

The Honeymoon Never Ends



Nelson Dy



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Manila, Philippines

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To my darling wife Lucy

who deserves a gold medal for putting up
with a husband who is still learning
what he has written in this book

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



This book is really a collaboration of my pen and many hearts. My darling wife Lucy played a big role in this book. Her devotion inspired me to be a better husband. Note that I said “better,” not “perfect,” which I am not. In fact, my marriage is like light and darkness. She is the light and I am the darkness. Lucy, my joy and my pride, thank you for being the model of an author’s wife: supportive, insightful, patient and most of all, loving.

Most of our views and values regarding marriage come from our homes. Lucy and I want to thank our families for modeling a lot of what’s good in marriage. Notable mention is made to our respective mothers Veneranda Tan Dy and Conchita Cheng, and the godparents in our wedding: Calixto and Hilaria Tan, Lino and Helen Costales, and (the late) Butch and Mel Vibar. (Butch Vibar passed away two months ago as of this writing. We will miss you, Ninong Butch.)

Five people enriched this book with stories, insights and advice from their own marriages. For Pastor Joey and Sister Marie Bonifacio, Drs Nomer and Sylvia Bernardino, and Brother Bo Sanchez (his wife was unavailable for the interview): Lucy and I are still feasting on your wisdom. I am sure that our readers will also do so. The Bernardinos were our godparents at our wedding.

A wonderful missionary couple, Reverend Bob and Koleen French, always delight us not only with their pattern of a great marriage but also an unquenchable passion for God.

This is my third collaboration with editor *par excellence*, Ian Magallona. Ian, don't you dare delete the *par excellence!* You deserve it. Thank you for painstakingly wading through the drafts, pointing out how the book can be improved and reminding me that good sales do not necessarily make a book good.

My deep appreciation to the OMF Lit family for giving me the honor of writing another book for them: Paul Aragonés, Yna Reyes, Beng Alba, Aleks Tan, Gladys Calalang, Misha Pallorina-Enriquez, and a host of others.

Above all, to our ever wise, good and faithful Heavenly Father — our true and perfect Model of love in the first place, so that our marriages will be living portraits of how He relates to a love-starved world — to Him be all the glory and power and honor forevermore. Amen!

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FOREWORD

BY DR HAROLD J. SALA



For a long time now, I have been asserting that Filipinos should be writing books on marriage and parenting for Filipinos. It's not that the Larry Crabbs, the Gary Chapmans, the Philip Yanceys, the Harold Salas (who incidentally has a Filipino heart), and a host of other foreign writers do not have a contribution to make. We do; we provide helpful insights and encouragement. But simply put, no one knows Filipinos better than Filipinos.

In recent days, however, God has raised up a generation of Filipino writers who are adequately addressing cultural issues in a biblical perspective for Filipino readers. These include authors such as Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano, Bo Sanchez, Cory Varela, Francis Kong, Grace Chong, Ruth Chang, Nomer Bernardino, and now, Nelson Dy. Great!

In his book *The Honeymoon Never Ends*, Nelson Dy very realistically confronts the greatest monster that married couples face — selfishness, the founding member of the AMYF Club (Haven't heard of this one? It's "After Me You are First"). Nelson lays open his soul, telling you of his struggles with his old nature and how he learned the key to having a marriage where the honeymoon never ends.

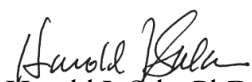
But honestly, is it possible for the honeymoon to never end as Nelson suggests? Reading through the book, I had to reflect on the fifty years of marriage (Good thing we got married when we were practically kids!) that Darlene and I have enjoyed, and I can tell you with absolute certainty, ours has been the kind of marriage Nelson and Lucy have embarked on — one which was intended to be blissful and joyful by our Heavenly Father for all His children. It is a kind of marriage that you can have as well.

Long ago, in the course of counseling and working with people, I have discovered that at the bottom of almost every failed marriage is a flaw that consistently persisted: At some point, the couple lost sight of God. And the resulting spiritual failure in the life of one or both spouses became the root cause of the conflict that produced heartache, sorrow, and often, a broken home. Marriage was never intended for perfect people, but for flawed, needy people who have found a perfect Savior and are willing to make Him the third party in a relationship that need never end.

