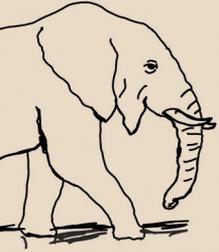


— DANIEL DEWITT —



Sketchy Views



— A BEGINNER'S GUIDE
TO MAKING SENSE OF
— GOD —



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A Stream Called Orthodoxy

To complain that man measures God by his own experience is a waste of time; man measures everything by his own experience; he has no other yardstick.

—DOROTHY L. SAYERS

The river looked like fire. The red beams of the rising sun reflected off the water, cutting through the fog hanging in the tree-lined banks. Steam lofted upward like smoke, releasing yesterday's heat.

As I put my kayak in the water for a morning of fishing, my thoughts turned to God.

Nature has always had that effect on me. There's something primordial, biblical even, about the way nature points beyond itself. For me, the call of the wild has always been an invitation to think deeply about God.

What comes to mind when you think about God? Your answer reveals one of the most important things about you.¹ It reveals your *theology*, the term we use to describe how we organize our thoughts about God. This will touch nearly every area of your life.

Theology literally means “words about God.” Because God is the most important topic a person can think about,

the way we view him—our theology—is the most valuable and important collection of our thoughts and words. Every person is a theologian because every person has some sort of opinion about God.

Even atheism is a theological position since it's a belief about God—a belief that God doesn't exist. Atheism can't be proven. It's accepted on faith. It too is a theology, the sketchiest of all views of God.

This book is a beginner's guide to making sense of theology—of God. If you haven't thought about theology much before, why not start now? If you've already given it a lot of time and energy, why not keep going? Wherever you are in your spiritual journey, I hope this book can spur you on in your thoughts about God. But first, back to fishing. (Don't worry, this isn't a book about fishing. But you should probably know, I love to fish. So it might come up on occasion.)

Looking for God

My family and I live in central Ohio, in an area surrounded by streams. Since I grew up fishing in farm ponds and small lakes in the flatlands of Illinois, I've had to learn some new techniques. Fishing in streams is a different ball game.

Splashing around in a stony creek on a midsummer day feels glorious. (Even if you don't like to fish, I bet you'd enjoy the experience.) The cool water gurgling its way around boulders and bends. The sun peeking through the veil of leafy branches overhead. The pools of still water resting behind large rocks and in the broad flats. The birds singing in the trees. The deer shyly crossing the creek up ahead. This is my kind of therapy.

When you're fishing in a stream, it's important which way you face. Fish have a limited amount of energy to eat a maximum number of calories. Fish are hunters, and they

know how to find a good meal. They aren't going to fight the rapids all day long. They're going to make their way to optimal hunting grounds, situate themselves in a nice spot where they aren't constantly swimming against the current, and wait for food to come to them. That means they'll be lurking in certain kinds of places, looking in a specific direction.

They wait. The water will bring them their entrée. Maybe the current will deliver a bug or a worm or a fly. They'll sit patiently, seemingly frozen in the water, with the exception of small movements of their tail. It's almost like a dog waiting for you to put food in their bowl, until finally dinner is served. When the fish see what they want, they're going to strike. If it's a largemouth bass, they might even jump out of the water like a great white on Shark Week. The whole thing is pretty exhilarating in my humble but accurate opinion.

Where to Look

When it comes to thinking about God, it's important to look in the right direction too. That doesn't mean you can't learn anything about God from looking in other directions. I'm just saying that where you start organizing your thoughts about God is foundational. Here's what I mean.

Looking to experience

As one option, you could make your own life experience your focal point for thinking about God. That's what most people do. I've certainly done that before too. We could think about life or about our experiences. Then ask something like, what must God be like?

This is an understandable place to begin. We can't help but see God through the lens of our lives. As Dorothy Sayers said in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, we have

no other yardstick by which to measure. We see the world through the lenses of our past experiences.

As it has been said, there is no view from nowhere. We are all standing somewhere, and wherever we're standing will tend to shape our perspective. Your location frames your outlook.

Have you ever had a bad seat at a concert or movie that made it difficult to see the show? You couldn't see over the tall person with a hat sitting in front of you or around a post. Or worst of all, maybe you got stuck in the front row and ended up with an insufferable neck cramp. Annoying, isn't it? Where you sit can make a big difference in how you experience what you see.

