

TINY, BUT PRECIOUS SPECKS, ON A GRAIN OF SAND

Have you ever thought about just how big the world is and how little we are compared to it? When we visited our daughter recently we flew on a jet airliner for the good part of an entire day traveling at about 550 miles per hour and went about 2,300 miles. And yet, we covered less than 1/10 of the distance around the earth. That's how incredibly big the earth is! And we are just tiny little specks that walk around on its surface.

And if you think the earth is big, well think about the size of the entire universe. Scientists tell us that the speed of light is over 186,000 miles per second."¹ To put that into perspective, it takes light less than 1.3 seconds to go from the earth all the way to the moon—Man, that is fast! So if you had a flashlight big enough to shine a light from one end of the universe to the other, how long do you think it would take light to travel all the way across the entire universe? A year? A decade?—not even close. It would take 156 billion years for light, traveling at its insanely fast speed, to travel from one end of the universe to the other. That's right—scientists estimate that the universe is 156 billion light years wide!² And if you think that we are tiny compared to the size of the earth, think about how tiny the earth is compared to the size of the universe.

It is estimated that the number of stars in the universe is about 10 to the 24th power. (That's a 10 followed by 24 zeros). Someone has said that finding the earth among such a vast ocean of stars would be comparable to hiding "one particular grain of sand in a sand pile the size of the United States piled 25 feet deep," and then trying to find that same grain of sand again.³ So the earth is just the tiniest of specks in the universe, and we are the tiniest of specks on the earth. Kind of makes you feel small and insignificant, doesn't it?

I heard something earlier this week that made me think about these things. During a conversation, a man told me something that his friend had said about God. His friend is an elderly gentleman who is in hospice and not expected to live much longer. And he told me that this man looked him right in the eye recently and sighed: ***"You know—the universe is just so incredibly big and I am so small and weak, I feel like God has lost sight of me."*** And I assured this man that such was not the case. That God never loses track of anyone and always has them intimately on His mind and in His eye. And I asked him to assure his friend of that fact.

And yet, his friend's question is not an unusual one. At one time or another that thought has likely crossed all of our minds—as it did David, when he gazed into the vastness of the universe, then

turned to God and prayed: ³ “When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—⁴ what are people that you should think about them, mere mortals that you should care for them?” Psalm 8:3-4 (NLT2) In a universe so vast, it is only natural that people might wonder why God would pay them the least little attention. Sometimes the vastness of the universe confuses them and they have this feeling that they are so small that somehow God has, indeed, lost sight of them. But, God never loses sight of us, even though sometimes we tend to lose sight of Him. So, if you have ever pondered whether or not God cares about us—we smallest of specks who happen to live on a tiny grain of sand called planet earth—I want to give you five things to think about to remind you that God not only cares, but that He loves us far more than we could ever comprehend.

No. 1: To see that this is true, look to the Bible. The Scriptures tell us again and again that God cares about you. I don’t know about you, but I learned this early on. When I was just old enough to go to Sunday School, my teachers gave me this “No. 1 reason” that told me for sure that God cares about each and every one of us. They taught us a song: ***“Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong. They are weak and He is strong.”***⁴ Yes, the Bible teaches that God pays attention to us on an individual basis. And it starts emphasizing this from the very beginning in the Book of Genesis when it speaks of the many times that God had His eye on people, and that He hears their pleas. God heard the pleas of Able when His blood cried out from the ground, and Cain’s murderous act did not escape the eye of God.⁵ God’s eye was upon Abraham, just in time to stay his hand from thrusting a knife into the would-be sacrifice of Isaac.⁶ God had His eye on Hagar when she had to flee to the desert to avoid the torments of Sarai. And after God gave her guidance there at a well, Hagar, to her credit, aptly named the place Beer-lahai-roi, which means the ***“well of the Living One who sees me.”***⁷ Later, when she and her son, Ishmael, were forced into the desert, God showed that He not only pays attention by seeing us, but that He is attentive in hearing us as well. For the Scriptures tell us: ¹⁷ “God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸ Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.” ¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. Genesis 21:17-19 (NIV) Yes, in the vastness of this universe, the Scriptures show us again and again that God’s eyes see us and His ears hear us and, because of that, He is attentive to whatever we may be doing.

