

GOD'S BEST-KEPT  
SECRET



CHRISTIANITY IS EASIER  
THAN YOU THINK

MARK MAULDING

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Some names and details of the people and situations described in this book have been changed or presented in composite form in order to ensure the privacy of those with whom the author has worked.

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To Christians everywhere  
whom God has been preparing  
with great care to discover  
his best-kept secret

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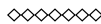
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## Secrets Christians Never Share

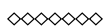
“I want people to go to heaven, but I don’t want them to become a Christian and wind up feeling miserable like me!”

Charlotte whispered this confession as tears streamed down her face. No one would have ever expected that she’d kept this secret to herself for years. Charlotte was married to a lawyer, had four wonderful children, knew the Bible backward and forward, and had a likable personality. Yet by her own admission she had had a mental breakdown because of her Christian beliefs. No matter how hard she tried, Charlotte just couldn’t seem to get Christianity to work for her. When I was asked to meet her at a local hospital, she was obviously depressed as well as confused. Charlotte confided to me what she had never told anyone—she was beginning to lose her faith in God.



“Last week, I was reading my Bible and praying. But just five minutes after I finished, I found myself yelling at my husband and

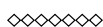
kids. What's wrong with me?" Shana spoke these words as she was sitting in my counseling office with a puzzled expression on her face. "How is it possible to be shouting at my family right after I've felt so spiritual?" she asked. "Why do I get angry so quickly?" Shana is not alone. She echoes the same secrets many sincere men and women have revealed to me in private.



Jake came to see me about a destructive habit he was struggling to overcome. He genuinely loved Jesus and was serving in full-time ministry. Yet his own behavior was kicking his butt.

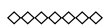
"When I've asked other Christians—even my mentor, a mega-church pastor—how to break this habit, they tell me to pray and read my Bible more. But even though I've dramatically increased the amount of time I pray and read the Bible, it hasn't worked for me. In some ways, I am worse now than before!"

Jake looked at me through eyes filled with despair, anger, and confusion. When I asked him how long he'd been struggling, he hung his head in shame and said, "It's been years."



"I thought if I genuinely tried to obey God, then he wouldn't let anything bad happen to me or my family. Boy, was I wrong."

Geraldo said these words with a furrowed brow. Ever since he'd decided to get serious about obeying God, it seemed as though bad things happened to him more than ever. He didn't get the promotion his boss had promised and his four-year-old daughter had just been diagnosed with a rare disease. Geraldo stared at the floor, wondering why God would let these things happen.



Have you ever kept thoughts to yourself about God, your personal life, or your spiritual life? Have you ever wondered if there

might be something better than the kind of relationship you presently have with God? Maybe you've held these kinds of thoughts deep inside:

- *How can I encourage someone else to become a Christian when I don't have my own life figured out?*
- *I've tried following biblical principles to improve my marriage, but we feel closer to a divorce than to each other.*
- *I'm afraid to tell my Christian friends I've fallen into an overwhelming sense of depression. They might judge me or tell me I just need to trust God more.*

As a Christian counselor and speaker for more than twenty years, I've listened to hundreds of Christians tell me their innermost secrets. These individuals include sincere people who've tried to follow inspiring sermons motivating them to live good Christian lives. They've served in their local church, gone on mission trips, and even witnessed to the people around them. Amid all their efforts, however, something still seems to be missing from their faith, and they don't know why. The quiet admissions above are some of the most common ones I've heard. You could call them secrets Christians never share.

Believe me—I understand how Charlotte, Shana, Jake, and Geraldo feel, because I've been there too. At one time in my life I harbored two deep secrets. For a long time, I was obsessed with these thoughts:

*Sometimes I wish I weren't a Christian, because non-Christians seem so much happier than me.*

*If this is all there is to being a Christian, it doesn't work. Something is wrong. I just can't go on living like this.*

One night I did share that last thought with my wife as we settled into bed. I blurted that I felt burned out trying to live the Christian



life and that I couldn't continue. After waiting patiently for me to share my heart, she responded compassionately. She assured me she truly believed God had an answer that would resolve why I couldn't go on with Christianity as I understood it.

After turning off the lamp, I laid flat on my back, staring at the dark ceiling. I wasn't praying. I wasn't thinking about God. I wasn't thinking about Bible verses. I couldn't do any of that any longer. I was simply thinking about how miserable I was. The room may have been dark, but my soul felt even darker.