The same is true in how we think about God. Wherever we're from or living now, whatever our circumstances in life have been, they all affect our view of God. Maybe you're from a broken family like me. That can affect your view of God. Our experiences can be like sunglasses, coloring everything we look at.

This isn't always a bad thing. On the one hand, good experiences can have a good effect. For example, maybe you have a great relationship with your dad. He's loving and patient and enjoys spending time with you. That can shape your view of your Heavenly Father in a positive way. But it may not take you long to think of ways your experiences can shape your beliefs in unhelpful ways. Even positive experiences can blind us to reality.

For instance, some might see their success in life as a sign that God is good with everything they do. But what if he isn't? On the other hand, people who are sensitive to their own shortcomings or failures might see God as an unaccepting, angry judge who's sick and tired of dealing with all their mess-ups. They feel they're one mistake away from being kicked out for good. Maybe that's how you see God.

But that's not the way the Bible talks about God. That means you need to recalibrate your feelings around the facts.

There are ditches on both sides of this road. Whether positive or negative, we need to interpret our experiences in light of what's true and not just based on our feelings at any particular moment. We need to find a way to see things more objectively than our subjective experience.

Looking to nature

Another place people look to make sense of God is creation. That's not an entirely bad idea either. After all, one way to learn something about an artist is to look at their art. If God made the world, then perhaps the world can tell us something about its Creator. As I've mentioned, I love spending time in creation. It makes me think of God. But is nature the best place to begin our theology?

The idea of the natural world pointing to God is actually found in the Bible. King David says the heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). The apostle Paul says creation reveals God's invisible attributes (Romans 1:20). So, according to the Bible, we can know something about God from creation. But the questions are, how much can we learn about God from creation, and is our experience in nature the best starting point for trying to make sense of God?

We often take the sum total of our understanding of the world and make it foundational for how we make sense of God. For example, some take the scientific consensus of the moment and make it the rule by which they measure Scripture. After all, the biblical authors were living in the same physical universe we are today. So, while our study of the world can at times inform how we read a biblical text, we can't make scientific consensus supreme in our biblical interpretation.

At times, something we learn about nature helps us understand what a biblical author is describing. For example, when David talks about the rising and setting of the sun in Psalm 19, we know he was using language to express his point of view. To him, as it is to us, it seems as though the sun is rising and setting. It's really not.

Through a study of the natural world, we can understand the earth's orbit and know it only appears that the sun is moving around the earth. David is no more wrong in describing the sun in the Psalms than a meteorologist is for announcing the time of the sunrise.

While these insights are helpful, we're heading toward a sketchy view of God if we make science the gatekeeper for our beliefs about him. As Christians we believe in a supernatural God who is beyond nature, who is able to interact with nature in powerful ways that defy our scientific categories. As created beings, we can't make ourselves or the creation the standard for understanding the Creator.

Looking to the mind

Still another view would be to measure everything by our own intellect. If something in the Bible doesn't make sense to us, we can discount it or ignore it. When we treat God's Word in this way, we're really making our brain the ultimate authority, instead of the Bible.

Don't get me wrong; I think the intellectual life is really important. Ignorance is not a virtue, and poor understanding and bad arguments aren't a model for the Christian life. But there are things about God that we just can't grasp—that go well beyond our intellectual reasoning. So, while we want to grow in our knowledge of who God is, we don't want to make our mental ability the real master and the Bible the servant. That's the exact opposite of how we should frame our theology.

A long time ago in a land far away there was a philosopher named Protagoras. He believed humans are the measure for all things, determining what's real, what exists, and what doesn't. There was someone long before him who taught that too. He showed up as a snake in the garden of Eden. Making ourselves the authority for what God is like and how to relate to him is a sketchy view as old as the third chapter in Genesis.

Facing the Wrong Direction

None of us like what psychologists call “cognitive dissonance.” That’s when we believe something that doesn’t quite line up with the world around us. Let’s say you trust a close friend, but you keep hearing that they are saying negative things about you behind your back. You believe them to be trustworthy, but your experience is pointing in the opposite direction. When we face challenges to our beliefs like these, we will often begin exploring new beliefs to better explain the situation.

