

## Topic 9: God

### Thinking Rightly About the Creator

“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

—John 17:3

A few years ago, a Canadian by the name of Kyle MacDonald conducted an experiment. Inspired by the popular children’s game “Bigger and Better,” he began with one red paperclip and started swapping. He traded the red paper clip for a fish-shaped pen. Next he exchanged that for something larger and nicer. More swaps followed. After one year and 14 transactions, MacDonald ended up with a two-story house in Saskatchewan. From a red paper clip to a house! It’s a true story.

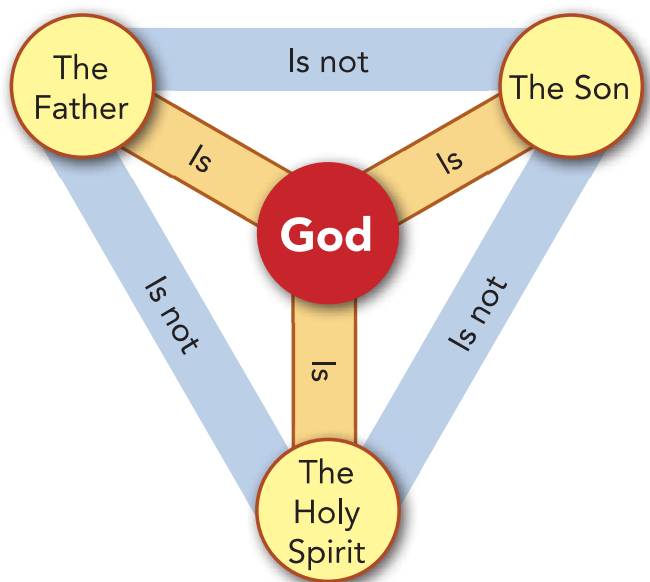
This is a lesson about swapping something far more important than mere objects. Our goal here is to search the Bible and also our hearts. Where we find wrong thoughts and ideas about the one true God, we want to swap them out for accurate beliefs.

Why is this so important?

Perhaps A. W. Tozer, the author of the classic book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, put it best: “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. . . . We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. . . . Were we able to

extract from a man a complete answer to the question, ‘What comes into your mind when you think about God?’ we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man.”

“Without doubt, the mightiest thought the mind can entertain is the thought of God, and the weightiest word in any language is its word for God.”—A. W. Tozer





## What Comes Into Your Mind When You Think About God?

I see God as . . .	Never	Sometimes	Constantly
<b>An infinite Introvert</b> Aloof, shy, seemingly reluctant to engage me	1	2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9 10
<b>Loving caring Father</b> Loving, accepting, wise, protective, trustworthy	1	2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9 10
<b>The CEO of Creation</b> Preoccupied, business-like, busy running the universe	1	2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9 10
<b>An impersonal Force</b> Vague, mysterious entity/all-encompassing energy	1	2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9 10
<b>A heavenly genie, Santa Claus, or grandfather</b> Good-natured, generous, winks at my indiscretions	1	2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9 10
<b>An impossible-to-please coach, referee, or cop</b> Always ready to bust me for my “poor performance”	1	2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9 10
<b>The angry—perhaps sadistic—judge of the universe</b> Cold, cruel, always glad to zap or smite sinners	1	2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9 10
<b>Motherly and kind</b> The mother of life and nurturer of all things	1	2 3 4 5 6 7	8 9 10

**Question:** If God employed 66 books and 1,139 chapters of the Bible to reveal his character and works, how can we “do justice” to such a monumental topic in one short lesson?

**Answer:** We can’t! But hopefully we can at least whet our appetite for *theology*—“the study of God.”

As we begin this exploration of what a devoted follower of Jesus needs to know about **God**, let’s mention a critical theological belief that undergirds the Christian faith—the belief that God is **triune in nature**.

Since the early days of the church, Christians have held to the belief that the one true God exists externally as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that each person is fully God.

## Why Do Christians Believe in the Trinity?

- ▶ The Bible declares that God is one (Deuteronomy 6:4).
- ▶ The Bible calls three distinct, divine persons God: The Father (1 Corinthians 1:3), the Son (Hebrews 1:6–8), and the Spirit (Acts 5:3–4).
- ▶ More than sixty Bible passages mention these three divine persons together.