How had I gotten here? What had gone wrong? At one time I really enjoyed being a Christian. Over time, though, trying to live the Christian life had become a burden instead of a blessing. Christianity was literally stressing me out!

I wasn't simply tired; I was exhausted. My faith in God was burned out, and I was at the lowest point I'd ever been.

For years I'd been taught that the keys to the Christian life were reading the Bible, praying, hanging around other Christians, going to church, and serving God. I took all that to heart. I even got to the place where I had redoubled my efforts. Instead of praying for a few minutes, I'd try to pray for an hour. Instead of reading one chapter in the Bible, I'd read two or more. Or at least that was my goal, although I often failed. Instead of fasting occasionally, I fasted every week. I figured if these activities were the keys to making the Christian life work, then surely I would break out of my spiritual funk.

The results, though, were just the opposite. I didn't feel any peace or joy or the abundant life Jesus proclaimed. Instead, I had a knot in my stomach from these activities, leaving me feeling drained to the point that I couldn't do any of it.

That's how I ended up harboring secrets that made me feel awful and exhausted. Looking back on that dark night of my soul, sometimes I laugh to myself and think that was when God exclaimed in heaven, "Finally! Mark has stopped trying to hide his

secrets and admitted something is wrong. Now I can show him who I really am and what true Christianity really is.” God knew I was ready to let go of my secrets and see a new perspective based on the truth of who he is. I wasn’t giving up on God or Christianity. I was simply giving up on God and Christianity as I knew it.

Is your view of God and Christianity working for you? Like many other Christians, do you harbor a secret inside? Have you ever slowed down long enough to ask what you really think about God, deep down in your soul?

These secrets all have their foundation in an incorrect view of God and inaccurate expectations of him and ourselves. First you’ll figure out how you view God by taking this quiz and doing a few revealing exercises. Then we’ll explore some other factors that may have affected your view of God, such as your family and religion.

## **The God Is Quiz**

What do you really believe about God? Is he who you think he is? To consider these questions, take the God Is Quiz. Read each of the twenty statements below and answer “true” or “false” beside each statement. Don’t overthink your answers. And don’t give the answer you think you’re supposed to give, such as the Sunday-school, in-front-of-people answer. Go with your first response.

True or False:

1. I worship God because he is a holy God. \_\_\_\_\_
2. I enjoy God because he is a loving Father. \_\_\_\_\_
3. I am often aware of God’s presence in me. \_\_\_\_\_
4. I know God loves me no matter what happens. \_\_\_\_\_
5. God is proud of me just because I am his child. \_\_\_\_\_
6. I obey God because he loves me, not so he’ll love me more.  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. I feel unconditionally accepted by God. \_\_\_\_\_
8. I feel very comfortable calling God “Dad” or “Papa.”  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. God is more interested in me than in what I do for him.  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. God never gets angry with me. \_\_\_\_\_
11. God must love me because many blessings happen to me.  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. I am afraid of God’s punishment when I sin. \_\_\_\_\_
13. I feel as though I can never please God. \_\_\_\_\_
14. Making my life work seems mostly up to me instead of up to God. \_\_\_\_\_
15. I believe I must do the right things to get closer to God.  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. I feel as though God is often disappointed with me. \_\_\_\_\_
17. God seems good when good things happen to me. \_\_\_\_\_
18. I need to put myself in the right position for God to bless me. \_\_\_\_\_
19. God doesn’t really show up when I need him. \_\_\_\_\_
20. Based on what he lets happen to me, God seems mad at me.  
\_\_\_\_\_

Your answers to these twenty statements reflect your personal view of God. How can you know?

If you answered the first ten questions as true and the last ten questions as false, then you have an accurate view of who God is based on what the Bible really says. If you answered the opposite way, then your view of God may need reconsidering. But here’s the good news: that’s why I wrote this book.

Let’s go a step further in our perception of who God is. For example, wouldn’t you agree it’s easy to believe God is wonderful when you’re enjoying a good day? But what’s your view of God on

a bad day? And I'm talking about a really awful, heartbreaking type of day. That's when you find out what you truly believe about God.