Someone humorously described marriage as “the condition in which a wife never gets what she expects and her husband never expects what he gets!” Don’t believe it for a minute! Only in this beautiful relationship called marriage — designed in heaven to be lived out on earth — can your deep needs be met, your fulfillment and happiness be found, and your home provide an environment in which children can learn Christian values and establish the same kind of a home you have when they grow up and marry.

So what has been our secret to a marriage that perpetuates a never-ending honeymoon? Simply put, both of us live for the other and the two of us live for God. We constantly stumble into each other’s arms to do something nice for the other person, to keep the other person first. Each of us lives for the happiness and pleasure of the other. It’s precisely what Ambrose Bierce wrote about, saying that a good marriage is one in which there is “a master, a mistress, and two slaves — making in all, just two.” This is the relationship that Nelson Dy has written about, the kind where *The Honeymoon Never Ends*.

Enjoy the journey.



Harold J. Sala, PhD

Founder and President, Guidelines International

INTRODUCTION



Why Another Book On Marriage? Why Read This One?

A woman caught her husband having an affair. They were members of a church well-known for its strong Bible teaching and leadership development. The husband asked his wife to forgive him. As part of the reconciliation process, he agreed to undergo marriage counseling and attend prayer meetings.

But things went from bad to worse. The husband used what he learned in the counseling sessions against his wife. For example, he badgered her to submit to his authority because “that is what the Bible says.” Eventually, the husband resumed his adulterous relationship and abandoned his wife and their five-year-old son. Now the wife is wondering if her husband was even a Christian in the first place.

I am not knocking down the plethora of marriage enrichment seminars, counseling programs, books, and videos out there. In fact, my darling wife Lucy and I benefited from these excellent resources. I rejoice that many gush over a certain book or a particular seminar that had saved their marriage. But why do

marriage resources work on some couples but fail miserably in others, like in the case of that husband? Are we missing something important?

Scan through the Christian marriage books you can find. These, you will notice, use the Bible to teach what the authors believe to be God's design for marriage¹ and/or how spouses should relate to each other. Genesis 2:24 is usually quoted to teach that a man should leave his parents and be united with his wife as "one flesh." Then, to show how the "one flesh" is supposed to operate, various passages are used to support relational principles and techniques such as anger management, inter-gender communication and conflict resolution.

I sense an underlying assumption here: Is your marriage floundering? Your problem may be that you don't know the relevant biblical principles and techniques. Learn what you need to know. Apply the authors' techniques. Follow them sincerely and diligently, then all will be well.

Of course, that is an oversimplification. The nature and severity of marital discord vary from couple to couple. Some cases will need prayer, intervention, extensive counseling and involvement in accountability groups. But the underlying assumption is still there, for such activities would still be governed by "biblical principles" as understood by the participants.

Now comes my struggle: Why do we see people who know a lot about the Bible — who are even church leaders — but are still mean to their spouses? The more I think about it, the more I am convinced that we need marriage resources with a high degree of spiritual content, that is, material that addresses the spouse's vertical relationship with God. This would make such

¹ Even then, Christian authors differ. The two major schools of thought being complementarianism (husband and wife are equal leaders) and egalitarianism (the husband is the leader of the wife). It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss these two sides. My view, however, is that no matter which school you subscribe to, love and respect must prevail in your marriage.

books more effective in addressing problems in one's horizontal relationship with his spouse. Consider this insight from a British couple:

When there are serious problems in a Christian marriage, they are almost certainly first vertical before they are horizontal. Troubles in the relationship between a husband and wife more often than not reflect problems in the relationship they have with God, either as individuals or as a couple. If the Lord is not at the centre of your personal lives and of your marriage, then simply improving communication skills or understanding gender differences better will not do. God and his glory must be your goal.²

I write this book as a humble attempt to explore how the spiritual side of marriage affects the practical realities of married life. I believe that to segregate your spiritual life from your marriage life is a faulty dichotomy. These two are actually so intricately meshed that one greatly affects the other. We may not even know where one ends and the other begins. In fact, don't be surprised if this book sometimes reads more like a devotional rather than a marriage guide.