Is that how we should handle our theology? If our beliefs hit troubled waters, should we begin editing our convictions to accommodate our experience? It’s certainly hard to avoid this. But is this the best way to make sense of God?

Have you ever thought, *I wouldn’t believe in a God like that?* I know I have. Maybe something you read in the Bible is difficult to understand or accept. It just doesn’t line up with a common sense view of things. What should we do? Reject what the Bible says or reject our feelings?

Let me ask another question: What if God is different than we expect? What if he doesn’t line up with all our experiences or expectations? What if we’re looking in the

wrong direction when we're thinking about God? What then? What now?

If something seems clear in Scripture but goes against our intellect, our understanding of nature, or our own personal experience, we might dismiss it or assume the Bible is saying something other than what it is. When we do this, we allow our experiences in the world to retrofit the Bible. We make ourselves the authority over what God has said about himself. In forming our theology this way, we shape our view of God based on our own lives and then find a way to make Scripture conform.

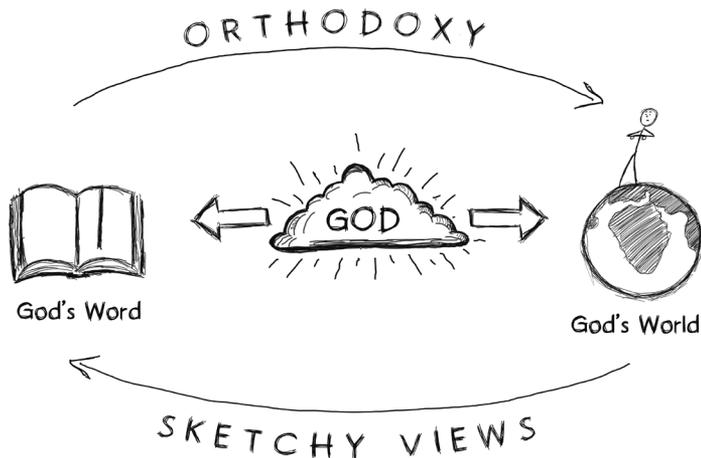
God in the Mirror?

Here's the problem with this method: we end up with a God who looks a lot like our experiences, a lot like the person who stares back at us from the mirror—a God who looks like us. I remember hearing a Christian leader once say something like, God made us in his image, and he didn't ask us to return the favor. If we make our experience in the world our starting point and authority, we'll end up custom making a God to our own specifications, one who never challenges our assumptions, aspirations, or appetites.

The Bible describes this as idolatry. If we make a god in our own image, after our own preferences, we've merely made an idol. If what you think about God is one of the most important things about you, then the last thing you want is to feel right but be dead wrong.

It's easy to gravitate toward sketchy views that better fit with how we want to live than to begin and end with Scripture. There are about a million ways to get God wrong. There's a narrow path to getting God right. Making our lives or the world the chief authority for forming important beliefs is the path to sketchy views of God. The **goal of this**

book is to point you in the right direction in your lifelong quest to form proper beliefs about God. This is what Christians for centuries have described as *orthodoxy*.



Drawing Straight Lines

Followers of Jesus have often used two different terms—*orthodoxy* and *heresy*—to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable views of God. *Orthodoxy* means acquiring rightly ordered or formed beliefs about God, in the same way an orthodontist wants to straighten your teeth.

Heresy, on the other hand, means getting God wrong. The British theologian Alister McGrath points out the “essential feature of a heresy is that it is not unbelief.” Heresy is a poorly formed belief that is unhelpful and destructive. McGrath says heretical beliefs are “subversive or destructive” and thus can indirectly lead to unbelief.²

Throughout this book, when I use the term *sketchy views*, I’m really talking about heresy. Heresy doesn’t flow from or fit with the text of Scripture. These are beliefs that don’t line up with the way Christians have interpreted the Bible for the last two thousand years. They might be beliefs

that fit a particular mood or experience, but they aren't lined up with how Christians have historically made sense of what God has revealed about himself in Scripture.

People who promote sketchy views of God are often called *heretics*. I regularly tell students in my theology courses that one of my main goals for them is that they not become heretics. That's one of my goals for you as well. It's a simple goal, but it can be far more difficult than it sounds. Heresy is subtle and seductive.

