

WHO
— IS —
GOD?



G R E G L A U R I E

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WHO IS GOD?

I have cared for you since you were born. Yes, I carried you before you were born. I will be your God throughout your lifetime—until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you.

To whom will you compare me? Who is my equal?

Remember the things that I have done in the past. For I alone am God! I am God, and there is none like me. Only I can tell you the future before it even happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish.
—Isaiah 46:3–5, 9–10 NLT

I have noticed that as I get older, and I am certainly getting older, more and more I am forgetting things. There have been times I have been looking for my reading glasses and I find they are on my head. That is kind of embarrassing. There are times I am looking for something that I have misplaced, and then forget what I am looking for while I am still looking for that thing.

Then there are other times when I forget where I've parked my car. I go into the parking structure and I can't remember what level I parked on. So I walk around with my little remote control, pressing the button, hoping the alarm will go off. And the sad thing is I see other people doing the same thing. So I guess I am not alone out there. The truth is, I need reminders. Sometimes I will jot little notes to myself. I will even tell someone, "Remind me that I need to do thus and so." Reminders are helpful.

We also have spiritual reminders. In church, we have Communion, where we are instructed to receive the elements—the bread and the cup—that remind us of the sacrifice of Jesus, as He said in Luke 22:19, "Do this in remembrance of me" (NIV).

Why do I need to be reminded? Because I forget things. And the Bible is a book that is filled with reminders. Not only that, it is a book that is filled with repetition. It tells us the same things over and over again. Why is that? Because we forget things.

What I have found is that I tend to remember what I should forget, and I forget what I should remember.

Why is my mind filled with trivia that I have no use for whatsoever? I can't get rid of it no matter how hard I try. I think to myself, did I consciously memorize the lyrics to stupid commercials and songs that I don't even like? Of course not. But, how is it that sometimes I cannot remember verses I have actually committed to memory? What I need to do is remind myself and refresh my memory repeatedly. In fact, Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:13, "I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body" (NIV).

In short, we need to think. And there is no more important area to think about than our faith. What we believe about God, because of what He says about Himself, is the most important thing we could focus on and think about. It has everything to do with how we live our lives. Your view of God will determine how you react to things that come your way.

So, who is God?

I admit that is a pretty complex question to consider in just a few pages. But I think sooner or later everyone gets around to asking that question and others, such as: Does God know everything? Does He have unlimited power? Is God a God of love or a God of wrath? Is He really interested in you and me? Hundreds of years ago, Pharaoh asked that question in Exodus 5:2, saying, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him?" (NIV).

And Zophar had it right when he said to Job, "Can you solve the mysteries of God? Can you discover everything about the Almighty? Such knowledge is higher than the heavens—and who are you?" (Job 11:7–8 NLT).

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can know many things about God. The truth is, the more we know about the nature and character of God, the better handle we will have on morality and principle, and the more we will love, worship, and obey Him. In this day of eroding morals and constantly changing values, these questions about the attributes and character of God are more important than ever.

To quote John 17:3 (NIV), "This is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." It was Paul himself

that said in Philippians 3:10, “[For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him” (AMP). And that should be our plan in life. That is what we are here to do. We are here to know, to worship, and to glorify the God who created us. Anything less than that is falling short of our purpose.

So where do we begin? I believe Psalm 139 is a great starting point to help us discover several essential things that we should know about God. Verses 1–12 say,

O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall fall on me,” even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You.

1. GOD IS EVERYWHERE (OMNIPRESENT)

Verses 7–8 of Psalm 139 describe this great quality of God. “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there.”

As Francis Thompson describes in his poem “The Hound of Heaven,” God is inescapable. No matter where you go, He is there. Jonah found this out when he tried to escape God’s command to announce judgment on the wicked nation of Nineveh. We read in Jonah 1 that he boarded a ship to Tarshish “to flee from the LORD” (verse 3 NIV). Content to believe he had successfully run from God’s command, Jonah was asleep when “the LORD hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart” (verse 4 NLT). Soon after, Jonah was tossed overboard and “the LORD had arranged for a great fish

to swallow Jonah” (verse 17 NLT). God put Jonah inside of the great fish, which He had prepared to get Jonah back in line. Jonah thought he could escape from God, but God was waiting for him. There is no escaping God.