I entitled this book "The Honeymoon Never Ends" because this is the way I love to describe my marriage with Lucy. I seek to maintain that sweetness that marked our courtship and honeymoon days. But make no mistake about it, it is not always roses and candlelight dinners. At times, it is also nagging bills and dirty dishes. On the flip side, this does not mean that the honeymoon experience has to come to a screeching halt when we begin paying the mortgage and wrestling with low energy levels. We can remain as tender, considerate and helpful to our spouses today — in the midst of bills and schedules — just as the week after we exchanged vows.

² John and Ann Benton, *Don't They Make a Lovely Couple?* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, Ltd., 2005), 103.

A few things before we launch into the spiritual deep:

- I will be using “he” and “his” instead of the awkward “he or she” and “his or her.” This is not because of any sexist intent. Rather, I am writing as a husband to fellow husbands. However, the principles presented in this book — such as “Burn the Scorecard!”, “Keep It Safe” and definitely “Begin with a Romantic God” — are equally applicable to wives.
- This book is a fresh change of reading because it is written by someone who is neither a pastor nor a professional counselor, but an ordinary Joe. The principles written here are from real-life personal experience, going beyond theory and technique. I know these principles work because I have seen them work in my marriage and those of others. Thus they are relevant, true and powerful, whether you have been married for five years or for fifty. I must confess, however, that I sometimes fail to apply the very principles you will read in this book. Then again, who is the spouse that has already scored a perfect 100? As someone once said, “Our goal is not perfection, but progress.”
- I do not have the monopoly in marital wisdom, and this book is not as comprehensive as many would like. Therefore we will also get to drink deeply from the wisdom of people who have gone further along this adventure called marriage. I interviewed church leaders Nomer Bernardino, Joey Bonifacio and Bo Sanchez to help us see marriage from different angles.

May these principles be arrows that point your marriage in the right direction.

Begin with a Romantic God



*Marriage does not begin with you and your spouse.
It begins with you and your God.*

Consider this story from Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano.¹ She introduces us to Millet, who “used to be a lively, intellectually keen and independent person until she married Ron, a pastor.” Not long after the birth of their first child, Millet took her baby and went to Evelyn’s house and asked if they could stay for a while. A day or two later, Ron came to pick up his runaway wife and baby.

“Then he packed for his child and wife, chiding her in our presence. Millet stared moodily . . . Every now and then we hear snatches of news about this couple. Millet had a serious breakdown from which she took months to recover.”

¹ David and Evelyn Feliciano, *Beyond the Honeymoon* (Metro Manila: OMF Literature, Inc., 2000), 26–27.

Evelyn continues the story after Millet gave birth to five children,

“How’s Ron?” we asked.

“Ron?” She lets out a sigh. “He’s hard to describe. I’ll never be able to please him. His standard is [beyond heaven]. I’m always on tiptoe whenever he’s around.”

“Is he cruel to you?” we asked.

“Not physically. But verbal abuse? Ah, lots and lots. His words stab me like daggers every time. That is why I sometimes just go away,” she answered.

“Is he aware how he is hurting you? Have you told him?” we further inquired.

“Yes, I have. But he just laughed at me. [He said I was just acting.]”

Evelyn proceeds to wonder,

How could a husband be so thoughtless toward his own wife? Ron seemed to be a guy who had not grown from the selfish kid in the block into manhood — despite his education and theological training.

Take note that Ron was a pastor with “theological training.” I take it that he went through seminary and thus accumulated truckloads of Bible knowledge. But based on the narrative, all these did not deter him from being so mean-spirited toward his wife that she wanted to flee.

Don’t get me wrong; I am not against pastors. I am not singling them out. I am simply raising an important question: Why do so many of us know our Bibles yet still have a hard time treating our spouse the way God wants us to? I count myself among that struggling lot. And don’t forget the husband whom we met in the Introduction: he badgered his wife to “submit,” quoting the very Bible that was supposed to correct him.

Why? What went wrong? Does this mean that even though the Bible is touted as the very Word of God — “living and

active. Sharper than any double-edged sword”² — it is actually dull and therefore useless in slicing off the ugly parts of the abusive husband’s character? Does this mean that the Holy Spirit is helpless in the face of a recalcitrant spouse who has a problem with temper, tenderness or tongue?