This diagram is a visual representation of the essential biblical doctrine of the Trinity.

In this lesson we will focus on just the first person of the Trinity, God the Father.



## Bible Study

Like a divine photo album, the Scripture includes many great glimpses of God the Father. We could almost close our eyes, open the Bible at random, and point. Whatever page our finger landed upon would reveal something of God's character. But for a vivid snapshot of God in just a few verses, it's hard to beat Psalm 103 (written by David).

Take a few moments right now to read the entire psalm thoughtfully.

1. Now, look at verses 3, 9, 10, 12. What do they say about us and about what God does for his people?

---



---



---



---



---



---

The word "sins" (verse 10) comes from a Hebrew verb that means to "miss the mark." It conveys the idea of moral failure. "Iniquities" (also in verse 10) is from a verb that means to "twist or distort or bend." These are the twisted acts, the wrong behaviors of which we are all guilty.

Verse 12 mentions our "transgressions." This word conveys the idea of "rebellion." This is where we intentionally cross lines we're not supposed to cross. This is willful rejection of God's authority. Such actions result in a fractured relationship. And we did that, not God.

It's not a pretty picture of humanity: moral failure, twisted acts, high-handed rebellion . . . Elsewhere, the Bible makes it clear that what we deserve for our disobedience is death (Romans 6:23). Yet, note the stunning statement in Psalm 103:10, God does *not* treat us as our sins deserve.

In verse 3, David says God *forgives*. This is the idea of "pardon." In verse 12 we see his gracious removal of our sin, "as far as the east is from the west." The idea here is of absolute removal.

In short, we see here the stunning truth that God is **Forgiving!** The *f* in "forgiving" is the first letter in "Father," and helps us form an acrostic in this study.

Human beings are not very forgiving. Often we can't forgive ourselves, but God forgives and he forgives us *completely*.



2. What makes divine forgiveness difficult for your head to believe and your heart to embrace?

---



---



---



---

3. Now, look again at Psalm 103 verses 4, 8, 11, and 17. What attribute of God is mentioned in each of these verses and how is it described?

---



---



---



---

David mentions the love of God four times. Much more than mere sentiment, this is God's lavish, loyal, covenant-keeping love. The Hebrew word is *chesed* (kheh'-sed), often translated "lovingkindness." *Chesed* is God's never-ending commitment to be for his people, and pursue them in order to care for and bless them—even when they are in a pitiful state.

We see here that our heavenly father is **Abounding in love**. Perhaps you need to swap out some wrong ideas or beliefs about God—for example, the idea that he abounds in anger, indifference, or cruelty—for this eternal, life-altering truth?

4. Look again at verses 4, 8, and 13. There's an idea that pops up in each of those verses (two times in verse 13). What is it and what does it mean?

---



---



---



---

In the Old Testament, the word translated "compassion" is almost identical to the Hebrew word for "womb," which leads some Bible scholars to believe that the word is meant to call to mind the depth of feeling that a mother feels for the newborn child who has just come from her womb.



David uses that word here of God, calling him a *compassionate father*. This means God's heart goes out to His children who are helpless and vulnerable, in trouble or hurting.

You can probably think of many times in your life when your heart was broken by seeing someone suffer. Maybe your stomach was in knots, or you felt punched in the gut (which is actually the idea behind the New Testament word "compassion"—it's literally a "guts" word). Maybe with a hurting loved one you thought or even said, "I wish it were me suffering instead of you."

5. Think about and then write down your reaction to this statement: *If we, as imperfect and selfish people, have such tender feelings, how compassionate is our perfect God?*

---



---



---



---

This snapshot of God in Psalm 103 shows us that our heavenly father is **Tender**.

6. How does this square with the way you think and feel about God?

---



---



---



---

Let's review: According to Psalm 103, God is forgiving, abounding in love, tender, and full of compassion. Let's see what else Psalm 103 tells us about God. Re-read verses 8–9, 11, 13, and 17.

7. Verses 8–9 mention the reality of God's *anger*. And verses 11, 13, and 17 speak of "the fear of the Lord." Why would God be angry? Why should people fear the Lord?