In Isaiah 43:2, God says, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze” (NIV).

Of course, this is clearly illustrated in the story of the three Hebrew teenagers Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as recorded in the book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, gave a decree that everyone should fall down and worship a gold image. And being good Jewish boys who did not want to break the commandments of God, they refused to bow down to the image. While everybody else in the kingdom lay prostrate before the image, there stood these three rebellious teenagers. So they were cast into a furnace of fire that was so hot, the men who took them to the mouth of it were overwhelmed by the flames and died. Then the king made an interesting observation. He said, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? . . . I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (Daniel 3:24–25). The Son of God was walking with His boys in the fire—untouched by the flames, as if it were a Sunday stroll in the park.

When you walk through your fiery trials, when you go through your times of difficulty, when you have to weather life’s storms, He is there. And whenever God lets His children go through a fiery trial, He always keeps one eye on them and one eye on the thermostat. He will not give us more than we can handle. He is there with us.

David points out three things about the omnipresence of God. First, death does not hide us from God. He says in verse 8 of Psalm 139, “If I ascend into heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.” Some people become frustrated with life and they decide to check out early through suicide. But death will not end your problems. I read a story in a magazine once about two very young teenagers who took their lives. The press falsely spun this as a modern Romeo and Juliet tale. But it’s a tragic end to two lives. Death will not hide you from

God. Suicide doesn't solve problems. It simply hurls a person immediately into eternity, into the presence of God Almighty, with all of their problems unresolved, and with their loved ones grieving, left behind, and often blaming themselves. God is present everywhere—on both sides of the grave.

Second, distance does not separate us from God. Do you remember when the Russians put their first man in orbit? They came back and proudly announced they had been in outer space and had not seen God; therefore, He did not exist. What foolishness. He was there, just as He is here. No matter where you go, He is there. If you are way up high, He is there. If you are down in the depths of the ocean, He is there with you. (That's comforting for all scuba divers to know.) "Even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me" (verse 10).

And third, darkness does not separate us from God. He says, "Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You" (verse 12). I have a friend that has a pair of night-vision binoculars. They are very expensive. The military uses this type of equipment. They attach them to their helmets and at night they can see everything that is going on. My friend took me out in his backyard. It was pitch dark that night. There was no moon out. You could hear all of the sounds of the animals—the hoots, the barks, and other sounds of the night. When I looked through these binoculars, it looked as if it were 12 noon. I could see everything. I could see the owl up in the tree. I saw a raccoon walking along. It's amazing.

We tend to think that darkness covers things and God doesn't see us, but darkness is like daytime to Him. It's like 12 noon. He sees everything.

2. GOD IS ALL-KNOWING (OMNISCIENT)

God also knows everything. There is not one single thing that happens on this planet that escapes the knowledge of God. Proverbs 5:21 says, "For your ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all your paths" (NIV). In Romans 11:33–34, Paul says, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" (NIV).

He not only knows what is going on with the people He created in His image, but He knows what is going on in the animal kingdom. Jesus said in Matthew 10:29 (NIV), “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care.” God knows about every little sparrow that has been shot down by a brand new Daisy BB gun that a kid got for Christmas. God is aware of all of these details.

Psalms 147:4 says, “He counts the stars and calls them all by name” (NLT). Think about that. In this massive universe that we live in, God knows the name of every single star out there. But in addition to that, He knows what is going on in this little planet called Earth. He is vitally aware of what is happening in every individual life. He is interested in us as individuals. Proverbs 15:3 says, “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” Really, when you stop and think about it, how could He reward and punish otherwise? He is aware of everything that is happening.

I don’t know how this concept of God’s omniscience strikes you. Realizing that God knows everything about everyone, including you, can be either frightening or encouraging depending on your relationship with God or lack thereof. If your life is right with God and you are walking with Him, to know that God is aware of what is going on in your existence is a comforting thought. We don’t want to be forgotten. We want to be loved. We want to be appreciated. We want to be remembered. We don’t want to be another face in this massive human sea of billions of people. So it’s comforting to know that God cares about us, that He knows about us.

