

God Is \_\_\_\_\_.

God Is Knowable—and we should make knowing God the highest priority in our lives

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August 8, 2021

What comes to your mind when you think about God? Pause for a moment and give attention to that question—what comes to your mind when you think about God? When you think about God, do you picture an old man with white hair, reigning above the clouds and looking down on earth? When you think about God, do you think of a kind of heavenly Santa Claus, someone who knows when we are sleeping, who knows when we're awake, who knows if we've been bad or good, so we better be good for goodness' sake? Like with Santa Claus, most of us want God to say "yes" to our wish list and not give us a lump of coal in our stockings. Perhaps you think of God more as a judge, the one who arbitrates the deeds of everyone in the world, who rewards the good and punishes the bad. Maybe like me you grew up watching *The Wizard of Oz* and you think of God as something like the wizard in this scene at the end of the movie. (Please view the video recording of the sermon to watch the movie clip.) That's what a lot of people today think God is—someone who has been manufactured by people behind a curtain to control, manipulate, or use people. Perhaps when you think of God you think about nature, and your mind goes to the power of a waterfall, the immensity of the oceans, the expanse of deep space, the sweet smell of a rose garden. Maybe you think about the voice of James Earl Jones or Morgan Freeman.

So many different ideas come to our mind when we think about God, but here's what I want to set before you today, in the words of AW Tozer: "What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Think about that statement: what comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you. Not your race, your age, your life experience, your intellect, your marital status. More essential and influential than all those things is your understanding of God. If you think of God as harsh and judgmental, then your approach to the world, to other people, and to yourself will inevitably be harsh and judgmental. If you think that God is loving, gracious, and kind, you'll most likely have a loving, gracious and kind approach to the world, to others, and to yourself. If you think of God as distant and disinterested, you'll probably go about your life ignoring Him. If you think that God is approachable and near, you'll probably reach out to Him. If you think that God answers prayer, you'll probably pray. If you think He doesn't, you probably won't. This one reality—what comes to our minds when we think about God—affects everything else.

Tozer goes on to say, "The heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian Church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of Him. In all her prayers and labors this should have first place." He's admonishing us to be willing to go to any length, to pay any price, to ensure that when we think about God, we think about Him as He truly is—not as the Wizard of Oz, not as Santa Claus, not as an old man with white hair dotingly looking down from heaven, but as He truly is. That is the heart behind this series. We are going to take the next nine weeks and unpack this statement: God is \_\_\_\_\_.

We will go right to Scripture to see the way God has revealed Himself, the way God Himself has filled in that blank. We'll learn how God is love, holy, good, beautiful, faithful, able, powerful, glorious. It's not as though God is 10% of one admirable attribute, 15% of another, 4% of this, 9% of that. He's not a recipe, not a cake you throw into the oven. He's 100% all those things at the exact same time. In fact, words like love, truth, beauty, goodness, and holiness derive their meaning and essence from who God is.

Throughout this series we will look at several attributes of God. But we begin today with simply the recognition that God is. And God "is" in a way that no one else is. Everyone and everything else in the world are **contingent**. Everything and everyone in the world depend upon something or someone else. My coming into existence depended on my mom and dad. Their coming into existence depended on their moms and their dads. And far as it goes back, for every one of us, coming into the world was contingent

on other people, and our continued existence is contingent on other things as well. We need to drink water and eat food and breathe oxygen to stay alive. Every one of us needed other people to give us life and we need other things to keep us alive. Not God. God “is”—period. God is the one being in all of history not contingent upon someone or something else to give Him life. “If God created everything, who created God?” is an old question. God is the one and only being who was not created. And as hard as that is to fathom, as hard as it is for our minds to imagine infinity and eternity, it makes sense, because sooner or later, if you follow the string long enough, it has to stop somewhere. The Bible teaches us that it stops with God. He has always existed, He brought everything that exists into creation. If God were to remove His sustaining power from the universe for a millisecond, everything that exists would cease to exist. But even if every material thing in existence vanished in an instant, God would continue to exist forever. Unlike anything else, God simply is.

Not only are we contingent, but we are also **comparable**. Most people are familiar with Kevin Hart and Dwayne “the Rock” Johnson. They have been in several movies together. It’s funny because compared to each other, Kevin is small and the Rock is huge. But then when you see the Rock next to Shaq, the Rock looks like a sixth grader wandering the halls of middle school for the first time. And then you see Shaq next to Yao Ming, and even Shaq looks tiny. Everything in life is comparable. I tell my two-year-old son he’s smart all the time. Compared to his nine-month-old sister, he’s a genius, but compared to an average five-year-old, he knows next to nothing. Everything in our world is comparable. To a large part, we find out where we fit, we identify ourselves based upon how we rank by comparing ourselves to the people around us. Not God. God is incomparable. God is not like anything in the world. In fact, when Moses met with God in the wilderness and asked God His name, how he could describe God to other people, who he could say that God was, God said, “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14). He meant, “I am so utterly beyond you and this universe that no name I could give you would help. I simply am.” Many theologians believe the right translation for this verse is “I am He who is.” God is. Period.