### **The God You Really Believe Is the One You View on Your Worst Days**

When your life is going well, it's easy to believe God loves you. It's great to proclaim he's good when you ask him to give you something and he does. But life doesn't always go well, does it? What do you feel God is like when he doesn't seem to answer your prayer? How do you feel about him when your circumstances get worse, not better?

When my wife and I had our third child, the doctor came in and said, "Mr. and Mrs. Maulding, you have a baby girl and she seems healthy." But she went on to tell us our daughter had been born with a genetic defect that would cause her to live developmentally disabled for the rest of her life. That was one of my worst days ever. My wife and I cried bitterly, because we had lost the dream of a perfectly healthy child every parent wants. A few years before our daughter's birth, my view of God in that situation would have made me think he was punishing me. I would have wondered what sin I had committed to cause God to hurt me, my wife, and our baby.

What have you thought about God on your worst day?

I know it's not easy, but let's find out—because making this important distinction in your mind is crucial. Think about a really bad day you had. Maybe it was the worst day in your life. You found out you had cancer. The divorce your spouse wanted was final. You were in a debilitating car accident. Your child was hospitalized and you weren't certain she would make it. A close family member died. You had a flat tire and you were late for the new job you just started. You got fired. You were sexually abused. Your best friend betrayed you. You realized you were in such financial debt that you didn't think you would ever get out. You were harassed

because of your ethnicity. Your church looked like it was going to split. You were falsely accused publicly.

You fill in the blank.

Then go back in your mind and remember the raw emotions you felt. Do you feel them now? I know it's depressing to recall these memories, but here's the important point: During that difficult time, what did you feel about God and his relationship with you? Was he even in the mix?

Don't try to avoid those memories by believing you shouldn't think about God this way. It's okay. God prefers honesty and truth versus sweeping secrets under the rug. Take a minute or two to recall your view of God on your worst day, what you would have said or did say to him.

What I've heard from people has varied from person to person, but here are some examples:

- God, if you really love me, why are you letting this happen?
- God, I'm not sure if you are even real. Maybe you're just a fairy tale.
- God, I'm mad at you and I don't want to talk to you.
- God, I wonder what I've done for you to do this to me.
- God, I don't believe in you anymore because of what you let happen to me.
- God, it seems as though you have abandoned me.
- God, you love me no matter what is happening.
- God, you are good even if I can't see it right now.
- God, you are sovereign in my life and in control, so I trust you.
- God, you are faithful always, so I can trust you with anything.

You may have had one of these or similar thoughts. But whatever it was, it defined what you truly believed about God, what you really thought about him.

Your view of God, however, goes beyond the way you feel on your worst day. We can get an even better picture when we consider God and ourselves together in relationship. Do these exercises to reveal how you feel about God, because how we *feel* shows us what we really believe.

### Exercise #1: God through the Lens of a Selfie

Many people find it fun to take pictures of themselves or close-up photos with family and friends called “selfies.” But what if you could take a selfie with God? What would your picture look like if you could take a photo of you and God together?

You might think your selfie with God will look different depending on the situation. So once again take a minute to think back to one of your worst days. Then imagine taking a selfie with God in that situation. What would your picture look like? Think about this image.

At one time in my life, my selfie with God would have showed him sternly pointing to the next thing he wanted me to do. I’d be in the picture, but I’d be standing a few feet away, looking half-eager and half-tired, trying to obey.

When I’ve asked people to describe their selfie with God, here are some images they’ve described. Which mental picture do you relate to the most?

- God is not in the picture. I am standing there alone.
- God is far back in the background, far away from me.
- God is on his throne. I see steps between us, but they are broken.
- God has a stick in his hand, and I have a terrible look of fear on my face as I wait for him to punish me for a sin I just committed.
- God has his arms folded and a frustrated look on his face that says, “Why can’t you get it together?”

- God looks disappointed as both he and I are nervously looking down at the ground beside each other.
- God has his arm around me and I have my arm around him.
- God is on his throne and tears are running down my face as I kneel and worship him.
- God is giving me a big hug, and I'm hugging him back.
- God is mad at me, and I'm crying because I always mess up.
- God is faceless, and I'm emotionless.

Do you relate to one or more of those selfies? Keep that picture in mind as we see how your view of God may be shaped more by your family than you think.

