

What is God *REALLY* Like?

Why should we even care?

You want to know why it is important to know what God is really like, because many of us apparently have no clue. He is a holy God. He is a righteous God. He is a God that calls us out of this world. He is a God that calls us to put away from us the filth of this world. O how we need to know Him.

He cares about what you do outside of church. He cares about what you take in through your eyes and ears. He cares about the choices you make. Knowing God will touch every area of your life.

As the lead pastor of this church, I am calling you out. I am calling us all out. It's time to quit playing around with Christianity and to either become actual disciples of Jesus Christ or quit pretending.

You may ask "What's the big deal? Is this that important?" Let me tell you just how important we think it is that the people who make up the church know about God. Your view of God is the absolute most important thing about your life. Nothing in all your life will impact your relationship to God, your relationship to people, your self-view, your decisions, your purpose – everything in your life, consciously, or unconsciously like this one thing. Who do you privately conceive God to be in your heart?

How would you describe God in one sentence to an eight year old?

What words would "have to be" in your one sentence description of Him?

What would be the most difficult aspect of explaining to an eight year old what God is like?

Why is it so important that we see God as He really is?

Dear friends, we are already God's children, but He has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He really is. 1 John 3:2 NLT

So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like Him as we are changed into His glorious image. 2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT

A.W. Tozer wrote one of my favorite little books called, *The Knowledge of the Holy*. He writes, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people have ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God."

Listen to this, "Worship is base or pure, as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason, the gravest question before the church is always God Himself. And the most portentous fact about any man is not what he or she at any given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be."

So here is what we are going to do. I am going to give you more scripture than you want but my hope and prayer is that you care enough to make God the center of your life and that you will care enough to study this on your own. For this series I am going to put some notes in the worship folder but still leave you room to write your own notes.

Basic Guide to Help You See God as He Longs to Be Seen:

For the next eight weeks, we're going to examine the character of God as though His character were a diamond, and we'll look at different facets called 'attributes' of what He's like. We will understand and apply how they will literally transform your life, transform your prayers, and transform your relationships. This first sermon is going to begin with three facts that are just very basic, that lead us to three questions that we need to ponder.

If you have a pen, pull it out, because I want you to write some notes; and we might even have a homework assignment. You will never discover who God is by listening to someone else. You will discover who God is when you dig, and we'll discover exactly how to do it. Three facts we need to consider if we're going to see God with 20/20 vision; fact No 1, is that God is not like us. We are made in his image, and there are similarities, but God is not like us.

1. God is not like us!

Isaiah 40:25-28: *To whom will you compare me? Who is my equal?" asks the Holy One. ²⁶ Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars? He brings them out like an army, one after another, calling each by its name. Because of His great power and incomparable strength, not a single one is missing.*

²⁷ *O Jacob, how can you say the LORD does not see your troubles? O Israel, how can you say God ignores your rights? ²⁸ Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding.*

2 Samuel 7:22

Romans 11:33-36

2. Left to ourselves, we tend to reduce God to manageable terms!

Romans 1:21-23: *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. ²² Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.*

Job 38-42:6: This is for self-study. Pour yourself a cup of coffee or an iced tea and allot some time to read these chapters. You will be amazed at what you will learn about God. This is the end of Job's story and God was kind of fed up with Job and his friend's attitude so He reveals Himself and who He is like nowhere else in the Bible.

Exodus 32:1-6 The story of Aaron allowing the people to make up their own god.

“When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us.’” As for this fellow, Moses, who brought us out of Egypt, we don’t know what happened to him. Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold ear-rings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” So, all the people took off their ear-rings and they brought them to Aaron, and he took what they handed him and he made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioned with a tool. They said, “These are your gods, oh Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.” When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf, and announced, “Tomorrow, we’ll have a festival to the Lord.”

The next day, the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings, and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward, they sat down to eat and drink, and got up to indulge in revelry. The revelry here is not like a worship service. It had to do with base sensuality and casting-off restraints. If it felt good they did it. Did you notice what happened here?

It’s like they said, “We can’t see this God so we’re going to take something that we have, and we’re going to make it into something and call it god, and then we’re going to worship it.

