Christ Gives Rest, Satisfaction, and Peace to Our Souls**

Our minds tend to be full of perplexed thoughts; fears, cares, distresses, passions, and lusts throw us into disorder, darkness, and confusion. But when our best thoughts are fixed on Jesus,<sup>5</sup> our hearts will be kept holy, serene, and spiritual, for “to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6 NKJV). Reflecting

4. John Owen, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, reprinted in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850; repr., Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 291.

5. See Colossians 3:1–17, especially verses 1 and 15; also Hebrews 12:2–3.

on Christ takes our minds off things below—things that aren't worth comparing to the great worth, beauty, and glory that we see in him (Phil. 3:7–11). When we take our eyes off Christ, we become strangers to heavenly life, and we live without the spiritual refreshment and satisfaction that God offers in his gospel.

### **Admiring Christ Makes Us Like Him**

If I couldn't help becoming like Richard when I was taken with his skilled teaching and sincere friendship, how could I by faith take a real look at the wonder of Christ without being changed into his likeness according to his promise (2 Cor. 3:18)? If we have been touched by God's grace and truly know him, we can't escape the transforming power of a glimpse of our beloved Lord.

### **Adoring Christ Whets Our Appetite for Heaven**

We know that in heaven we'll be filled with joy forever. But what will be the fountain of that joy? Seeing the glory of our Lord Jesus. The Scriptures repeatedly assure us of this future treasure.

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thess. 4:17–18)

My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. (Phil. 1:23)

To be with him is far better than our earthly lives because we'll see his glory (John 17:24), and, by seeing him as he is, "we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). This is the goal of our salvation and will be our joy forever.

The beatific vision—an unhindered sight of God—is the eternal fountain that gives life to souls in heaven. But we know

that the immense and infinite essence of God is invisible to the eyes of our flesh. In fact, we'll never be able to see the essence of God, because we are and will always be finite creatures. So the sight that we'll have of God will always be "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). In Christ alone we'll see the glory of God in his infinite perfection, and this vision will fill us with peace, rest, and joy.

We can admire these things here, but we can't comprehend them. When we talk about seeing the perfection of God in Christ, we're high in the Himalayas of thought, walking a knife-edge. We have to choose our words as carefully as we would our steps on that precipice, lest we stumble. Still, believers have in Christ a foresight and foretaste of this ultimate vision of God. We sometimes hold in our hearts, by the Word and the Spirit, a sense of the unaltered glory of God shining out from Christ, which moves and saturates our souls with unspeakable joy. From this comes "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). Christ, our "hope of glory" (Col. 1:27), gives us a taste of the firstfruits of his heaven. Sometimes he even lets us bathe our souls in his light and drink of the rivers of pleasure that are at his right hand (Ps. 16:11).

The wonders of Christ lie before us. Even though we see but a poor reflection of him (1 Cor. 13:12), what we can see and know of him will calm our souls, stir our hunger for him, and make us like him. I pray that through the following chapters our Beloved himself will woo us with his beauty and grant us the grace to surrender to him as we feast on *the glorious Christ*.

### *For Reflection and Discussion*

1. Christ is the Bridegroom of the church, his beautiful bride. With this in mind, answer the question that is posed in Song of Songs 5:9: "What is your beloved more than another beloved,

O most beautiful among women?” (In other words, what is it that you love about Christ? Be as specific as you can.)

2. Have you ever felt unusually close to Christ and in some sense received a foretaste of heaven as you gazed on him by faith? If so, describe one or two things about Christ that you were taken with.

3. What are your expectations as you begin this journey? Make a list of at least three things you'd like God to do in, to, or for you. Now ask him to do them—for the glory of Christ.