JANUARY 21, 2018

BE ONE
Essential Truths

SESSION 2:
Who is God?
PART 1

BETHANY CHURCH
Today's Question: Who Is God?

1. God's Is _______ Us

1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 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. 3 So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.” 4 When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” 5 “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” 6 Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. Exodus 3:1-6

2. God Is _______ Us

7 The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” 11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” 12 And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.” 13 Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” 14 God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’ ” 15 God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ ” This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.” Exodus 3:7-15

Next Steps:

• Complete Session 2, Who Is God (Part 1) in our Essential Truths Series
• Connect with someone in our 10-week journey through these Truths.
• Check out bethanychurch.com for more details.
Who is God?

God is beyond us.

God is with us.

God is Trinity.

Who is God? It’s a difficult question, and many people would answer it differently. Religions all over the world have proposed thousands of definitions throughout the entire scope of human history. How can we possibly sort through all of these solutions and find one that we can accept as true and reliable?

Fortunately for us, God did not leave us to figure all of this out on our own. God has reached out to reveal Himself to us. We Christians believe that God has revealed Himself to us as His Son, Jesus, and in His written Word that we call the “Bible”. Later, in our session entitled, “Why the Bible,” we will discuss this revelation more fully. We will ask the question, “Why should we trust the Bible?” But for now, we simply make the point that God has not left us to our own devices. We do not have to define God because God has already defined Himself. He has already revealed Himself in the way that He wants us to know Him.

In this story of the Bible, then, we see a God who is both Beyond Us and With Us, and these two aspects of God are powerfully revealed in the rich image of Trinity. In this session, we will discuss the God who is Beyond Us and With Us, and in the next session we will discuss God as Trinity.

Fortunately for us, God did not leave us to figure all of this out on our own. God has reached out to reveal Himself to us.
1. God is Beyond Us

On one level, then, we see that God is beyond us. Or, to use a more precise term, we say that God is “transcendent.” Although God reveals Himself to us in words and images that we can understand, we know that, apart from this revelation, God would remain incomprehensible to us. His greatness and His beauty would defy our meager human intelligence and our paltry human speech. God would forever remain an indecipherable mystery, were it not for His gracious decision to disclose Himself to us, accommodating Himself to our human abilities.

In the story of the Bible, there is never any confusion about the fact that God is God, and we are not Him. He is entirely other. The Bible therefore rejects any notion suggesting that we humans are essentially divine in our nature. We do not contain a “spark of the divine”, and we do not become part of the divine when we die. God alone is God. Consider these words spoken to an Old Testament saint named Job:

“Do you have an arm like God’s, and can your voice thunder like his? Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty.”

– Job 40:9-10

Job could only remain silent. The distinction between he and his Maker was self-evident.

And yet God does in fact accommodate Himself and reveal Himself to us. Even in this self-disclosure, however, we see a God who remains above and beyond us. Several themes in the Bible point to this conclusion:

1. God is Creator

Before anything was, He is. He has created everything from nothing. In the first book of the Bible, called Genesis, we read a summary of the creation story. It begins this way:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” (Genesis 1:1-2)

Then God speaks and the world comes into being. We don’t get the scientific detail about all of this. We just get the big idea, that God made it happen. Human beings are not just accidents of chemistry and biology. God wanted us here, and we have a place in His order. As the Book of Genesis says:
“So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)

Or, as the Psalmist puts it:

“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.” (Psalm 8:3-5)

God is Sovereign

Everything must bow in submission to Him. Everything and everyone owes their existence to Him. Consider this colorful image spoken through the prophet, Isaiah:

“As one reaches into a nest, so my hand reached for the wealth of the nations; as people gather abandoned eggs, so I gathered all the countries; not one flapped a wing, or opened its mouth to chirp.” (Isaiah 10:14)

Ultimately, He will judge all of creation by the standard of His own holiness. The writer of Ecclesiastes summarizes his wisdom this way:

“Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

God is absolutely perfect in all of his qualities

He is, for example, All-Knowing (omniscient), All-Powerful (omnipotent), Always Present (omnipresent) and Holy (without imperfection, evil or defect). The Bible is rich with these thoughts that permeate story after story. Consider just a few of these many passages:

“Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.” (Psalm 145:7)

“Yours, LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.” (1 Chronicles 29:11)

“How can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?” declares the LORD. “Do not I fill heaven and earth?” declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 23:24)

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.” (Isaiah 6:3)

God is Eternal

He is not bound by time. He has no beginning and He has no end. The Psalmist put this truth into poetry:
“Do not take me away, my God, in the midst of my days; your years go on through all generations. In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.” (Psalm 102:24-27)

And there is so much more...