So I'll just state it up front: don't become a heretic. Don't develop sketchy views of God that don't line up with the Bible. The goal of the book is to point you in the right direction. This is more of a beginner's guide because there are a lot of things I could say, or would like to say, but can't. I'm going to introduce you to some big topics—to sketch the outline of biblical truth in broad strokes. I will begin with a bit of an overview, then model for you how to get started in the right way.

Facing the Right Direction

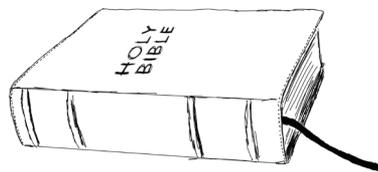
Just like that hungry fish looking for a meal upstream, it's important to know which way to look when we think about God. It's been said there are three good starting places for making sense of God. First, there is **human reason**. God made you in his image as a thinking being. You have a brain. When it's working properly, it can direct you to truth. In fact, one of my favorite definitions of faith is “well-reasoned trust.” Our brains are tools we can use in our understanding of God.

Though reason can play an important role in our relationship with God, it can only take us so far. We can have good reasons to believe in God. But true faith follows our reason where it leads but then goes beyond where it's able to

take us. Reason goes a certain distance in explaining God, but there's so much mystery to who God is, we can't expect reason to bring us all the way. As we mentioned earlier, we have to take the next step beyond where our reason can take us. That's faith.

The second source for thinking about God is church history or what we might call **tradition**. British author G. K. Chesterton said that tradition is "the democracy of the dead."³ By looking at how Christians over the centuries have thought about the issues, we're giving past believers a vote in how we think about God. We're letting them teach us. This is important, and we'll cover a good deal of it in each chapter.

The truth is, however, that even the best thinkers of the past were still only human. Though they lived long ago and didn't face the same contemporary challenges we do today, they still could get things wrong. They were as susceptible to sketchy views as we are. Nonetheless, we need to give them a voice. We need to let their lives and writings teach us, learning from both their positive and even negative examples. We would be fools not to.



The third source is **Scripture**. Of these three sources, I'm going to make a case throughout the book that the correct starting point is the Bible. Though reason and tradition are important and helpful, they are not supreme. Scripture is the direction in which we need to look. The stream of orthodoxy flows straight from Scripture through our reason and tradition. The best way to avoid sketchy views of God is to begin with the Bible and return to it often.

An Impossible Task?

When we start with Scripture, and not our experiences in the world, we allow it to challenge our assumptions—to interpret our perceptions. Instead of letting our lives define what God must be like, we let God determine what our lives should be like.

Now, there's a problem with what I'm proposing, and some of you may have already thought of it: removing all your experiences is impossible. We're not blank slates. No one approaches the Bible from nowhere. We're all looking toward Scripture from a particular place in time and space.

Authors Randolph Richards and Brandon O' Brien illustrate this challenge in their book *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*. They helpfully remind us how we all “tend to read Scripture in our own *when* and *where*, in a way that makes sense on our terms.”⁴ As they point out, much of what shapes our reading of the Bible is below the surface, things we haven't fully explored, much like the tip of an iceberg.

We all have baggage, and we all bring it to the Bible. This could be something we've been taught or a belief we've formed on our own that doesn't square well with Scripture. If we're not careful, we'll come to the place where we mute, ignore, or deny the parts of the Bible that challenge and don't fit with what we want to be true. Our obstinance in refusing to let the Bible confront and change our views is baggage.

There's baggage we're aware of and baggage we've never really thought about before—what we might call *unexamined* baggage. First, we need to think about our baggage, those assumptions we bring to the Bible. Then we want to examine it in light of the Bible, just like a TSA agent would do with a suspicious suitcase at the airport. Our goal is to

have as little unexamined baggage as possible—to be fully aware of things that might keep us from seeing Scripture in all its splendor.

Those who think they are the least affected by this are probably the most blind to their own baggage. So our first step is to hold our baggage lightly. If the Bible challenges our previously formed beliefs or assumptions, we should loosen our grip on those. What will we choose—our baggage or the Bible?