We keep hearing about making Christ the center of one’s marriage. So what does a Christ-centered marriage really look like? Daily devotions with the missus and kids? Hauling them to church every Sunday? Serving as Sunday school teachers, ushers or deacons? Pastors do all these “spiritual stuff” and more . . . and we still hear of pastors running off with the church secretary.

Are we missing something important beyond knowledge, techniques and counseling?

Yes. And here is what I think it is.

THE MISSING INGREDIENT

Every once in a while, one stumbles upon a book or even a sentence that changes his life forever. One such epiphany happened to me when I was reading Dr Larry Crabb’s *Connecting*. Dr Crabb is a Christian psychologist who penned books such as *Inside Out*, *The Marriage Builder* and *Basic Principles of Biblical Counseling*. After twenty-five years of practice, he laments in *Connecting* over what he sees as the limited effectiveness of therapy and moralizing:

The crisis of care in modern culture, especially in the Western church, will not be resolved by training more therapists. We do not need a counseling center on every corner. It will be worsened by moralists who never reach deeply into the hearts of people in their efforts to impose their standards of behavior on others, even when those standards are biblical.³

² Hebrews 4:12.

³ Larry Crabb, *Connecting* (Nashville, Tennessee: Word Publishing, 1997), xvi.

What, therefore, is his view of the real problem and hence, the real solution?

We must do something other than train professional experts to fix damaged psyches. Damaged psyches aren't the problem. The problem beneath our struggles is a disconnected soul. [Italics are Crabb's]⁴

Read that line again: *The problem beneath our struggles is a disconnected soul.* Crabb goes on to say that one can be disconnected in three basic ways: from self, from others and from God. Could it be that husbands like Ron are harsh towards their wives because they themselves are disconnected from God?

Many evangelical Christians equate “connecting” with God as having a “personal relationship” with Him through faith in Jesus Christ, then living out that new life through activities such as prayer, Bible study or going to church. But one can do all those things and *still* be disconnected from God. The Pharisees in the Gospels did those things and more. They knew their Bibles inside and out. They prayed, fasted and tithed. Yet still they did not recognize, and even rejected, Jesus as the Messiah. What I mean by being disconnected from God is deeper: we do not know God in an intimately personal way. We have not “tasted” Him, have not experienced His goodness in a way that stops us in our tracks, burns off our hidden rottenness and purifies us into models of grace. Yes, including grace to our spouses.

Could it be that before a husband can relate better to his wife (or vice versa), he must first learn how to relate better with God? Could it be that a spouse struggles with issues like anger, forgiveness and grace because he has not seen how God Himself exemplifies anger (yes, our Lord can get furious!), forgiveness and grace? Without this intimate knowledge and relationship with God, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to sustain the lasting change

⁴ Crabb, *Connecting*, xvi.

that is needed in a happy marriage. For example, a husband is chronically hot-tempered towards his wife. To help him change, he is taught anger management techniques. He may practice the techniques for a while, but if there is no real change in his heart, his anger remains. The root cause is not addressed. Worse, he may explode again with all the pent-up anger inside him, get discouraged and conclude, “These techniques never work. I can’t change. So don’t try to improve me. Why bother?”

What about accountability groups? To be honest, I am not completely sold on their effectiveness because we can lie to or even defy our accountability partners. Accountability relationships presuppose that the people involved are willing to be vulnerable and willing to change. In my experience, not all accountability set-ups work because not everyone who goes into them is determined to change at great personal cost. Anecdotal evidence abound, like the man who abandoned his wife despite all those counseling sessions. I may be misreading Crabb, but he seems to be pointing out that people tend to enforce accountability rather than do the harder work of cultivating good relational skills: “And we must do something more than exhort people to do what is right and then hold them accountable. Groups tend to emphasize accountability when they don’t know how to relate.”⁵

I asked Bo Sanchez, the well-known Catholic writer and speaker, “How can you explain a philandering husband who, despite all the Bible studies and accountability groups he went through, still insists on his ways and even abandons his wife?” Here is his answer:

We have it in our church. I recall one case, he was already a leader. In spite of all the Bible studies and meetings, he still became unfaithful to his wife. So there are situations like that. Accountability is not the final cure. Ultimately, accountability is not an activity but an attitude of the heart.

⁵ Crabb, *Connecting*, xvi.