## **Exercise #2: God through the Lens of Family**

One of the challenges you may have is that your view of God was shaped more by your family than what you read in the Bible. My counseling staff and I see this problem on a regular basis when we help people understand their actual concept of God. When we go over the history of their lives, they sometimes see how their relationship with their earthly father has influenced their view of God.

It was certainly true for me. Let me describe how my relationship with my dad related to how I once saw God. (My dad and I have talked about this, and I have received his permission to share this information.)

My dad would have given his life for me. There is no doubt that he loved me then and loves me now. He provided for me and our family. He came to my basketball games in high school and was there for other important events.

Yet when he asked me to do some kind of project, he had a habit of coming behind me, redoing it, or telling me what I did wrong more than what I did right. As an adult, I talked to him about this

and he apologized, not realizing he was doing it. But this is what was happening as I grew up.

For example, we had a fairly large yard that was hilly and full of pine trees. We lived where it was hot and humid, and we had a push mower to cut the grass. As you can imagine, it was hard work.

I started mowing our yard when I was around fourteen years old, and I could never finish it in one day. Finally, toward the end of the summer when I was fifteen, for the first time I mowed the entire yard in one day. I was so excited I had accomplished this feat. I couldn't wait for my dad to get home from work so I could tell him.

I sat on the front steps of our home, anticipating what it was going to be like when he drove up. When he pulled into the garage, I rushed over to his car door. As he stepped out, I shouted, "Dad, I mowed the lawn and finished the whole yard all in one day!"

Dad stepped out to the front lawn, inspected it, and then said only one thing: "You missed a spot." I was crushed. This imprinted on me that I couldn't fully please my dad. It felt like no matter what I did for him, it was never quite good enough.

I didn't know it at the time, but these types of comments from my dad definitely shaped how I viewed my heavenly Father. When I became serious about my relationship with God, I really wanted him to be proud of me as well. I worked hard to obey and serve him. Yet deep down, I felt as though I could never fully please him either. It often felt like he was coming behind me, saying, "You missed a spot."

Our view of God, however, is not always negatively influenced by our families. For example, my wife's father was loving, affectionate, and kind. She had a great relationship with him and felt loved, accepted, and important. His love was unconditional and she didn't feel as though she had anything to prove. But she wanted to obey him just because she knew how much he loved her.



That is how she has always seen her heavenly Father—loving, kind, and accepting of her. She's wanted to obey him just because she knew how much he loved her. Over the years, God has grown her understanding of who he is, and she had a good model in her dad.

When you think about your relationship with God, do you see any parallels with your family? Your perspective could have been influenced by your dad, or it could have been affected by your relationship with your mom, a grandparent, an uncle, or even someone outside your family, such as a pastor or priest.

Keep in mind, though, not only our families influence our view of God. Another big contributing factor is religion itself.

### **Exercise #3: God through the Lens of Religion**

Would it surprise you if I said God is not religious? Do you think he is? Would you describe God as someone who is mostly interested in giving people rules to live by? Would you define a relationship with God as being blessed when you obey and punished when you disobey? In other words, do you believe God is religious in that he is all about rule-keeping? What does the Bible actually say on this topic?

Let's start with Genesis, the first book of the Bible, where we see God's purpose in creating mankind. Genesis 2:7 explains who God is and his motivations: "Then the LORD God formed a man out of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being."

As we dig into this verse, we see that it reveals a fantastic love story between God and mankind. Use your imagination for a moment and become that first man. Your gender doesn't matter; just pretend you are Adam when God created him.

Visualize how God has just taken dirt from the ground and formed every cell of your body into a perfect being. Your skin, your eyes, your ears, your hair, your arms, your legs, your face are

all perfect. He is looking you over, admiring his creation. But you aren't fully human yet. You're lying there motionless. One more ingredient is needed to make you a real person.

God leans over your lifeless body and gently blows the "breath of life" into your nostrils.

The word *breath* here doesn't mean "oxygen" but "spirit." It means God blew the Holy Spirit into you as he was creating your human spirit. And the word *life* means "lives," plural. This seems to be a clear reference to the entire Trinity entering you to live in you. As they do, you come alive and begin to breathe. Then you open your eyes, and the first thing you see is God looking at you with love.