We’re going to create religious exercises that we really want to do anyway, in the name of religion. This happens all the time. Churches do it and individuals do it. You might be thinking to yourself, “I don’t make idols. I can’t remember the last time I went home and said, ‘Excuse me Honey, going in the back bedroom, and I’m going to bow-down to the statue in the kid’s bedroom 45 times. I think it might do some good.’” Now, you don’t do that. I don’t do that. We make idols when we take the God of the Bible who is all wise and powerful, and we shrink Him down.

What we do is we make Him our self-help genie. Instead of worshiping Him and knowing Him, and us being servants who want to understand His mission and following Him by faith we reinvent Him into our image. God can’t be tamed or created by you. He is awesome, and powerful, but we little by little work the scriptures around, and we come to the conclusion that the real goal in life is to be happy. Our God becomes the God of the “happy, happy, happy.”

The real goal in life becomes fulfillment. We take the Bible verses and God, and we mold Him around, and say, “Let’s see, if we read the Bible in the morning, if we pray a few prayers, if we give some money, if we go on a missions trip, if we read some Christian self-help books, we’re going to have these unbelievable, intimate, deep marriages. All of our kids are going to turn-out right. They’re never going to have any problems. We’re going to be upwardly mobile in our jobs. We’ll never be depressed. We’ll never be sad. Bad things won’t happen to us. Life will be wonderful, if we just obey.” What we’re saying is, “What we worship is our own happiness.”

What we’ve said is most important is our personal fulfillment. We’ve created and reduced a God who’s supposed to fulfill our agenda. When our friends get cancer and our kids don’t turn out right, and we don’t have this incredible bliss in a fallen world with our marriage, then what do we do? What’s the deal, God? I’ve been going to church regularly. I pray. I’m giving. We have a little “molten calf.” A pity party. I have news for you it’s not the God of the Bible you’ve been worshipping!

A man was riding by a woman on the plane and reading his Bible. She asked, “Are you spiritual?” He said, “Well, yeah. Actually, I don’t want to get into it, but everyone’s spiritual.” She said, “What do you mean?”

I said, “Well, we have a spirit that resides in us, and there’s a vacuum in our heart, and God wants to have a relationship with everyone.” “Oh, wow, well we have a lot in common.” she said, “Well, tell me a little bit about you.” he said, “What do you believe?” She said, “Everything.”

He said, “What do you mean everything?” She goes, “Oh, everything. I’ve just – “and she named a group, and it’s a cult. And she says, “I like this part of Buddhism. I think that’s really cool. I feel good when I do that. Judaism kind of brings that on as well. Jesus, you know, He’s got some really nice stuff. There’s some stuff I don’t care for, but I like this out of that. I dipped into Hinduism, and I’m not sure – maybe I’ve had three or four, six former lives. I’m not quite sure, but I kind of like the reincarnation. I like this over here. The heaven part I like. The hell part, I don’t. The justice, I don’t think God could be like that. I think He’s always loving.” She created this amazing God out of the salad bar of all religions, picked what she wanted, and said, “I’m spiritual.”

Can I help you for a moment today? Who is she worshipping? She’s worshipping herself. She has, by feat of logic said, “I must be all-knowing. I must be all-wise. I must be all-powerful. I must know all that there is to see; the truth that is in all the different forms of men reaching after God. I am the one who will determine what that is. I am the center of the universe. I will make-up all my rules, so that I can, quote, “Be happy.” Therefore, I am God.”

If you’re going to see God with 20/20 vision, you need to understand, He is not like you. He is not like me. Left to yourself, you will have an unconscious tendency to reduce him into manageable terms. The third fact we must hit on, is that God can only be known as he reveals himself to us.

3. God can only be known as He reveals Himself to us!

1. Nature:

God has clearly revealed Himself in nature. Romans 1:19 says, *“The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day, they pour forth speech. Night after night, they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.”*

Every person on the earth sees the sky, sees the stars, and sees a sunset. Whether in a hut, or a high-tech hospital, sees the miracle of birth; sees the order, sees the balance of life. God displays speech and reality, and truth about Himself through nature.