I once had a student who didn't believe in the Trinity. She told me my class was challenging her assumptions and making her go back to Scripture to really figure out what she believes about God. That's a good example of letting the Bible be the authority and holding onto our assumptions loosely.

This is hard work. It's not easy. But it's not as impossible as it might sound.

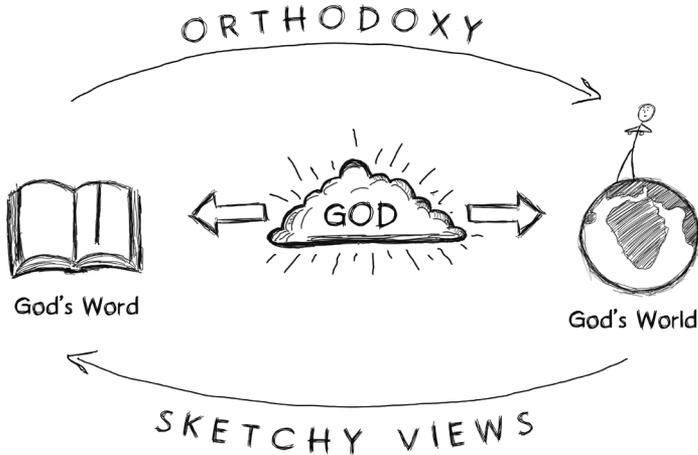
While we can never fully remove ourselves from our experiences or circumstances, it's possible to be challenged and shaped by the Bible. It will take time. It will take thought. It will take work. But it's worth it. Remember, how you respond to the question of what you think about God is one of the most important things about you.

If you want to develop a biblical way of seeing the world, what we call a biblical worldview, then you need to read the Bible. A lot. The more you immerse yourself in the world of the Bible, in the glorious story of God's saving grace, the more you'll look at the world and your place in it from God's perspective. That's what it means to have a biblical worldview, to see the world through the lens of what God has revealed about himself.

The apostle Paul explains the path to not being conformed to the world is by being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:1–2). Instead of conforming

the Bible to ourselves, he says we should conform our lives to it. We should let it transform the way we think about God, ourselves, and this world we live in. The Bible describes someone who has experienced a life-changing encounter with Jesus as a new creation. That means God is rewriting the believer's life story. But in our desire to do our own thing, we often try to take the pencil back. We want to have the final say. And that's when we start sketching out what we think God should look like. This is where we start going wrong and develop sketchy views.

Our minds are renewed by being saturated in what God has revealed about himself, our world, and our lives. What he said sets our agenda; it frames our beliefs. C. S. Lewis said something really important that we will return to throughout the book: "Christians believe God himself has told us how to speak of him."⁵ Orthodoxy begins with letting God frame our thoughts of how we speak of him. We can properly see who we are only in relationship to a proper understanding of who he is. To put it another way, we can only see ourselves in his light.



The Mind of God and the Mainstream

When I was a junior in high school, I remember flipping through the famous book *A Brief History of Time*, written by the atheistic scientist Stephen Hawking. I later learned it was described as “the world’s least-read bestseller,” which means a lot of people bought it, but few read it.

Given its author didn’t believe in God, the book ends with a startling quote. Hawking describes his desire to find a scientific theory of the world that can make sense of everything. He says when we discover such a theory, we will know the mind of God.⁶ What! Since Hawking didn’t believe in God, he obviously wasn’t describing some sort of spiritual experience. He meant something like, if we discover a “theory of everything” we’ll have solved the mystery of the universe. In other words, we don’t need God. We can figure this out ourselves.

I had been a Christian for a little over a year when I read those words. Deep down I knew they were off base. Even then I realized that if we are to know the mind of God, it wouldn’t be because we are clever or good. God would have to reveal his mind to us. Our starting point wouldn’t be our experience in the world, or even a theory of the entire world. Our starting point would have to be God telling us something about himself. That’s precisely what God has done in the Bible. That’s where we have to begin. That’s where we begin and end. That’s where we look.

Sketching Essential Truths

If you’ve ever kayaked on a stream or gone whitewater rafting with a group, you know there are many tributaries branching off the main body of water. These are always fun to explore. As a fisherman, I rarely pass up an opportunity

to get out of the current and see what might be lurking in these distributaries.