The last part of Genesis 2:7 says you became a living being. The word *being* means "soul," which is your mind, emotions, and will. Your soul has also come alive. With God living in you, only now are you fully human. You are the person he had in mind long before he created you. You are the human prototype for every human to be born after you. A human was originally designed to live in a relationship with God by God indwelling him or her. That is what makes us fully human.

What do you learn about God from this verse? You learn he is your Creator. You were his idea. You exist because he wanted you to be here. That immediately gives you a great sense of value. You also realize God has intended to unite himself with you from the beginning of time. He wanted to be your source of life. He wanted to be close to you. Why? Because the God who is love created you to live loved in the depths of your being.

Let me put it this way: God brought you into this world because he wanted to live in union with you. He wanted to have intimacy with you. Maybe you've heard intimacy means "Into me you see." This means he wanted to enjoy you, and he wanted you to enjoy him.

God did not create you because he needed someone to love him. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have been fully satisfied with

the love and intimacy they shared together long before you and I came along. But if he didn't need us, then why did he create us?

I hope the answer I am about to share with you blows your mind and removes any sense that God is religious.

God was so full of love that he wanted to share it with another creature with whom he could unite himself. He wanted to share himself with you! You've been invited into the fellowship of the Trinity!

This is why humankind began. This is what God is like. Just as with Adam, God created you to have a relationship with him and to live with purpose. In Adam's case, God knew he would enjoy naming the animals and taking care of the garden of Eden. Then, after all that was started, God gave Adam only one rule, in Genesis 2:16–17:

And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

Consider the importance of these verses and put yourself in Adam's place. God didn't create you and then give you a bunch of religious rules to force you to worship him and love him. God gave you himself and only one rule that was intended for your good. If God were religious by nature, then he would have written down the Ten Commandments immediately and given them to everyone. But you didn't need them because his desire from the beginning was to live in you! He wanted to be your life source and to love you from within.

Do you see now that God is not religious? We'll discuss the purpose of the Ten Commandments later in this book, but it will all relate back to our beginning days before sin entered the world.

Of course, Adam and Eve blew it for all of us when they ate from that tree. Their sin was passed on to us when we were born.

But God's intent has been to live inside of every human being who came after Adam and Eve. Even better, in the midst of our sin, God loved you and me so much that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, for two reasons.

First, so Jesus could be exalted before all creation. Second, so God could live in you, which he has always wanted to do. His plan to live within you has never changed. He has always wanted to love you and for you to love him. Contrary to what you may have heard or felt, you can't make God stop loving you, because he is not religious.

### **Let's Blow the Lid Off God's Best-Kept Secret**

Looking back to my dark days when I felt miserable as a Christian, I mistakenly believed God was religious, angry, distant, unloving, and impossible to please. No wonder I was a wreck. My mistaken view of God led me to experience depression, bondage to lustful habits, discouragement, and physical pain.

Did I mention I was a church pastor at the time?

Thankfully, God began to show me the best-kept secret in Christianity. God revealed the gospel as he wants all Christians to understand it. He began replacing my stinking thinking with the truth of who he really is. Little by little, I was able to let go of my mistaken beliefs. God took me from relating to him as stoically religious to enjoying an intimacy with him I still have difficulty putting into words today.

To say I was transformed is an understatement. When God exchanged my warped view of him for the true view of him, he changed me from the inside out. My depression was exchanged for joy. My discouragement was exchanged for hope. My continual battle with many sinful habits was exchanged for victory, without my even trying. Much more happened that I will share later in this book.

You might think my story sounds too good to be true. But the transforming power of God is real. Sadly, so many Christians live without knowing how God really is. They also don't know how he views them. It's almost as if the reality of God's amazing life and deep love within us remains a secret. You could call it God's best-kept secret because so few seem to know the truth. But I don't mean God is keeping it a secret. He is not! God wants everyone to experience life as he intended.

God's best-kept secret is this: the Christian life is easier than you think because you already have everything you need in Christ to live it! This is revealed in the New Covenant, which this book will unpack one truth at a time.

I've given my life to teaching this great message of freedom to anyone who will listen. As I have shared it around the world, the typical response I get is, "Why haven't I heard this before?" To some Christians, this message seems like something buried in the Bible, yet it's been right under their noses the whole time. Well, I think it's time to blow the lid off it!

Are you ready to learn more about God's best-kept secret?