[No. 2:] Now the second thing that helps us understand that God cares for us is this: ***God prioritizes things very differently than we do.*** The Scriptures emphasize that smallness, even weakness, is something that God gives priority to. For example, children in the ancient world were perhaps the

most vulnerable ones in any community. They were victims of malnutrition and disease to the extent that only about 50% of children lived past age ten. And for some in the ancient world, children were considered liabilities because their frailties prevented them from contributing as workers to the families or communities welfare. And so, they were marginalized in a society that gave priority to productivity and not to weaknesses. But, this is not the case with Jesus, for children so often caught His eye.⁸ In fact, once when His disciples were turning children away who had come to see Him, Jesus was not at all pleased. Mark's Gospel tells us: ¹⁴ When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children." ¹⁵ I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it." ¹⁶ Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them. Mark 10:14-16 (NLT2) Jesus' treatment of children is quite telling. It shows His reversal of what the world would normally prioritize as being important. Jesus did this again and again in this treatment of the poor, tax collectors, women, lepers and other marginalized groups. Often, He gave them precedence over what the world viewed as their social superiors. Nowhere is this reversal of priorities seen any more starkly than in Jesus' inclination to give more value to ***servanthood and humility*** than to being a ***master filled with worldly pride***.⁹

We can see this consistent pattern in the Old Testament as well in the stories referring to the birthrights of an eldest son as compared to a younger son. In ancient times, the societal tradition was to give significant priority to the first born child. The second born had to take a back-seat when it came to sharing in the family inheritance and blessings. But, notice that this isn't allowed to happen in the story of Jacob and Esau where, by hook or crook, Jacob—the second born—ends up with both the birthright and Isaac's blessing.¹⁰ This theme reoccurs in the blessing the Jacob would later give to Joseph's two sons, Manasseh (the oldest) and Ephraim (the youngest) When Joseph placed his two sons before Jacob, with Manasseh positioned to receive the eldest son's blessing, Jacob, ever the trickster even to the very end, crossed his arms and, over Joseph's objections, gave the younger son, Ephraim, the blessing normally accorded to the older one. These birthright stories reflect God's own attitude toward positions of privilege, honor and greatness. They mean nothing to God—who seems always ready to aid the underdog, the underprivileged, the little guy, the little speck on a grain of sand, so to speak.

Jesus noted this divine tendency when He said: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." Matthew 20:16 (NIV) The fact that God made the universe so enormously big may even highlight this very point. In other words, if God prioritizes things in inverse proportion to things that the world might

be impressed by—like the size of the universe, for example—then our smallness in comparison to the size of the universe may well express the infinite amount of love that God has for us. Think about it.

[No. 3:] The third thing that shows just how attentive God is to us is that **He cares about the little details of our lives.** To point that out, Jesus said: ⁶ **“Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. ⁷ Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.”** Luke 12:6-7 (NASB) What a wonderful thought. Truly, the words of the old hymn got it right when it said: *“Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise / When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies / I draw the closer to Him, from care He sets me free / **His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.**”*¹¹

We have sliding glass windows on our back porch, and occasionally a poor sparrow will think the they are open and fly right into the glass and go flopping onto to the ground. God see’s that. I know, because I have gone out to some of those little birds and often they look pretty dead. But, I hold them lightly in the palm of my hand and stroke their backs—a little bird CPR, and then say a prayer for them. I lay them back down in the cool grass, and most of the time when I check on them a few minutes later, I find that God has revived them, and they’ve been able to fly off. You are always on God’s radar—and if He raises up sparrows who have been a little careless in their flying habits, He will rescue you as well.