Adam Clarke described God this way:

God is the eternal, independent, and self-existent Being; the Being whose purposes and actions spring from himself, without foreign motive or influence; he who is absolute in dominion; the most pure, the most simple, the most spiritual of all essences; infinitely perfect; and eternally self-sufficient, needing nothing that he has made; illimitable in his immensity, inconceivable in his mode of existence, and indescribable in his essence; known fully only by himself, because an infinite mind can only be fully comprehended by itself. In a word, a Being who, from his infinite wisdom, cannot err or be deceived, and from his infinite goodness, can do nothing but what is eternally just, and right, and kind.”

Charles Spurgeon once said:

The contemplation of divinity is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, “Behold, I am wise.” But when we speak of the knowledge of God we find that our plumbline cannot sound its depth, that the eagle eye cannot see its height, and we must solemnly exclaim, “I am but of yesterday; I know nothing.”

That is the God we are talking about: a God who is above us and beyond us in every way. And yet, a God who has revealed himself to us.

Even though God is so infinitely beyond us, **God is knowable**. He is knowable because He has chosen to make Himself known. A wonderful example we see of this in Scripture is through the life of Moses. Moses spent the first forty years of his life growing up in the household of Pharaoh; all the wealth and power and influence of the world was at his fingertips. But when he came to the defense of a Hebrew slave, he was exiled into the wilderness, where he spent the next 40 years of his life. That's where Exodus 3 picks up: "Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law" (verse 1). The word "tending" is in the tense that communicates ongoing action. He was tending the flock, and tending the flock, and tending the flock. That's what his life had come to consist of—shepherding animals in the wilderness. He led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. "There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up'" (Exodus 3:2-3). God saw Moses in the midst of the monotony of his 9-5 job, just taking care of livestock, and God showed up. God revealed Himself to Moses. God gave Moses a sign: "Hey, look at this bush that is burning but is never consumed." God wanted to make Himself known.

This is a pattern that we see all throughout Scripture, and honestly all throughout history. God shows up, He gives us signs that He is here, that He is present, that He is knowledgeable. If we have eyes to see and ears to hear, we'll discover burning bushes everywhere.

- The moment when you are standing at the altar with your husband or wife.
- The day you bring your child home from the hospital.
- That time when you were desperately lonely, and a friend reached out to let you know they cared.
- That time when you had just moved to a new town and a neighbor invited you to church.
- The person who you treated horribly but inexplicably offered you forgiveness.
- That thought about eternity you had last time you took a walk at night and looked up at the stars.
- That book a friend handed you about the existence of God.
- Each morning, sitting at your kitchen table with a cup of coffee next to you when you open the Bible.
- That time you walked into a church service, and you don't know how to describe it, but you felt God's presence and knew you were loved.

If we have eyes with which to see, and ears with which to hear, we will discover that there are burning bushes everywhere—the infinite one, reaching out to the finite. God wants to make Himself known. The ultimate way God has done this is through the incarnation, when God took on flesh and lived among us through Jesus Christ.

- Colossians 1:15 says, "(Jesus) is the image of the invisible God."
- John 1:18 says, "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known."
- AW Tozer put it this way: "It is a sacred and indispensable part of the Christian message that the full sun-blaze of revelation came at the incarnation when the Eternal Word became flesh to dwell among us."

God wants to make Himself known. He has done it throughout history, He has done it through countless expressions of grace in our lives, He has done it through Scripture, He has done it through Jesus Christ. Burning bushes are everywhere. Here's the question before us today: how do you respond when God shows up with an invitation for you to know Him better? Look at what Moses did. Back to Exodus 3: "So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up'" (Exodus 3:3). This phrase "I will go over" is better translated "I will turn aside." It's a word in Hebrew that means to go off the beaten path, to divert from the road you are on and take a detour, to stop what you are doing and

explore something new. For Moses this meant pressing pause on his daily routine, taking a break from his work responsibilities, his sheep tending, and pay attention.

This is such an important step. If we want to know God, really know Him, not just know some things about Him, but know Him personally, know Him intimately, we are going to have to be interruptible, to press pause on the demands of the day, to be curious, to be interested, to go off the beaten path, to take a detour, to try something new in our walk with God. I'm sure, like me, you get plenty of invitations sent to your house, invitations to weddings, to graduations, to birthday parties, invitations to apply for a new credit card, to start using a new lawn care service, to have someone power wash your windows. We have countless invitations sent to us every day, and we get to decide which ones we respond to. Every day, God sets invitations before us to know Him better, to understand what He's doing in the world, to deepen in our devotion to Him, and we get to decide how we are going to respond. J. Oswald Sanders put it this way: "Every person knows God as well as they chose to." Just like you know Spanish as well as you have chosen, like you know sports stats as well as you have chosen, like you know the characters of *The Office* as well as you have chosen, you know God as well as you have chosen. On a scale of 1-100, whether you are a 1 or a 99, since God is revealing Himself and extending invitations, it really is up to us.