The apostle Paul would even say in Romans 1:20 that, *“Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities, His eternal power, and His divine nature have been clearly seen. Being understood from that which has been made, creation, so that men are without excuse.”* If you want to see God as He really is, it would do you well to turn the radio off, and go get out into

nature. Get out of your car, where people aren't around, and sit down and set your watch for 30 minutes, and just sit and watch. Those of us that hunt know what it is like to sit in the woods in the early morning and watch it come alive.

Psalms 19, Romans 1:19-20

2. His Word:

"In the beginning, was the Word." Or literally, the Word is, "The logos," the communication vehicle in the Greek world. *"In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* He was with God in the beginning. Through Him – this Word we'll learn later is Christ – all things were made. Without Him, nothing was made that has been made. In Him, the word was life. That life was the light of men.

When Jesus was interacting with some people in John 5:39 and they were real religious, and they were really into the word. And he says, "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you'll find eternal life, and it's these that bear witness of me." To know God, he will reveal himself first through nature, second through his Word, and third and most profoundly, most clearly, most intimately, through Jesus, his son. John 1:1-4, 5:37-40

3. His Son:

There are some scriptures here for you to look at but since we just spent three Sundays looking at Jesus I am not going to spend a great deal of time here.

He was a suffering servant.

He was a Great Shepherd.

He was and is the Savior of the world.

John 1:14-18, Hebrews 1:1-3

Three Questions to Ponder in your personal study:

God desperately wants you to see Him accurately, and clearly, because He loves you. In order to do that, there are three facts you must understand. One, He is not like you; two, you will have this tendency that you will have to battle, because you will reduce Him into manageable terms so you can see, control, and actually use Him; and three, you must know Him on His terms, not yours. He has revealed or disclosed Himself through nature, through His word, and through His son.

This raises some questions. The first difficult question: **is it really possible to completely see God, just as He is?** Can we really, in this life, pull-back the curtain and the shroud of mystery and say, "I've seen all of God"? The answer is no, and yes.

1. Is it really possible to completely see God just as He is? Answer is: No and yes!

Moses responded, "Then show me your glorious presence."¹⁹ The LORD replied, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will call out My name, Yahweh, before you. For I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose.²⁰ But you may not look directly at My face, for no one may see Me and live. Exodus 33:18-20

You can't see God directly but you can see as much about who He is and what He is as you want to know and see.

John 4:24

John 14:5-9

1 Corinthians 2:12-14

2. What must I do to see God as He really is? Answer: Seek Him!

For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.¹² In those days when you pray, I will listen.¹³ If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find Me. Jeremiah 29:11-13

Luke 11:9-13

How?

*Proverbs 2:1-5: My child, **listen** to what I say, and **treasure** My commands.² **Tune** your ears to wisdom, and **concentrate** on understanding.³ **Cry out** for insight, and **ask for** understanding.⁴ **Search for** them as you would for silver; **seek them** like hidden treasures.⁵ Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God.*

Proverbs 2:1-5 explains exactly how to seek God, and tells you when you do the first four things, that you will actually know Him. Do you have a pen? I'm going to ask you to write something in the margin of your Bible or on the sermon notes.

First thing, it says, "*My child, if you will listen to what I say and treasure my commands.*" Write in the margin of your Bible, "**Intake of God's Word.**" The first step to seeking God is you have to get in God's Word for yourself. Did you notice the word "treasure" my commands?

Second, verse two, "*Tune your ears to wisdom and concentrate on understanding.*" Put in the margin of your Bible, "**Attitude.**" Write, "**Be Teachable.**"

Third, verse three, "*³ Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding.*" Write in the margin of your Bible, "**Passionate prayer.**" This isn't, "Oh, God, it would be nice. I would like to know you. It would be a wonderful little thing in my life." This is, "Cry out for discernment!"

Notice what verse four says, "*⁴ Search for them as you would for silver; seek them like hidden treasures.* In the margin of your **Bible write, "Priority, intentionality."** Knowing or seeing God clearly means it's a priority. You do it with intentionality. You don't do it when you have time for it, and other things are done. If I told you there is \$1 million buried in your back yard.

How many of you would just hang out for a few days at home before you started searching for it?

