

“Every Person Reveals a Facet of God”

Genesis 1:27, Psalm 139:1-18, Philemon 1:3-7

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Every aspect of a backpacking trip reveals a unique facet of the Mountain. One summer I recognized the majesty of the Gallatin Mountain Range near Bozeman Montana. It was early in the morning when I first saw the mountains on the horizon. It looked like they were just a few minutes down the road; yet, we traveled all day before reaching the base of the Gallatin Range. The next morning the bus climbed a steep two-lane highway and then snaked up a narrow road through the dense woods. Every turn revealed a new aspect of the mountain. One day earlier, I could hold up my hand, wink and size up the mountains between my thumb and index finger. This morning I cranked my neck up and studied the endless towering wall of trees and rock. I could not see the summit; but, I knew it was up there. The bus creeked over the uneven, gully washed out road and the motor howled in protest over the grade as we climbed higher and higher. The road turned into two tracks in the brush where it ended and the other track where the grade became too steep.

I gathered my pack, hopped off the bus and began my journey up the mountain. The trail meandered back and forth crossing a small stream numerous times as it bounced back and forth between the steep mountain faces on both sides. After a day of hiking up the ever-ascending valley, the two sides of the mountain joined together and I hiked that ridge for half a day until I emerge just above the tree line. The view is breath taking. The enormity of the mountains is revealed for the first time. I look back and see the tiny stream I hiked beside the previous day. It now appears so small. I study the trail ahead as it switches backs up the steep mountain face and then disappears. After hiking all afternoon it appears that I will reach the summit. Just a few more steps reveals an immense plateau and a beautiful lake. It is calm as glass and reflects a huge mountain. I look across the lake and there is Gallatin peak streaked with snow in late July. I have a picture of this view in my study here at church. The trail ends at the far side of the lake and I set up camp. It is amazing how the mountain changes as the sunsets. For several hours I am in the shadow of the peak until I finally realize the sun is setting. When I look across to the next mountain range I see the array of colors on the mountain face. In the morning, I study the face of Gallatin peak determined to find a way to reach the summit. I tried numerous routes but they were all dead ends. The rock face became too steep or the spire too unstable. Exhausted I returned to camp and studied the rock face for a new route. The silence was broken by an exuberant holler. Someone had made it to the top. The top was too far away to see them; but, the voice clearly came from the summit. I would have only one more day to try again to reach the summit before beginning my journey back to the trailhead. The next day I got closer to the peak but again was unable to reach the summit. The bus would be returning to pick me up at the trailhead in two days and I needed to be there. I thought the hike down would be familiar; but, it is amazing how different things look when you turn 180 degrees. I climbed into the bus and listened to stories of other backpackers. One backpacker described his spectacular trip to the summit of Mount Gallatin. I enquired as to how he reached the summit? He explained by a narrow trail chipped into the mountain face. As we talked; I learned he came up a valley from the

West. I came from the East. He shared how wonderful the view from the summit was and how he longed to find a way down the East face to the lake where I was camped at. Together we shared our stories and painted pictures for each other. Together we had a more complete picture of Gallatin Mountain.

In his treatise *On Seeing God*, Augustine emphasizes the many aspects of God's invisible nature. Augustine said, "God is like a many-faceted jewel. God chooses to reveal certain aspects to each of us, through us and in us." David Hazard wrote, "God made us to need each other. We can know more about God by listening to each other's experience. If I want to know God better, I cannot dismiss you and your experience of God. When I learn to stop ignoring you, I suddenly see a new depth of God."

Genesis proclaims **Genesis 1:27 "God created human beings in God's own image. In the image of God, God created them;"** Each of us bears a unique facet of God. Our diversity, different styles of worship, diverse ways to perceive God, our varied ways of interpreting scripture, and different opinions reveal a more complete picture of God. Instead of trying to be similar, growth comes when we celebrate our diversity, listen to uniqueness and consider different perspectives. God is infinitely more wonderful, joyful, gracious and loving than we can fathom. If we try to become like one another we will narrow our perspective of God.

The psalmist sings about God's omnipresence, that God's presence is with us everywhere and God's omniscience is to know every person every thought and detail. The psalmist sings about how each of us is made unique. God takes the extra time to make every person a unique masterpiece. No two people have the same personality, delights, gifts, dreams or physical appearance. God designed us so each of us will reveal a facet of God. When we love each other we discover and love God.

