

³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!*

ENJOY YOUR EXPLORATION OF GOD'S WORD

I did some exploring of famous explorers and stumbled across the not-so-famous name of Ed Stafford. Ed Stafford is a British explorer who found his inspiration in Scottish explorer David Livingstone. With much of our world already discovered, Stafford set out to be the first person to explore all 4,345 miles of the Amazon River in the Amazon Rainforest. Stafford started this exploration April 2, 2008 and 860 days later completed this exploration on August 9, 2010. Stafford wrote a book about his experience and the Discovery Channel turned Stafford's self-filmed footage into a two-part television documentary.

I feel bad it took me a Rainforest Vacation Bible School to learn about this great exploration. It feels like I should have known about this effort. Maybe you feel that way too. I also felt bad about my own exploration. This summer my exploration team had a 3-day trip planned in Yosemite National Park. And day one was great. With the help of a tour guide and a motorized vehicle and cooling towels we had a great first day of exploration. And yet when our lodging accommodation couldn't resolve a water issue, we felt we had to pull the plug on our 3-day exploration. I think Ed Stafford would have completed this 3-day mission.

On a happier note, our Vacation Bible School students successfully completed our 5-day Rainforest Falls – exploring the nature of God - Vacation Bible School. And just like we can't explore all of God's creation, whether we take 3 days or 860 days to do it, so also we can't explore all of God's nature, whether we take a 5-day Vacation Bible School or all the days of the Apostle Paul's ministry. In the eleventh chapter of the Apostle Paul's great teaching letter to the Romans, Paul concludes with the words:

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I suppose the temptation that comes with any kind of exploration, whether the exploration of nature or the exploration of God's nature, is to cut our exploration short because we see everything anyway and we can't know everything either. And yet whether we are talking about Ed Stafford out in the deep nature of God's creation or the Apostle Paul in a deep study of God's Word, we see enjoyment in their exploration even though they can't figure everything out. This is because they found joy in what they were able to learn and with this joy they were eager to find out what they might learn next. And that's what our God and our congregation wants for our children during a VBS-week and that's what our God and our congregation wants for our families on this VBS Sunday. Enjoy your exploration of God's Word.

Our Genesis 1 reading only scratches the surface of the nature of God's goodness, but what a scratch this is! The entire universe was made out of nothing in 6 days by God's Word. What power! Greater light to govern the day. Lesser light to govern the night. What wisdom! And we are just scratching the surface. Explore creation a little more like Ed Stafford did and you learn our Milky Way galaxy has something like 100 billion stars in it and that our bodies contain over 37 trillion cells in it, each cell more complex than anything that can be made by man. How Great is our God! *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*

And, *"How unsearchable his judgments."* Explorers search. Explorers don't often know what they are looking for when they are searching. Explorers are always searching for something, but one thing an explorer will never find in all their searching are God's judgments. After creation, God gave Adam a calling and a commandment. Adam's calling was to care for God's creation and Adam's command was to not eat from a certain tree or Adam would die. Adam and Eve ate from that certain tree and true to His Word, Adam and

Eve died, but Adam and Eve also received a judgment they would have never thought to search for and that judgment was spoken to the serpent in their hearing, *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

Fast-forward to our Gospel reading and our children’s message today. Not a one of the women and not a one of the Apostles went to the tomb of Jesus looking for a living Jesus. They even had the words of the resurrection from Jesus himself, but what they judged as they saw Jesus’ death was so confirming they had forgotten what Jesus had said until they were reminded of God’s Word from the heavenly messengers. And later, who would have judged that the spread of the Gospel, the good news of Jesus and his saving work would have reached as far and as fast as it did because God allowed his disciples and apostles to be martyred like Stephen and James were. Our judgments are largely based on performance (Did you do good?) or satisfying expectations (is the customer satisfied? Or the boss pleased?) Our judgments are transactional. You scratch my back and I’ll scratch your back. You love me and I’ll love you. Only God’s judgment is based only on who He is! And God judges to love. And since this love is based on whom God is. His love is truly unconditional. The only reason our love can become like God’s love is after we learn of God’s love and ask God to help us to reflect his love in our prayers. And as we explore God’s love and God’s power we learn there is purpose to our pain, there are blessings to our burdens and there is life after death. What God ordains is always good. *“How unsearchable his judgments.”*

“And his paths beyond tracing out!” Explorers need maps. Once upon a time if your parents were rich you had a Rand McNally Road Atlas in the seat pocket of your car. For people with less resources, free folded maps could be stored in your glove box and after a single use those maps could never be properly folded again. I remember being able to print turn-by-turn directions from my computer and as long as you didn’t make a wrong turn, MapQuest was terrific. Now our electronic devices show us exactly where we are and they audibly tell us exactly where we need to go even if we make a wrong turn.

We can track our steps, but we cannot trace out the way to heaven without Jesus telling us the way. Jesus tells us of how the angels carried Lazarus to Abraham’s side after he died. And how the thief on the cross would be in paradise with Jesus on the same day when died. And because Jesus lives, we also will live.

We still don’t have all the details about God and his nature. We are still exploring creation. We are still growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. The separation of body and soul, the exact locations of heaven and hell and our day-to-day life in eternity are experiences we have yet to explore. And yet our exploration of God’s Word is enough to not only enjoy what we have explored and have come to learn from God’s Word, but to also enjoy what we might learn next time we gather around God’s Word and to enjoy what we still remains to be learned about that.

So let’s do this VBS exploring again, next year, Sunday worship next week, and tomorrow and every day after that either together or on our own let’s never tire in exploring the great things God has done. Amen.