When it comes to theology, some truths are main-stream. Then there are some doctrines off the main current like distributaries. We really don't want to leave any terrain uncharted or unexplored, because all the truth in the Bible is from God and intended for our good. Yet there are some doctrines of greater significance when it comes to understanding, ignoring, or rejecting them.

For example, what you believe about end times and Jesus's return is not as important as what you believe about Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection. The view of end times is called *eschatology*, and the view of salvation is called *soteriology*. It's not that eschatology doesn't matter. It does. It just doesn't matter as much as what you believe about how a person is made right with God, or *soteriology*.

As an old theologian once said, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."⁷ In a quick sketch using broad strokes, I'm going to focus on the essential things about the Bible, God, and creation. There are a lot of tributaries we will leave unexamined. Orthodoxy has always been more about the main current, which is where we will spend most of our time.

Some may wish I'd said more on certain topics. Others will wish for less. My goal is not to be overly restrictive. There are areas where Christians will interpret the Bible differently. I firmly believe the stream of orthodoxy is broad enough for all sincere believers to dive into. That's not a baptism pun. Or maybe it is. I am Baptist after all.

Even my poor attempt at humor illustrates my point. Orthodoxy is something all genuine Christians share in, regardless of their particular denomination or the name on their church sign. One of my dearest friends is Anglican. Another close friend is Lutheran. We differ from each other

in how we see and explain baptism. Yet I don't feel the need to cut them off, call them heretics, punch them in the nose, or refuse to be friends with them. Christianity is big enough for us to disagree about secondary issues and still get along and work together to advance the gospel.

In issues where I might differ in my theology from other Christians, I certainly want to be charitable. There are more than enough angry-spirited scuffles online between people who profess to be followers of Jesus. I don't want to add noise or heat to debates over nonessential issues. I'm going to resist the temptation to wade into those troubled waters as much as possible.

In this book, I want to survey the depths of three of the biggest areas of theology. We're going to explore God's revelation, the doctrine of God himself, and how we should understand the world we live in. There's a lot more to theology than these three areas, but this is a great place to start in organizing our beliefs about God.



C. S. Lewis used a different metaphor for what I'm talking about. He called his project *Mere Christianity*. He described his goal as seeking to lead people into the main hallway in the house of Christianity. This hallway was meant to illustrate those basic beliefs Christians of all times share in common, providing the basis of their unity. Lewis told his readers that the fireplaces and dining tables, the relationships, and the laughter, were all located in the different rooms of the house. He considered those rooms to be different churches or denominations. While he wanted to introduce readers to the hallway, his goal for them was, in time, to settle into a room. That would be my hope for you as well.

C. S. Lewis's point was not to get people to indefinitely linger in the hallway of *Mere Christianity*. He wanted them to read the Bible and figure out for themselves the room that best represented their specific beliefs. It's inevitable and even desirable for a Christian to move beyond mere Christianity, beyond the fundamental elements of Christian doctrine. Yet, while you will believe more than the basic truths of the Christian faith, you certainly must never believe less. That's the nature of orthodoxy.

A Method for the Mystery

In formulating our theology, it's helpful to have a basic method to think through our thoughts about God. A lot more can go into our approach to theology, but the following five points will shape the way we talk about the content in the chapters that follow:⁸

1. *Always keep the big picture in mind.* The Bible is about a gracious God, who is sacrificially providing a way for rebels like us to dwell in his presence. There

are many other fascinating things in the Bible, but every word on every page is pointing to what God is doing through Christ. Never lose sight of the theme of God's plan of redemption through Christ as you organize your thoughts about God.

2. *Interpret the less-clear parts in light of the more-clear parts.* Survey all that Scripture says about a particular doctrine you study. That's a lot of work, but it's part of allowing the Bible to form our views about God. Along the way, you'll find passages you won't know what to do with. That's normal. Always retreat to what's clear and work your way out from there. Don't let something unclear keep you from progress. Sometimes it's OK to even set a difficult passage aside for a time. You can return to it later after praying for discernment and seeking counsel from those you respect.
3. *Mind the boundaries.* Where there is mystery, let Scripture speak for itself without trying to force a resolution that doesn't fit. Be mindful of the boundaries in Scripture so you're not always tripping over them. Let them serve as guideposts instead of trip wires. They are like a frame around a beautiful painting, intended to keep your eyes focused on what matters most. Throughout this book we will talk about these boundaries as the banks on either side of the river of orthodoxy.
4. *Don't travel alone.* When it comes to organizing our thoughts about God, we'll always need help. We stand on the shoulders of spiritual heroes, women and men of faith, who have thought deeply about the very questions we're asking. Don't neglect the resources of faithful thinkers, dead or alive, who can keep you from forming sketchy views of God.