The bottom line: Could it be that we equate behavioral principles with internal piety? Could this be the reason why we are flooded with so many techniques but see and experience very little transformation of the heart? Many marriage resources focus on fixing the horizontal relationship without first addressing the vertical. Perhaps they presume that the reader is in great standing with God in the first place, whereas reality may be way off the mark.

This, I believe, is the key principle that we are missing: **Marriage does not begin with you and your spouse. It begins with you and your God.** Get right with God first. I mean, *really* right. Then getting right with your spouse will follow, with a lot less struggle and more joy. Techniques are good — you will find some in this book, too — but we should not put the cart (how to relate with our spouse) before the horse (how to relate with God). Chances are, if we are walking right before God, we will exhibit the very behavior these techniques seek to build, not because we are “told to” but because we “want to.” Such behavior springs from a heart cleansed and changed by God.

HOW “GOOD” IS YOUR GOD?

A teenager got himself into plenty of trouble and landed in the office of a counselor. When he found out that the counselor was a Christian, he sneered, “I don’t believe in God.” The counselor wisely replied, “Tell me what kind of God you think He is and chances are I don’t believe in that kind of God either.”

How we view God affects how we relate with Him. In turn, this influences how we relate with others, especially with our spouse. At the extreme, there are those whose view of God is so negative they would rather die than set foot in a church. But even those who call themselves Christians can suffer from a distorted view of God, which robs them of the life they could have

enjoyed. Let us look at three ways God is *not* good and understand how they can shape a marriage.

The “You’re-Not-Good-Enough” God.

This is the Cosmic Tyrant. Nothing you do is ever good enough for Him. Many people have this view of God, as if He was a killjoy and the heavens would darken when they get a wee bit of fun.

To these people, Christianity is reduced to a performance game. They believe that all God cares about is whether they crossed their t’s and dotted their i’s. Have they prayed enough? Read their Bibles enough? Given their time and money enough? How much is enough, anyway? And if they lag behind, they flinch as He can bop them over the head anytime. On the other hand, if they are ahead, all He will muster is a grudging nod. These people simply can’t win. There is just no pleasing Him. How can an awesome God even think of loving them? They know and hear how God can wash away even the most scarlet of sin, but they have a hard time swallowing this truth.

A person with such a harsh view of God can develop a harsh view of people. Is it any wonder that he forces his spouse to play the same performance game? The spouse is never good enough and hence has to be kept on a tight leash. She never cooks dinner well enough. She is never smart enough, pretty enough, eloquent enough. His speech is peppered with “You always...!” “You never...!” “If only you...!”

The Good-For-Nothing God.

In the case of the Cosmic Tyrant, nothing *we* do is good enough for God. Here in the second view, God is a Negligent Father; nothing *He* does is good enough for us. People who view God as good-for-nothing know He exists and that He is sitting on some big throne up there. Meantime, we poor mortals have to trudge

to church every Sunday and sing some hoary old songs to Him. But for all intents and purposes, He doesn't matter. It is not as if Christians get any special treatment. After all, Christians also get cancer, get run over by trucks, get mugged or lose their jobs. So why pray at all? Why read the Bible at all? Why go to church at all, with all those "hypocrites" and their politicking ways? To be blunt, of what use is God?

A husband who views God as "good for nothing" will likely consider how he treats his wife as something of little concern to God. He may yell at his wife while thinking to himself, "God doesn't care anyway." Or he may see that his income is not enough to meet household needs, so he resolves to get rich. He slaves away at the office, clinches those deals and jostles for promotions . . . even if the wife is feeling lonely and neglected. After all, if God can't look out for them, then who will?

Lest we get too harsh on such people, consider that they may have been traumatized by some major disappointment. They feel God has failed them at a critical juncture in their lives. They claim to love and serve God, but they keep Him at arm's length. They don't want to be hurt afresh when God lets them down again. Since they think they cannot count on God to provide for them and protect them, they act as if they are on their own.

In effect, they become practical atheists. The world is such a scary, unpredictable and violent place, so deep down they become disconnected from God and are deadened by fear and frustration. And a spouse with a deadened soul sucks all the vitality out of a marriage. After all, who wants to be married to a spiritual zombie?