And God pays attention, not just to the big things of life, but to the little details of your life as well. Yet, some people have a hard time believing that the Creator of the universe would have any interest in the mundane things that happen in that lives. For them, if God shows any interest in them at all, it has to be over big things that are limited to life or death issues—or so they think. But, that’s such an erroneous notion because the Scripture that we just read states that even the hairs on our heads are counted and individually numbered. And with that being the case, Jesus assures you that, when your flying habits may get a little too careless—just like some of those errant sparrows—if you trust in Him, **“not a hair on your head will perish.”**¹² You have nothing to worry about. But, let’s be clear as to what this means. New Testament scholar, Larry Chouinard, states it well: ***“[This is not a] guarantee that the Lord will protect [His children] from all affliction, but simply to assure them that even in their affliction, God is fully aware and is somehow working out His divine will,”*** in their best interests.¹³

[No. 4] There is a fourth thing to remember if you are somehow feeling small and insignificant, and it is this: **Each and every human being is special in the eyes of God.** But, why are we, on an individual basis, so special? Well, because we are made in the image of God. Genesis 1:27 tells us: **“So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.”** (NLT2) So what does that mean, that we are created in the image of God? It doesn’t refer

to our physical make up. God does not have physical features like a face or hands or feet, because God is spirit.¹⁴ So, when the Bible says that we are made in the **image of God**, it is talking about the things that set us apart from any other living creatures on the planet—things like our ability to think and reason, to exercise moral judgments within the context of free will, our capacity to have relationships with others and engage in social behavior, our abilities to be creative. On this latter point, it has been said: ***“Anytime someone invents a machine, writes a book, paints a landscape, enjoys a symphony, calculates a sum, or names a pet, he or she is proclaiming the fact that we are made in God’s image.”***¹⁵ But, the most important thing that defines us as being created in the **image of God** is our ability to engage in worship and have a relationship with God. This derives from the fact that, when God first created human beings, He breathed into them the **“breath of life”** and, consequently, we came to exist as **living souls**.¹⁶ And because we have souls, this distinguishes us from all the rest of Creation.¹⁷

Since the fall of Adam, the image of God stamped upon each of us has been marred by sin. And since the time of Adam, God has been working out His amazing plan to restore His image in us. And to that end, God did the most amazing thing of all that shows we are His most cherished objects in the universe—He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins.¹⁸ So, never think that we are too insignificant, considering the scale of the universe, to merit God’s love and full attention; nor that God is too Great to care about specks on a grain of sand, like us—For as the Christian writer, Greg Boyd, says: ***“Rather than saying God is too great to care about us little humans, [we should] say God is great precisely because He cares about us little humans. For the essence of God’s greatness is love.”***¹⁹

The final thing that I want you to carry with you this morning is this—No. 5: **God is not 156 billion light years away from you—He is very near to you. In fact, He is always with you.** And, God takes great delight in you. Listen to what the Prophet Zephaniah has to say: ¹⁷ **The LORD your God is with you; His power gives you victory. The LORD will take delight in you, and in His love He will give you new life. He will sing and be joyful over you,** ¹⁸ **as joyful as people at a festival. The LORD says, “I have ended the threat of doom and taken away your disgrace.”** Zephaniah 3:17-18 (TEV) That is what He wants to do. He wants to ***“take away our disgrace”***—God wants to take away our sin. But, to do that, He doesn’t want to merely be with you; He wants to be **close to you**—have a relationship with you. James, the brother of Jesus, says: **When you draw close to God, God will draw close to you.** James 4:8 (TLB) So how do you draw close to God? It requires several things. It requires true repentance of your sins. It requires the study of His Word on a continuing basis. It requires the application of His Word to the way in which we live our lives. It requires intimate prayer with Him. It requires the worship and praise of

Him in His House on a regular basis. Do these things with a sincere and submitting heart, and you will draw close to God, and He will draw close to you.²⁰

Remember this: We should never see the great size of the universe as an impediment to believing that God cares for us. Paul reminds us: “Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:39 (NIV)—not even when that height and depth is 156 billion light years in length. So, if someone tells you that they feel depressed when they think of just how incredibly huge God’s Creation is, remind them of that very fact. Remind that it is **God’s Creation**. It is not meant to make us feel small, but to show us just how powerful and all-knowing our God really is.