So far, we have mentioned just a few of the qualities that the Bible mentions when it describes God. His majesty and His glory far surpass our abilities to understand or describe Him. And yet, the scriptures provide ample reason to worship Him, as He who is above and beyond us.

2. God is With Us

The good news is, however, that God has not abandoned us to figure all this out on our own. He remains a God for us and with us. Bible scholars therefore speak of God being “immanent” as well as being “transcendent”.

God is Personal

The fact that God is “with us” is most powerfully stated in terms of relationship. The Bible clearly teaches that God is personal, meaning that we can enter into a relationship with Him. He is not some impersonal force or some ill-defined power of nature. Rather God reveals Himself as a person with a name, whom we can know and love.

“I AM”

For example, when God called Moses to lead His people out of slavery in Egypt, Moses at first hesitated. Would the people believe him? Would the people accept him as God’s spokesperson? So, Moses asks God directly:

“So I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.” (Exodus 3:13-15)

Our English translations of the Bible use the phrase, “I AM”, as this name of God revealed to Moses. In the original Hebrew language, however, this name is a single word, consisting of four letters in the Hebrew alphabet. In
English, these four letters sound like our letters, “YHWH”, and so we often see the English translation, “Yahweh” to indicate this name of God.

**He Is for Us**

This revealed name says a lot to us about the God who has revealed Himself. It says that God is a person, an “I AM,” who wants to be in relationship with us. It says that “He is” for us, that He wants to lead us, guide us, protect us, and strengthen us through the difficult journey of life. And it says that “He Is” always and forever there for us. He was there before us and He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He does not move, and He does not change His love for us, His commitment to us or His covenant with us.

God is Love

Furthermore, God’s everlasting commitment to us and to His entire creation is summarized in the simple word, “Love”. The apostle John says explicitly:

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:7-10)

In this brief passage, then, John seems to be summarizing the entire story of the Bible. This story describes God’s unrelenting work to redeem and restore His creation from the power of evil, at first by calling the people of Israel, and then, through Jesus, by extending that work to the entire world. In his Gospel, for example, John says:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16-17)

This fact that Jesus comes into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it, is God’s fullest declaration that He is with us.

**Conclusion**

These then are two fundamental truths that the Bible teaches us about God. If someone were to ask us, “Who Is God?”, we can respond with confidence that God is above us, and God is with us. In our next session, we will examine how both truths are demonstrated in the powerful image of Trinity. Until next time, then, may God reward you and bless you as you continue your spiritual journey.
Discussion Questions

After completing Session 2, Who Is God, Part 1, you can use the following questions to encourage discussion within your group.

Who is God?

God is beyond us.
God is with us.
God is Trinity.

Opening

Why do you think that most people in the world, both now and in history, believe in some form of divine being?

Going Deeper

1. God Is Beyond Us
   ✓ God is Creator
     • If God created everything, that means that God created you and that He wants you here; He has a place for you in His creation. What does this truth tell you about your own self-worth to God?
     • What does it mean that God created everything from nothing; that He spoke and the world came into being?
   ✓ God is Sovereign
     • What do you think of the idea that God is sovereign, the supreme ruler of everything and that you must bow in submission to Him?
     • What does it mean that God will judge all of creation by the standard of His own holiness?
   ✓ God is absolutely perfect in all of his qualities
     • How can the truth of God knowing everything and being everywhere present affect our relationship with Him, especially how we talk (pray) with Him?
     • Discuss with the group your reactions to God being All-Powerful and Holy.
   ✓ God is Eternal
     • The Bible begins its description of God’s creative act with the words, “In the beginning God.” What does that verse tell us about God’s existence before the creation of our universe and everything in it?
     • Why is it hard for us to grasp the concept that God is not bound by time and that He has no beginning and end? In what ways can we draw both comfort and strength from this truth about God?

2. God is With Us
   ✓ Can you look back and see any situations where you believe God has intervened and helped you or guided you, not leaving you to “figure out life on your own?” If so, what?
   ✓ What do you think of the idea that the creator, sovereign, eternal God wants to enter into a relationship with you?
   ✓ How do you believe God leads, guides, protects, and strengthens those who follow Him through the difficult journey of life?
   ✓ How does Jesus’ death on the cross, without a doubt, declare that God is with us?

Next Steps

Spend time this week in prayer, turning difficult circumstances in your life over to God. He is above us and beyond us, which means that His ways are not our ways. And, He is with us, which means that He has not left us to face these circumstances alone.