Perhaps a more subtle but insidious influence is that if a person loves God only for what he can get from Him, then he may value his spouse the same way. Is the wife not making him happy? Not adding to the family budget? Not helping him fulfill his dreams? Then to him, the wife is good for nothing. He will not

admit it, but this creates a breeding ground for dissatisfaction, contempt and even infidelity.

The Feel-Good God.

Those who view God as a Grandpa/Genie are, paradoxically, slaves to the emotion of happiness. They are addicted to feeling “high.” Of course, as good religious folks, what better way than to be “high on God”?

There is nothing wrong with being happy with God. We will tackle that in the chapter “Pursue Joy.” But the danger comes when we view God as One who is obligated to give us nothing but health and wealth, keeps telling us how wonderful we are but never points out what’s wrong with us, and flashes a “boys will be boys” wink at our shenanigans.

At the root of such people is a self-centered idolatry. Their main focus is not God, but the good vibes they get, whether from God, that job, this car and yes . . . this spouse. The concept of making the other person happy, let alone sacrificing for her good, is alien to them. An extreme example is the unfaithful husband who reasons this way, “I no longer want my wife. She is a big pain in the neck! But this other woman makes me feel alive and wanted, so I will leave my wife and go with her. After all, God wants me to be happy, right?” Does this sound familiar?

Okay, not all of us are philanderers. But a more insidious attitude goes like this, “I deserve to be happy. Therefore I demand that my spouse make me happy. She must serve me hand and foot, satisfy my every whim and shut up while doing it!” Spiritual spoiled brats are most likely also marital spoiled brats.

A husband who makes an idol of “feeling good” resents it when he did something wrong and his wife seeks to correct him. After all, shouldn’t the wife be supportive (read: mindlessly servile)? Or what about expecting the wife to cook a sumptuous meal, never mind if her nerves are all frazzled from taking care of

the kids or doing chores all day? Another example: he wants to buy some luxury item and thus breaks the household budget, never mind consulting his wife.

We can see that these three kinds of a “good” God cause problems, not the least in that they produce attitudes and actions that make a marriage miserable. So what kind of a good God do we really need?

We need an All-good God.

BEGIN WITH A ROMANTIC GOD

Unlike the “You’re-not-good-enough” God, the All-good God gets a ringside seat to all the nauseating, maggot-infested muck in our hearts . . . but wants to be with us, anyway. In counterpoint to the Good-for-nothing God, there was never an instant when He ceased to care for us. But unlike the Feel-good God, He does not pander to our caprices. He is not above withholding the sugar pill that we hanker for as good but He knows is bad for us. Neither is He remiss in urging us to swallow the bitter pill that we recoil from as evil, but in His eyes is exactly what we need. The All-good God trains us in such a way that whatever grieves us – a difficult job, poor health, wobbly finances and yes, that impossible spouse – are not signs of His displeasure, but are rather invitations to participate in His grace.

I know for some people what I am about to say will be very hard to believe. But here goes: God loves you very, very much. Here is how Larry Crabb paints a Romantic God and how it can revolutionize a person (and I might add, one’s marriage) to the core. His verbal brushstrokes are so eloquent, I beg you to savor the next two paragraphs:

The most powerful thing we can do to help someone change is to offer them a rich taste of God's incredible goodness in the New Covenant. He looks at us with eyes of delight, with eyes that see a goodness beneath the mess, with a heart that beats wildly with excitement over who we are and who we will become. And sometimes he exposes what we are convinced would make him turn away in disgust in order to amaze us with his grace. That's connecting. When we connect like that, it can change people's lives.

God doesn't fix us or pressure us. He does whatever it takes to reveal himself to us. That may include probing deeply into our messy hearts or insisting that we do something we really don't want to do. But the core purpose is always the same, not to repair or exhort us, but to draw us into a fuller appreciation of his beauty, to dazzle us with the sunrises of his nature, to awe us with the Grand Canyons of his character, to entice us with the endless fields of fragrant flowers blooming in his heart.⁶

Wow! Don't forget Crabb is a psychologist, not a poet.

How, then, can we transform our selfish hearts and thus transform our marriages? To borrow the language of Psalm 34:8, we do so by tasting and seeing the All-good God in His indescribable splendor. This leads us to the next chapter.

⁶ Crabb, *Connecting*, 10.