If you are a child of God, it encourages you to know, as Jesus said, “The very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Luke 12:7). But if your life is not right with God, if you are doing things you should not be doing, it could be rather terrifying to think that nothing escapes His attention. I like the words of the psalmist in Psalm 56:8 when he says, “You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?” God knows every time you have shed tears because of the sorrow that you felt. Maybe someone made fun of you. Maybe you were left out. Maybe you were misunderstood. Maybe someone lied about you. Or you were hurt by someone you loved. God is aware of that. He keeps your tears in a bottle. He cares about you. And though it may be insignificant to someone else, who might say to you, “Why are you getting all worked

up over that? You're fine. That's no big deal," it is a big deal to you. God knows, and He cares.

And because God is all-knowing, it is not hard for Him to speak of the future. God can speak of the future and predict what will happen with as much accuracy as we can speak of the past.

Would you think I was a prophet of God if we went out to breakfast together and at noon I boldly said, "I know what you had for breakfast. It has been revealed to me." You'd say, "Greg, calm down. What are you doing? You were with me."

"But I know what you had. You had a cheese omelet with mushrooms, hash browns, and toast." You would say, "So what? You were there."

God can speak of the future with as much accuracy as the past—even more so because, as I said in the beginning, sometimes we forget things. But God has perfect knowledge of all things.

People so desperately want to know what is happening in their future. They call psychic hotlines. I saw an ad one day that said, "Are you tired of those psychics on television? Well, call us because we are *certified* psychics." Who certifies these people? Once, the singer Dionne Warwick was telling people to call the psychic and I thought, "Why should I let Dionne Warwick tell me what is going to happen in my future? She doesn't even know the way to San Jose!"

When God speaks of the future and He tells us of the events that are going to unfold in human history, He knows what He is talking about—because He can see into eternity. In fact, in Isaiah 46:9–10, God says, "Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.'"

That is interesting. God says He knows the *end from the beginning*. The arrangement of those words is striking because it's the exact opposite of the way man knows history. We are limited by time and space. We learn about things as they unfold in time—from the beginning to the end. But God says, "I know the end from the beginning. I know what is going to

happen already,” because He is eternal. He is infinite. He is perfect. He is timeless. Therefore, when He tells us that certain things are going to happen, we can take it to the bank. And when we read Bible prophecy, we can be sure that these things will take place just as He has said.

Not only does God know about the universe. Not only does He know about every little bird that falls to the ground. Not only does He know every thought that you think, but also He searches us and He knows us, as the psalmist says. He knows the intimate details of our lives. The word that David uses for *search* in Psalm 139:1, where he says, “You have searched me,” literally means to pierce through. We sometimes speak of seeing through a person. In God’s case this is always true. On more than one occasion in the Gospels this was a source of particular irritation for people who were around Jesus, because He could read their minds.

There was that occasion in Luke 5 when the poor crippled man was brought to Jesus by his friends. Jesus was speaking in a house. Suddenly, the thatching on the roof began to open up and clods of dirt fell down to the ground, and a hole was pulled open. This man was dropped down slowly. As the ropes suspended him there in front of the Savior, Jesus looked at him and said, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” Then He spun around to the Pharisees and essentially said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? I know what you guys are thinking.” They were thinking, “How can He say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’? For who can forgive sins but God alone?” How did Jesus know that? He read their minds.

He read the minds of the accusers of the woman caught in adultery, He read the minds of His disciples, and He reads our minds. He knows what we are thinking. He searches all our ways, the psalmist tells us. He knows when I get up in the morning. He knows what I eat for breakfast. He knows what route I take to work or to school. He knows when I go back home. He knows what time I arrive. He knows what words I say as well.

It has been said that the average person speaks enough words in a given day to fill a good-sized volume. And in the course of a lifetime they speak enough words to fill enough books to fill a college library. It would be interesting to read what some of us have said.

We must remember that God is the unseen Listener to every conversation. When you pick up that phone, He is listening. He is the unseen Guest at every table. There He is, taking it all in, aware of everything that is being said. And He has told us that every idle word a man speaks he will give an account of on the Day of Judgment.

3. GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL (OMNIPOTENT) AND SOVEREIGN

Now, we have all heard the question, “Can God do absolutely anything He wants?” And the second question assumes that the first was answered in the affirmative and will go along the lines of, “Well, if God can do anything, can He do something that is un-godlike?” I hate questions like this. They are so idiotic. “Can God make something more powerful than Himself?” Or, the great classic, “Can God make a rock so heavy He cannot lift it?” “How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?” Do you really think these things, or do you just dream them up to be obnoxious? These silly questions are somehow supposed to stump us.

Yes, God is all-powerful, but the short answer to those questions is no. To say that God is all-powerful is not to say that He can do something sinful, or something which is against His nature. Scripture says, “God cannot deny Himself.” In other words, God cannot lie or do anything that is inconsistent with His divine nature. Omnipotence means God has infinite power that can never be depleted, drained, or exhausted. But He is perfect in every way. So we have to balance these things together.

God can do all things. Nothing is too hard for Him. No problem is so large that He cannot deal with it. And, if it is His will, He is able to eliminate the problem altogether (see Job 42:2; Genesis 18:14).

A. B. Simpson said, “There is no difficulty too intricate for Him to unravel. There is no little detail of life too petty for Him to take an interest in. There is no toil too tedious for Him to go through with us. There is no tangle too involved for Him to unthread and loose. There is no complication of difficult circumstance too extreme for Him to be willing to take hold of and lead us gently out into the light.”¹

God is also sovereign. That means God is able to do what He pleases with whomever He chooses wherever He wishes. Psalm 115:3 says, “God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.” He is the Master. We are the servants. He is the Potter. We are the clay. He is the Vine. We are the branches. He is the Giver. We are the recipients.

God is sovereign and, without asking permission or explaining His reasons, He can do what He wants when He wants in any way that He wants. We need to know that about God. Psalm 135:5–6 says, “I know that the LORD is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods. The LORD does whatever pleases him” (NIV). Even the pagan king Darius acknowledged in Daniel 4:35 (NLT), “All the people of the earth are nothing compared to him. He does as he pleases among the angels of heaven and among the people of the earth. No one can stop him or say to him, ‘What do you mean by doing these things?’”

4. GOD IS THE ONLY TRUE GOD

God’s knowledge and words are true and are the final standards of truth. That means God, and God alone, is the true God.

A lot of people make statements like, “I don’t believe in a God of judgment,” or, “My God would never do thus and so,” or, “The God I follow is not like that.” All I would say is, take a good look in the mirror because that is your god. It is you. You have become your own god when you think and speak that way. There are iPods and iPhones. Why not iGod? God on demand. God as I want Him to be. God as I have fashioned Him—in my own image.

Romans 1:21 says, “Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools” (NLT). Jeremiah 10:10 says, “The LORD is the only true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King” (NLT). And as Jesus said in John 17:3, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (NIV). God is the only true God.

Now, I know that we live in a time where it is politically incorrect to say that God is the only true God. You might say, “Well, you know there are other gods that are true as well. And you know, all roads lead to God and everybody has their own ways that are valid.” No! God says that is not true at all.

Let me make a bold statement: God is the only true God, the Bible is the only true Scripture, and our faith is the only true faith. And every other belief system is wrong.

“Oh, you can’t say that!” Well, I just said it. And I don’t say it in a mean way. I say it with compassion. I want to reach out to people who don’t know the truth and tell them the truth. I didn’t always know the truth. There was a day when I came to realize what was right and I came to believe, just as you perhaps did. But I didn’t just know these things. I learned them from studying the Word of God. My point is simply this: if God’s Word is true, then He is the one true God, and there is no other god.

How do we know He is the true God? What is the final court of arbitration? Is it our feelings or emotions? If I decide He is the true God, does that make Him the true God? Or maybe if we vote on it and a majority of us agree that He is the true God, does that make Him the true God? On the other hand, if a majority of people don’t agree with it, does that not make Him the true God? How is it determined? We say things like, “I believe God is loving but not wrathful. I cannot look at those two attributes together. Either God is wrathful or God is loving. He can’t be both.” Or we will say, “I think God is right about this in Scripture, but I think He is wrong about that.”