---



---



---



---

That phrase "fear of the Lord" suggests "jaw-dropping awe" or "breathtaking reverence."



As you read through the Bible, you'll notice that whenever people encounter God, fearful awe is *always* the response. They fall on their faces. They tremble. Their hearts almost stop! Invariably, they speak of God's shattering holiness. Which is exactly what David mentions in verse one: Did you see it? "Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his *holy name*."

In this concise picture of God the Father that is Psalm 103, we see that God is **Holy**.

8. How would you explain the concept of God's holiness to a friend with little or no religious background?

---



---



---



---

A truth we can extract from these verses is that, God, because he *is* holy, gets angry over sin. Because God is absolute purity and there's no defect in his essential nature, sin is an affront to him.

- ▶ It wrecks the world he has made.
- ▶ It damages caring relationships between people, hurting the creatures he loves.
- ▶ It is a rejection of his kingship over the universe.

Many people speak of God as though he is just a magnified amalgamation of mankind's best features. He's like us, only bigger, more powerful, and definitely more "religious." How might this explain irreverence toward God or a casual attitude about sin?

9. Re-read Psalm 103:14–17. They contrast man and God. How so? What is the psalmist David telling us about God?

---



---



---



---

We are not long for this world, David says. Not only are we temporary, we live in a world where nothing endures for long:

- ▶ People and civilizations fade away.



- ▶ Things and situations constantly change.
- ▶ Good times don't last.

What a great comfort to remember that our Father in heaven is the One Great Constant:

- ▶ He doesn't age and lose his physical or mental capacities.
- ▶ He has always been and he will always be.
- ▶ God is timeless. He isn't going anywhere.

This gives us security. That's another really comforting truth . . . God is **Eternal**.

10. Look at verses 19–21. How is God pictured there?

---



---



---



---



---

Verses 19 says he “established his throne.” The verb David uses is a Hebrew word that means “be firm.” It conveys the idea of stability. It means to be unshakable. Seated on a throne in heaven, served by angel armies who carry out his perfect will. This implies royal dignity, sovereignty over the universe. In other words, God has dominion. He is in charge. And if he reigns over the universe, then surely he reigns over our lives.

That's the last detail we can take away from this brief look at Psalm 103, one scriptural snapshot of God. He is **Ruling the universe**.

David points out much truth about God in this psalm. He notes that God is:

- ▶ **F**orgiving
- ▶ **A**bounding in love
- ▶ **T**ender
- ▶ **H**oly
- ▶ **E**ternal
- ▶ **R**uling the universe.

Look down that list and notice what those things reveal about God. Do you see it? God is a F-A-T-H-E-R. He's our perfect heavenly Father!





Here's the bottom-line: Psalm 103 is about swapping. When life is confusing and/or hard, when we're not sure what to think, David reminds us that we have a choice. We can settle for murky, subjective feelings about God or we can swap all that for what God has clearly revealed about himself.

David would urge us to make the swap. "Instead of choosing to doubt or despair . . . because of *what* is happening (or might happen) in your life, choose to focus on the one *who* has you. Focus on your heavenly Father."

In a nutshell, disciples of Jesus believe:

*God is the Creator and Judge of all—and He's the loving Father of those who put their faith in Christ.*

## Why does the thought of God as a heavenly *Father* leave so many people cold?

All earthly fathers are imperfect. And sadly, some are downright evil or sadistic. Many people have a tendency to think of God as a kind of heavenly version of their own earthly dad. So, for example, if your father was or is distant and stern, you may subconsciously assume God is like that. This is a natural tendency—for us to project the qualities of our human fathers onto God.

Others are put off by the term "Father" because they see it as chauvinistic to refer to God in masculine terms only. But does the term "Father" necessarily mean that God is exclusively masculine in his nature or that all things feminine are somehow second-rate? Not at all!

Genesis 1 tells us that God created *both* male and female humans "in His image." Furthermore, in several places in Scripture, God is portrayed in terms that we might typically regard as feminine. For instance, he is described as having given birth to Israel (Deuteronomy 32:18). And he is likened to a mother showing compassion to a nursing child (Isaiah 49:15) and to a mother comforting a child (Isaiah 66:13). Jesus even used the image of a mother hen gathering its chicks to express his affection for the people of Jerusalem.