Which leads me to what I believe is the most important thing I will say today: **knowing God is the most worthy pursuit to which you can give your life.** Of every option you could possibly pursue in this life, there is nothing worthier or weightier than pursuit of the knowledge of God. Not the pursuit of a spouse, not the pursuit of a family, not the pursuit of an education, a career, or a promotion, not the pursuit of fame or friends or financial success. All those things matter to varying degrees, but they pale in comparison to the importance of knowing God. In Philippians 3 the apostle Paul counts out a long list of all the things in life he had going for him: from a great family, with a great education, a sterling reputation, and a record a mile long of impressive religious deeds, but then said this in verses 7-8: "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Translation: there is nothing in all the world that even begins to hold a candle in comparison to the value and worth of knowing God.

But here's the complicated thing about knowing God. Even though we know the invitation set before us, and even though we know how important it is, we put it off, we say we'll get to it later, when I have more time or less stress or my life is in better order. Until then we are content to just stay at a distance and allow other people to get to know God better and perhaps report back to us what they learn.

That happened in the book of Exodus. After God brought the Israelites out of Egypt through the Red Sea and to Mount Sinai, after He entered into a covenant relationship with them and gave them the ten commandments, this is what we read in Exodus 20:18-21:

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

This is a fascinating experience. God showed up to reveal Himself to his people. He is there in power and glory and awe with thunder, lightning, and smoke! And the people said, "This is too much for us. We don't want God Himself to speak to us. Moses, why don't you just talk to God, let God tell you what He wants from us, and then come back and report it to us. That would be so much easier, so much more comfortable." So the people stayed at a distance, and Moses climbed the mountain and spent forty days in

God's presence. And do you know what happened? While Moses was hearing from God about the heart of worship, the people who stayed at a distance made a golden calf and devolved into idolatry.

We never want to find ourselves in that sort of situation. We have to get rid of the mentality that says, "God is too awesome for me, too complicated for me, too complex for me, God is too high and holy for me. I'll just stay at a distance and let someone else get to know Him and then tell me about Him. My pastor can get to know Him, my wife can get to know Him, my parents can get to know Him, my friends can get to know Him, the Pope can get to know Him, and then they can just tell me what He's like." That's not what God wants. He wants YOU to know Him. In fact, in the book of Jeremiah this is the hallmark of the new covenant that was established. Listen to what God says: "No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Jeremiah 31:34).

I want that to be one of the hallmarks of this church. Yes, that is a church that faithfully preaches the gospel and passionately teaches God's Word. Yes, that is a church with strong marriages and Christ-centered families. Yes, that is a church that loves children and serves the community and does mission work all over the world. But even more than all of that, I want us to be a church where everybody, from the elders and senior pastor, all the way down to the kids in the elementary school classrooms, knows God. I'm not talking about knowing God the way I know Michael Jordan. I can tell you what he looks like, I can tell you his playing weight and height, his stats and championships. I know about him, but I don't know him. We don't want to be that kind of church. We want to be a church that personally, deeply, intimately walks in the knowledge of God! That is what this series is all about. And that's what the Bible tells us matters more than anything else.

Listen to what we read in Jeremiah 9:23-24: "Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me." Not the understanding to pass a GRE, not the understanding to get a high GPA or a great score on the ACT, the SAT, the LSAT, the MCAT or any other test you might take, not the understanding to close deals and social networks or make money or move upward in the world, but the understanding to know God! If you want to boast, great! Go ahead and boast. But don't boast about things that are temporary and worldly, things that are insignificant and passing. Boast about the one thing that matters most: deep down in your heart, at the core of your being, more than you want anything else, you want to know God!

Listen to what we read in Hebrews 11:6: "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Let's be people who earnestly seek Him. For this entire series, all nine weeks, I want to challenge you to focus on taking at least one new step to know God better, to earnestly seek after Him. In just this past week I've talked to people who are doing that in a variety of different ways. You might remember several months ago when we were teaching through James, I offered a challenge for people in our church to memorize the book. This week I talked to a woman who spent the last four months doing that, and she told me about how meditating on the truths of God has deepened her walk and transformed her life. I talked with another person who is reading one chapter of the Bible every day and choosing one verse to meditate on and turn into prayer. I talked to another person who is listening to a sermon every day during their workout, so they are getting fit physically and growing spiritually at the same time. I talked to one person who skips lunch on Tuesday and instead of eating a meal, takes their lunch hour to pray through the Psalms. I talked to one guy who set an alarm every night before he goes to bed to make sure he spends five minutes prayerfully reviewing his day to see all the places where God was at work. There are so many different steps we can take to know God better; the important thing is that you take a step, that you

earnestly seek after Him. God has promised us in his word, **“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”** Let’s put that promise to the test.