I just want you to know, right from the outset, that we are flawed in our understanding and in our ability to know: what right and wrong are, when something is true or false, what is evil, what is impure, and what is good or virtuous. In fact, Romans 9:20 says, “Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (NLT).

It’s sort of an absurd picture that is painted here. It’s the idea of a potter, maybe working at a wheel, forming a piece of clay into what he wants it to be. And suddenly the clay says, “I don’t want to be what you are

making me into.” It’s ridiculous. The thing that is formed cannot say to the one who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?”

You see, God’s knowledge is perfect. It is without flaw. And He is the final standard of truth. There is no other. Remember when you were a kid and you would ask your parents, “Can I do this?” They would say no. You’d argue, “But the other kids are doing it,” and they’d say, “Well, you aren’t the other kids.”

Still you would push, “But why can’t I do this?” And your parents would give that great parental answer, “Because I said so!” And then you just had to live with that, right? Your parents gave the edict *because they said so*.

Now magnify that many times and it is essentially what God says. Why is God true? Because He said He is. And if I don’t think He is true, then I am wrong because I am flawed in my ability to grasp the infinite with a finite mind. There are no second opinions. God is the only true God. Now, we may not always understand what God means when He says certain things. We may not always understand why He does or does not do certain things. But the bottom line is, God is true.

5. GOD IS HOLY

If there is one truth repeated again and again in Scripture, it is this great message of the holiness of God. In fact, we see this demonstrated in Isaiah 6:1–5:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”

Here is God in His glory and the angels are exalting Him and they are speaking of His holiness. Notice that the passage does not say that the angels said, “Faithful, faithful, faithful.” Or, “Eternal, eternal, eternal.” Or, “Mighty, mighty, mighty.” Although God is all of those things and more, it is important to note the aspect that is emphasized: God is holy.

So, to approach God I must be holy. Psalm 24:3–4 says, “Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully” (ESV). Because God is holy, He hates sin. Proverbs 15:9 says, “The LORD detests the way of the wicked, but he loves those who pursue godliness” (NLT). Habakkuk 1:13 says of God, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing” (NIV).

That is why the death of Jesus Christ was necessary—because God is holy, and man in his best attempts cannot bridge the gap that separates us from God. We may try to be virtuous. We may try to be charitable. We may try to be religious. We may try to be moral. But we fall miserably short of the standards of a flawless, perfect, and holy God—the God who said, “Be perfect as I am perfect.” We realize we can’t do it. Therefore, God reached out to us and sent His Son to walk this earth and to die on the cross.

In Matthew 27:46, when Jesus hung there on the cross and cried out the words, “Eli, Eli lama sabachthani,” which means, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me,” it is believed by many that it was the moment when the holy God put the sin of the world upon His Son. God essentially turned His eyes away because His eyes are too pure to behold evil, and all of the sin and corruption of this world fell upon Jesus.

You might say that Jesus was forsaken so that we might be forgiven. Jesus entered the darkness for a time that we might live in the light forever. There was no other way to settle the sin issue except through our holy Savior dying on the cross for us.

6. GOD IS RIGHTEOUS

The Bible also teaches that God is righteous. Holiness would describe His character, while righteousness would describe how He deals with mankind. Psalm 11:7 says, “For the LORD is righteous, he loves justice; the upright will see his face” (NIV).

In the book of Exodus, there is the story of Pharaoh, who rebelled against God. He hardened his heart by holding on to the children of Israel when the Lord had instructed him to release them. Finally, a series of plagues came to Egypt and the Pharaoh eventually released the Israelites and gave this statement: “I have sinned this time. The LORD is righteous, and my people and I are wicked” (Exodus 9:27).

Now, some people don’t like the righteousness of God. They don’t agree with certain things that He does. They say, “Why do You do that? Why do You do this other thing? I don’t think that’s right.” It reminds me of a conversation that Job had with God. He was essentially accusing God of being unjust and unrighteous. And he said those kinds of things to the Lord. Here was God’s response to him: “Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? . . . Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?” (Job 40:2, 8 ESV).