Never forget the reassuring words of David, who proclaimed: “The LORD remembers us and will bless us. . . ¹³ He will bless those who fear the LORD, both great and lowly.” Psalm 115:12-13 (NLT2) Tell them that, and then add the words of Jesus: “Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to Him than they are?” Matthew 6:26 (NLT2) Yes, you surely are! Why?—because God has put something special in each and every one of you. God has instilled in you a desire, a yearning, that can only be filled when we come to know Him. None of His other creatures have been blessed with that desire. Some people resist that yearning and try to fill the void in their hearts with so many other things than God. But, if you want to know God and fill that void, you can begin by seeing Him in the great wonder of His Creation. But, nothing can show you who God is any better than looking to Jesus Christ. The Apostle John tells us: “No one has ever seen God. But the one and only Son is Himself God and is near to the Father’s heart. He has revealed God to us.” John 1:18 (NLT2) Come to know Jesus Christ today.²¹ When you do, you will discovery that you are not an insignificant accident, a mere speck in God’s incredibly huge creation. You are precious to God and He has made you for a purpose to fulfill a special role in His plan.²² And know this: “You were fearfully and wonderfully made,”²³ and without you in it, this whole of universe—well, it just wouldn’t be quite the same.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor
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¹ Nola Taylor Redd, "How Fast Does Light Travel? / The Speed of Light," www.space.com (March 07, 2018).

² Robert Roy Britt, "Universe is 156 billion light-years wide," CNN.com, May 24, 2004.

³ Greg Boyd, Re-Knew, Q&A: If God is So Great, Why Would He Care About Us?, <https://reknew.org>, September 25, 2012.

⁴ Anna B. Warner, "Jesus Love Me," (1860).

⁵ Genesis 4:9-10 (NIV) Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰ The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.

⁶ Genesis 22:11-12 (NIV) ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ¹² "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

⁷ Genesis 16:13-14 (NLT2) ¹³ Thereafter, Hagar used another name to refer to the LORD, who had spoken to her. She said, "You are the God who sees me." She also said, "Have I truly seen the One who sees me?" ¹⁴ So that well was named Beer-lahai-roi (which means "well of the Living One who sees me").

⁸ Jeannine K. Brown and Nicholas Perrin, "CHILD, CHILDREN," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Second Edition*, ed. Joel B. Green, Second Edition ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 109.

⁹ Jeannine K. Brown, p. 112.

¹⁰ Genesis 27:30 (NIV) After Isaac finished blessing him and Jacob had scarcely left his father's presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting.

¹¹ Civilla D. Martin, "His Eye is on the Sparrow," (1905).

¹² Luke 21:18 (NLT2) But not a hair of your head will perish!

¹³ Larry Chouinard, *The College Press NIV Commentary – Matthew*, ed. Jack Cottrell, Ph.D. and Tony Ash, Ph.D., (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Co., 1997), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 194.

¹⁴ John 4:24 (NLT2) ²⁴ For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

¹⁵ "What does it mean that humanity is made in the image of God (imago dei)?" www.gotquestions.org.

¹⁶ Genesis 2:7 (KJV) And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

¹⁷ Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, ed., "Genesis," in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2014), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 39.

¹⁸ John 3:16 (NKJV) For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

¹⁹ Greg Boyd, Re-Knew, Q&A: If God is So Great, Why Would He Care About Us?, <https://reknew.org>, September 25, 2012.

²⁰ "Does God Really Care About Me?" by Staff Writers of *Living on the Edge*, by Chip Ingram, <https://livingontheedge.org>.

²¹ Billy Graham, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, <https://billygraham.org> (March 15, 2017).

²² See: Mike Riches and Sycamore Commission sycamorecommission.org.

²³ Psalm 139:14 (NKJV) I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.