Psalm 139:1-18 "O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You go before me and follow me. You place your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night—but even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to you. You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me!"

Why are we tempted to change, to not celebrate our uniqueness and reveal our true self when each of us is wonderfully made in God's image? We are to strive to polish the tarnish of sin off of our life, to remove the distorting fear and hate from us so we can shine with God's brilliance.

Some people go to great lengths and spend huge sums of money to alter their appearance. Some people spend a great deal of energy trying to behave and think like someone else. What motivates people to devote so much time, energy and money to alter themselves?

Perhaps when we peel back the layers the real need is to be loved. Maybe it is a spiritual longing gone astray that causes someone to desire a facelift when what they really need is a soul lift. As we peel back the layers is it fear that being different will make us less loved, accepted and appreciated?

Whenever you are tempted to be like someone else remember that God delights in you being you, your true self. God smiles when you celebrate your uniqueness. We live in a time when often people are valued for what they do. God loves you whatever your productivity. We never need to earn God's love, for God loved us, God got excited about us, when God formed the very first cell of our being. You are so infinitely valuable that Jesus died for you so God can spend eternity with you.

Barbara Sher says, "You are one of a kind. The world will never see anyone like you again. You have unique perceptions and your own contribution to make." Imagine how God smiled as God formed you. Imagine how God delights in you. God loves each of us and nothing can ever separate us from God's love. God knows each of us and is with each of us.

Part of worship is reflection. We reflect on what God has done and is doing. God invites us to see ourselves as God sees us—a beloved, cherished child of God. What keeps you from seeing yourself as God sees you? How do you stifle celebrating God's delight in you?

The apostle Paul proclaims that God loves you so much and enjoys your company so immensely that God considers your body to be a living temple for the Holy Spirit. Of all the beauty in the universe; yet, God chooses your body to be God's preferred temple.

God wonderfully made each of us, knows us, love us and is with us. Each one of us is like a puzzle piece. Individually we reveal a minuscule spec of the image of God, we reflect light through one facet of the jewel, we experience one trail through life. Together we see more of the image of God, discover new facets and learn of different ways to experience God.

The more I listen to you and others, the more I discover about God. I cherish my visits with seniors, their life stories and wisdom. Children remind me of beauty I have longed ago taken for granted—the magic of a snowflake, the joy of rolling in grass, the awe of learning how some common thing works and the abundance of wonders all around me. Youth have great questions and discoveries of God's activity in their lives. The more I learn about different cultures the more I perceive God.

The psalmist declares just God's weighty thoughts are more numerous than the sand. This fall at the 10:45 worship service we hope to grow in our perception of God. During worship, everyone will be invited to send a tweet, possibly even an image, to the tech team in the booth who will then project it for all of us. Hopefully our sharing will help each other see more of God. We are considering posting the scripture in advance and having people comment upon it then working those insights into our worship. Please share your ideas with Lonnie or myself. Together the more we share the more we will experience God.

The easy thing to do during the sabbatical would be to arrange for a pastor or different pulpit supply to cover each Sunday. We will do that for some of the Sundays. On other Sundays, in hope to broaden our perception of God we will have small groups that will share their insights, hands on mission, sermons from you. Several youth have already asked for an opportunity to share a sermon. It will be a great opportunity to try some new ways to worship. Let's not be afraid to fail and to try some new things and say "you know that isn't for us at this time." Yet,

let's also appreciate the diversity to understand that even though it is not for us it is a meaningful way for someone else to connect with God. Perhaps we will discover some new forms of worship we enjoy. After the sabbatical we will share our insights. We will decide what we want to add to our 10:45 worship. After the sabbatical the 9:15 worship will continue its traditional style.

Variety is good? If every mountain is the same, if there is only one kind of tree, plant and animal if there is only one color, shape or smell--life would be boring. We have a great opportunity to explore a variety of ways, to grow in our experiences of God.

The Apostle Paul wrote **Philemon 1:3-7** “**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.**”

God is constantly creating, working and revealing God's self through each one of us. Appreciate the uniqueness of every person. Discover and affirm their distinct beauty. Each one of us has a special gift, perspective, experience, insight and image of God. Every time we welcome another to our community and join together in love we discover more about God.
Amen