God answers not in terms of explanation that would allow Job to understand His actions. Rather, He gives a statement of His own majesty and power and righteousness. He said to Job, “Do you have an arm like God’s, and can your voice thunder like his?” (Job 40:9 NIV). “Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place?” (Job 38:12). “Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that an abundance of water may cover you? Can you send out lightnings, that they may go, and say to you, ‘Here we are!’?” (Job 38:34–35). “Does the hawk fly by your wisdom, and spread its wings toward the south?” (Job 39:26).

In other words, “Did you do all this, Job? Are you an expert? Did I miss something?” Job then comes to his senses. In a reaction similar to Isaiah’s when he saw the holiness of God, Job says meekly to the Lord, “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further” (Job 40:4–5 ESV).

Who are you, and who am I, to analyze or criticize God? Who are we to say, “This is good about God and that’s bad,” or “I accept this and I don’t accept that”? God is the source of truth and righteousness. God is the one who makes these determinations—not us.

It’s important that we understand that the attributes of God complement one another. I mentioned before how God is omnipotent, that He is all-powerful. But if He were all-powerful without being righteous, He would be a celestial tyrant—doing whatever He wanted wherever He wanted to do it. On the other hand, if He were righteous but without power, He would be unable to execute justice on this earth.

The good news is that God is all-powerful *and* God is righteous. He can do whatever He wants, but He does the right thing in every situation. So we ought to thank God for that. As the Scripture says, “All His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4 NIV).

7. GOD IS JUST

The attribute of being just is closely related to His holiness and righteousness. Because He is just, He has wrath and anger. Some people have a hard time with this. “How can God be loving and wrathful?” Is it really that hard to figure out? If God loves what is good, then He hates what is evil. And if He is just, there has to be a penalty for breaking His laws.

Don’t think of God’s anger like your anger or my anger. God is righteously angry, righteously indignant. My anger is not usually very righteous. Once in a while, I will sometimes think it is very righteous and then afterwards I will realize it wasn’t at all. Certain things push my buttons. I’m tolerant in certain areas, but other things really get me. Most of those things happen on the freeway. I don’t know why that is. I just get really angry.

But God doesn’t fly off the handle. God doesn’t lose His temper. Wouldn’t that be frightening—if God were in a bad mood? But that’s not God’s anger. Instead it’s a righteous indignation.

Certainly, throughout the Old Testament, we see God's anger—His wrath—demonstrated. On more than one occasion, He was angry with the children of Israel. Moses was angry with them too and said, essentially, "Lord, I'm sick of these people. Why don't you just wipe them all out and you and I will just work this thing out?" Then, on one occasion in the book of Exodus, God said, "I am going to judge these people. They are stiff-necked. Now leave Me alone that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." But at this point, Moses had changed and had become more like what God wanted him to be, and he pleaded for the people. "Lord, don't judge them. Spare them." And God was waiting for Moses to do that—because He wanted him to act as a mediator (see Exodus 32:9–14).

There were times when God executed His judgment clearly, but of course He never did it quickly. It was always tempered with patience. It was always tempered with longsuffering. It was always tempered with grace. God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. And the Scriptures say that God takes no delight in the death of the wicked (see Ezekiel 33:11). God doesn't want to judge us, but He is bound to be just, because of His Word.

Now of course this brings up the question, "How could a God of love send someone to Hell?" Consider this to start with: Hell was not created for people. God did not say, "OK. Heaven is for good people. Hell is for bad people." The fact of the matter is that we are all bad people. We are all bad because we have all broken His commandments. Instead, He says, "Heaven is for the people I love, and who love Me. People that want to join Me. People that want to change. I have prepared it for them." But He is not going to force you into Heaven.

The Bible says Hell was created for the devil and his demons. God says, "I am just. I am righteous. I am holy. Therefore, there must be a penalty for sin. And I say the soul that sins shall die. I say the wages of sin are death. But because I love you, I am sending My Son to die on the cross to cover the cost of your sins. He makes it possible for you to be pardoned of everything you have done. And if you will just put your trust in Him and follow Him, then you can join Me in Heaven."

Now if you flatly refuse and say, "Well, that's too bad. I don't want to believe in Him. I will live the way that I want to live. Forget You," then

who is sending whom to Hell? You are essentially sending yourself to Hell. And you're sending yourself there because you have rejected His gracious provision.