I tell you what I'd do. I'd call my friends. I'd call my family. I'd work out negotiations. You can get this part of it. God says if you want to see Him, if you want to be transformed, if you want to experience grace, intake of His word, the teachable spirit. You cry-out passionately in prayer, and you make it the kind of priority you would with the same passion that you would look for treasure in your back yard. What did verse 5 say?

What's the result of those four things? *Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God.*

Seeing God with 20/20 vision is discovering the knowledge of God. Did you notice? It says, "You will do it." A teacher, a pastor, a preacher can't do it for you. You will discover, because you dug, because you cried out. We got a whole generation of people that are getting their spiritual diet second and third hand. I listened to this guy. I read this thing. I listened to this podcast and all that is fine and good but it's no substitute for you, God, your heart, this book, your soul crying-out. Because when wisdom and the true knowledge of God comes, it's birthed in your heart. There's one final thing we need to look at today:

3. How do you know if you are seeing God as He is or not?

Answer: J.I. Packer's four evidences of a real knowledge of God

Four Indicators of "Seeing God As He Longs To Be Seen"

1. Those who know God have great energy for God. When you have an accurate view of God, you have energy to get into His word. When you see things that are wrong in the church, you have energy to lovingly fix them. When you see people in need, you have energy to move in for God. You have energy to prayer. He is a priority in your life, in the midst of a fallen world. If you have energy for God, you have a pretty accurate view of Him.
2. Those who know God have great thoughts of God. When you know God – there are times in prayer, you will hear yourself talking about His majesty, and His glory, and His righteousness, and His holiness, and His purity. You will sit in quiet silence, and at times be overwhelmed with His greatness. You will have the desire to learn about His greatness. You will have great thoughts of God. He will not be your buddy. He will not be Santa Claus. He will not be your self-help genie. He will be God, and you will be creature.
3. Those who know God show great boldness for God.

When you have an accurate view of God, in a fallen world, and you have to decide – what does everyone think, or what does God think? People who really know God are bold for God. The greatest evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with gifts, it's boldness. Peter and John were untrained and uneducated men but they were recognized as having been

with Jesus. Why? 'because they went against the whole establishment. Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego – bold. They did not bow down. There were not politically correct. If we burn, we burn.' If you are bold about your convictions, and you don't really care, reverently and lovingly, what other people think, you have an accurate view of God. We really need to understand this one or were going to lose a whole generation of our kids to this world. You better think long and hard about the priorities in your lives and the message you are sending your kids.

4. Those who know God have great contentment in God.

When you have an accurate view that God is all knowing, and all powerful, and He is sovereign, and He is good, and He is for you, you can have tribulation and you're not uptight, and you're not anxious, and you're not worrying, and you're not on the phone all day, "Oh, what about this? What about this? What am I going to do about this?" You say there's tribulation, it's a struggle. The king of the universe, with all His resources, who gave His son for me and dwells in me, will work this out. It is hard, and I have some ups and downs, but I have a peace that surpasses understanding. Those who have great contentment in God are revealing they have an accurate view of God.

Personal and practical application:

1. Look up and study the passages given in the notes to see God.
2. Begin to ask God to reveal Himself to you.
3. Meditate for three minutes on "who God really is" each time before you pray this week.
4. Read *The Knowledge of the Holy* by Tozer or *Knowing God* by Packer.

Are you a follower of Jesus Christ? I mean really are you following legitimately? You need to know where we are going as a church. We are going to be calling on families to act like Christians and follow Jesus instead of this world. We are going to call on you to put God first before much lesser things. We are going to be calling your children to follow Jesus and not this culture. We are going to put much more of an emphasis on knowing God and being impressed by God then being impressed with Newark Naz.

S. I. McMillen, in his book "None of These Diseases," tells a story of a young woman who wanted to go to college, but her heart sank when she read the question on the application blank that asked, "Are you a leader?" Being both honest and conscientious, she wrote, "No," and returned the application, expecting the worst. To her surprise, she received this letter from the college: "Dear Applicant: A study of the application forms reveals that this year our college will have 1,452 new leaders. We are accepting you because we feel it is imperative that they have at least one follower." Hunger for God -- Be His follower – Don't settle for anything less.