5. *Enjoy the ride.* The study of God is intended to bring joy. The goal of orthodoxy is praise. Don't just study to learn facts but to know God better and serve him more faithfully. Prayerfully study God's Word so you can apply it, so that you might be both a hearer and a doer of the Word (James 1:22–25).

Orthodoxy provides guardrails around the glorious beauty of the Christian faith. The banks of the stream help us see the boundaries of the mystery. The waters of orthodoxy flow in a particular direction, from the source of Scripture to our lived-out experience in the world. On your own, you can investigate detours down the distributaries, but in this book we will aim to flow with the current.

Between the Banks

Since we're talking about orthodoxy like a stream, I'll continue this metaphor throughout the book by also talking about the banks on each side of the water. The shores on either side provide boundaries for how we think about issues that might seem difficult or even impossible for us to fully understand. While there are a lot of things we will have to accept as a mystery too great for words, there are contours to these unfathomable truths.

These boundaries frame how we should talk about God. Based on what he's revealed to us, these riverbanks mark out what we can and can't say about God. In each section I will discuss what I think best frames how we think about orthodoxy related to God's word, God, and God's world.

Sometimes theologians will use the word *paradox* to describe the tension between certain truths in the Bible. A paradox results when two truths are difficult to make sense of when placed side by side. One example in Scripture is that

God is in control of everything, yet humans make real decisions for which they are responsible. When you put these truths side by side, they seem to conflict with one another. That tension is what I mean when I use the word *paradox*.

I think a lot of sketchy views of God are the result of being uncomfortable with this kind of tension. Paradox can be an awkward thing to live with. We want to understand everything completely. Some seek a solution by simply ignoring the conflict. Others try to force a resolution. Throughout this book, I'm going to encourage you to embrace paradox.

When we encounter truths that seem difficult to reconcile, think of them as the banks on either side of the stream of orthodoxy. Quite often these gigantic truths set the boundaries for the mystery of God. For example, one of the biggest paradoxes is that God is three in one. Can you fit that into that cranium of yours?

With the Trinity example, one bank represents that there is only one God, and the other bank that God exists as three persons. Can our finite minds fully fathom that mystery? No. But the stream of orthodoxy flows between those boundaries. Don't ignore it or try to force a resolution. Behold its beauty!

When I was a kid my parents would take our family hiking every fall on trails high above the banks of the Missouri River in Southern Illinois. We could look across the autumn landscape to where the mighty currents of the Missouri, Illinois, and Mississippi Rivers all converged. From a high vantage point, we could see the water snaking its way between Illinois and Missouri. I hope to give you a similar perspective when it comes to thinking about God, his word, and his world.

I invite you to look to the mouth of the river, the very source of our theology, God himself, as revealed in Scripture.

Behold the Creator who made everything and needs nothing. In light of all this, I hope you stand in awe and reflect on what it means to be alive in the world today, made in the very image of God! These beliefs are all bubbling, gurgling, and flowing forward in the stream of orthodoxy.

For full disclosure, we're going to look at a lot of stuff in addition to Scripture. I love literature, philosophy, world-view studies, and of course, C. S. Lewis. I'll mix in a good bit of all those in the coming pages. I hope to illustrate what it looks like to wrestle with big ideas, while constantly coming back to the Bible as the lens through which we see everything else.

Questions to Consider

1. What direction are you facing when it comes to forming your theology?
2. What have you learned or been reminded of in this chapter that can help you better organize your thoughts about God?
3. What big truths in the Bible are essential for Christian faith?
4. What are some truths or doctrines about which Christians have liberty to disagree?
5. What are some ways you can be loving when you talk about your beliefs about God?