As C. S. Lewis said, “The gates of hell are locked from the inside.” That simply means that in that final day the people who end up in Hell are there because they chose to be there. They made the decision.

Now, are you going to get mad at God for that? No. You should take responsibility. It would be like a person saying, “I don't like the law of gravity. I don't think it's fair and just.”

7. GOD IS LOVE

The Bible tells us that God is love—not merely that He has love or even that He loves, but that He Himself *is* love. He is not the shallow Hollywood version of love. What do these people in Hollywood know about love? “So-and-so is hooking up with so-and-so. They are the beautiful couple, or they are the power couple, etc.” And yet, they can't keep a relationship together for longer than twelve minutes. Why would we look to Hollywood?

Our culture today promotes a limited love that says, “I will love you if you will reciprocate. I will love you if you love me back.” Or, “I will love you until someone more lovely or lovable comes along, and then I will transfer my love to them.” That's not the love of God!

When you look at the love that God has for us, you see it is not fickle. It is not dependent on how attractive we are or even how well we perform. His love is unchanging. It's consistent. It's inexhaustible. He loves you no matter what. His love is unending. God says in Jeremiah 31:3, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.”

Consider the differences between human love and God's love:

- Our world loves you when you are young and beautiful; God loves you when you are old and not so attractive.

- Our world loves you when you are famous and a celebrity; God loves you when you are unknown and a complete nobody.
- Our world loves you when you are rich and powerful; God loves you when you are penniless and weak.
- Our world loves the extraordinary. God loves the ordinary—people like you and me.

And God has demonstrated this love for us in a tangible way. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). It wasn’t nails that held Jesus to that cross 2,000 years ago. It was His love for you, because God loves you. Maybe the people in your life have not loved you. I want you to know that God loves you. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The Bible says, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

You say, “But how could God be loving and hate something?” What do you think love is—just some mushy generic thing? “I love everyone and everything.” Imagine your little toddler is playing in the backyard. “Oh, I love my little toddler.” That’s good. And then let’s say a wolf comes over the fence. “Oh, I love the wolf. The wolf is our friend.” No, he’s not. He is your enemy because he is the enemy of your child. So I love my child with a perfect love, and I hate the predator of my child with a perfect hatred. Out of love for my child, I want to stop anything that would bring harm to him or her. God loves you. And He hates that which would harm you—that which would destroy you.

In His holiness, He is unapproachable. But in His love, He approaches us. God is holy, and God is love.

9. OUR RESPONSE TO GOD

We have to acknowledge that we are not going to understand everything about God. This book is titled *Who Is God?* but it is impossible to completely know and understand Him. Yet, having said that, God has revealed many things about Himself to us, and I want to emphasize how important it is that we don’t pick God apart, or edit Him, or try to make Him politically

correct. It's a package deal. We can't stroll up to the celestial salad bar and choose only the attributes of God that we like best. "I'll take love and mercy, but I don't want any justice or righteousness today." It doesn't work that way.

All of the attributes of God beautifully complement one another and blend together to give us an astounding and incredible picture of who God is.

So, how should we react to this God who is ever-present, all-knowing, all-powerful, sovereign, true, holy, righteous, just, loving, and much more—including faithful friend, provider, giver of good gifts, protector, our light, hope, strength, our comforter, and our biggest fan?

- As God's children we are supposed to reflect our heavenly Father. We are to echo His character (see 1 John 2:6).
- We must be truthful. Like God, we should love truth and hate falsehood (see Proverbs 12:22; Isaiah 59:2-4; 3 John 1:3).
- We should seek to be holy. To live a holy life is to be wholly committed to God (see 1 Peter 1:15).
- We should be righteous. We should love all that draws us closer to Him and hate all that drives us away (James 5:16).
- We should be good, just, and loving. As children of God, His love must show itself through us (see John 15:4).

Our God is great and greatly to be praised (see Psalm 145:3). We do not need to be afraid of Him. He is powerful and worthy of our respect, but our reverence should not be that of cowering in terror. Instead, it should inspire a love so strong that we will do all we can to keep from displeasing Him. Christians should be driven by their love for God to discard and avoid anything that will hurt their relationship with Him.