Yet, even given all that, it's important to recognize that Jesus, endowed with divine wisdom and a comprehensive human vocabulary said, "Pray like this: 'Our *Father* in heaven . . .'"



## Take-Home Reflections

### God's Attributes at-a-Glance

Developing a deeper understanding of God begins with learning about his attributes—the essential qualities that make up his nature. The Bible overtly mentions or describes all sorts of things that are true of God. This is not an exhaustive list. For example, it doesn't mention that God is: Spirit, merciful, gracious, patient, faithful, or jealous. But it will at least start you thinking about who God is and what he is like.

God is . . .	Scripture	Definition	Implication for your life
<b>Eternal</b>	Gen. 21:33 Ps. 90:2 Rev. 1:8	God is outside of and unbounded by time.	
<b>Good</b>	Ex. 33:19 Ps. 145:9	God is perfectly benevolent, merciful and gracious to his creatures.	
<b>Holy</b>	1 Peter 1:16 1 John 1:5	God is perfect—wholly set apart and separate from all sin and evil.	
<b>Immutable</b>	Ps. 102:27 Mal. 3:6 James 1:17	God is unchanging and unchangeable in his being.	
<b>Infinite</b>	1 Kings 8:27 Ps. 145:3 Acts 17:24	God is without ends or limits.	
<b>Just</b>	Acts 10:34–35; 17:31 Rom. 2:11	God is absolutely fair. He does not show partiality. He maintains perfect moral standards	
<b>Loving and forgiving</b>	Ps. 103:17 Eph. 2:4–5 1 John 4:8, 10	God seeks the highest good of his creatures at his own infinite cost.	
<b>Omnipotent</b>	Matt. 19:26 Rev. 19:6	God is all-powerful. Nothing can or will thwart his will.	
<b>Omnipresent</b>	Ps. 139:7–12 Jer. 23:23–24	God is present everywhere.	
<b>Omniscient</b>	Ps. 139:1–4; 147:4–5	God knows all things (actual and possible).	
<b>One</b>	Deut. 6:4 1 Cor. 8:6	God is unique. He alone is God. He is indivisible in his essence.	
<b>Sovereign</b>	Eph. 1:4–14, 21	God is the supreme ruler of the universe, independent of any authority outside himself.	



God is . . .	Scripture	Definition	Implication for your life
<b>Transcendent</b>	Ps. 13:1 Isa. 8:17	God is separate from and beyond the universe. He is above our intelligence and understanding.	
<b>Triune</b>	Eph. 4:4-6 Heb. 1:6-8 Acts 5:3-4	God eternally exists as, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God.	
<b>True</b>	John 14:6; 17:3	God advances and confirms that which is true; his Word is trustworthy.	

## Life Application

An important part of discipleship is learning how to apply God's truths to your life. Below are just a few ways you can start thinking about what you've learned and apply it to your daily life.

1. Memorize our memory verse, John 17:3.
2. Read carefully these words of J. I. Packer, author of *Knowing God*, and on another sheet of paper journal your reaction:
 

"The stress of the [New Testament] is not on the difficulty and danger of drawing near to the holy God, but on the boldness and confidence with which believers may approach Him. . . . To those who are Christ's, the holy God is a loving Father; they belong to his family; they may approach Him without fear, and always be sure of His fatherly concern and care. This is the heart of the New Testament message."
3. Wrestle with one or two of these questions:
  - ▶ What attribute(s) of God do you find most difficult to comprehend? Why do you think you have difficulty with these descriptions of God?
  - ▶ The Scriptures portray God variously as a: loving Father, righteous Judge, strong Tower/Fortress/Refuge/Rock, reigning King, merciful Helper, faithful Shepherd. Thinking about your life lately, which of these images of God resonates most deeply with you? Why do you think that is so?
  - ▶ When in your life have you felt closest to God? What were the circumstances of your life at the time?
  - ▶ In Mark 14:36, Jesus called God "Abba, Father". Abba is an Aramaic word for "father" that suggests extreme intimacy (Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6). It is like our English word "Daddy." How does this square with your experience with God?