Of course, there are a few things that we can't emulate. For instance, God is everywhere. He is all-knowing. He is all-powerful. Those are things we can't be. But, by mirroring those traits that we are able to imitate, we will bring God joy. And it will give us fulfillment as well.

You say, "Well, Greg, that's hard." I know it's hard. Remember, I am the person that gets mad on the freeway. I cannot do it on my own. I admit that I need help. And, that is the first step in seeking to live a godly life—realizing that we don't measure up. We realize that we fall short.

The godliest people I know are among the most humble. I have had the opportunity to meet some real men and women of God and spend time with them. They are not arrogant. They are not cocky. They are not proud. They would be the first to admit their own shortcomings and flaws and sins. And that, to me, is a mark of true spirituality. Not someone with their nose in the air looking down at the rest of humanity, but someone who would say, “I really don’t measure up.”

Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). So first, I recognize my weakness. I say, “Lord, I can’t be holy. I can’t be righteous. I can’t be as truthful as You want me to be.” Second, I recognize God’s adequacy, and His power. He is enough. The Scripture tells me I must abide in Him. Jesus said, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:4–5).

Do you want to see the wonderful virtues of God in your life? Recognize you can’t do it on your own and abide in Jesus.

How do you do that? To abide means to sink your roots deep—to stay in a given place, to be immovable. So, each day, you seek to cultivate your growth. You do the things that would help you grow and flourish spiritually. And you avoid the things that would tear you down or hurt you spiritually. Every day, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of things we have the choice to look at, listen to, be around, that will either help or hurt, right? They can build us up or tear us down. We have to make judgment calls. If something is not going to help us spiritually, we’re going to avoid it. If something will really help us, we’re going to do that. As you put your roots in Christ, in time you are going to see changes.

Give it time, OK? These things don’t come overnight. There are no shortcuts to true spirituality. There is no way you are going to become Mr. Holiness or Ms. Righteousness overnight. It takes time as you spend time walking with God. As you absorb His Word into your mind and live by it—spending time in fellowship with believers and spending time in prayer—godliness will work its way into your life and you will find yourself changing.

The funny thing is, the more holy you become, the more you realize you need to change. You know, the apostle Paul, after years of walking with

the Lord, said, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12–14).

After many years of walking with the Lord, Paul referred to himself as the chief of sinners. What kind of spiritual growth is that? The chief of sinners? I will tell you what it is: real spiritual growth. The more you grow, the more you realize you have a lot more growing to do. So that’s what you dedicate your life to doing: abiding and growing in Christ.

10. SOMETHING INCREDIBLE TO PONDER

Considering what we have learned about God and what He has revealed about Himself to us, can you believe that the God who created the entire universe would have any interest in us personally?

You might wonder, “Why would God be concerned about what concerns me?” or “Why would He care about my needs and even my wants? Why would He want me to walk in fellowship with Him? And why would He commit Himself personally to providing my daily bread?” Job 7:17 (NIV) says, “What is mankind that you make so much of them, that you give them so much attention?” There are many reasons, but the most notable would simply be that He loves you! He loves you with an everlasting love!

The amazing thing is that the God of the universe loves you and is watching over you. He will bless you, smile on you, keep you, and give you His full attention and peace because He cares for you.

And if you have not yet made a decision to follow Christ but you want to, you can make one right now. All you have to do is pray a simple prayer, from your heart, like this one:

“Jesus, I know that I’m a sinner. And I fall miserably short of Your perfect ways. But I also know that You love me beyond understanding. Please forgive me of my sins. I repent of them now, and choose to follow You. Thank You for covering the

cost of my sin by dying on the cross and rising again as my Savior. From this moment forward, I choose You as my Savior, Lord, Father, and Friend. I want to abide in You from this day forward. Thank You for loving me and calling me by name. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.”

May God help us as we seek to be holy, righteous, truthful, loving, and to honor Him in all that we say and do.

To learn more about what it means to follow Jesus Christ, visit KnowGod.org.

¹ A. B. Simpson, *The Names of Jesus* (Camp Hill, PA, WingSpread Publishers, 2007).