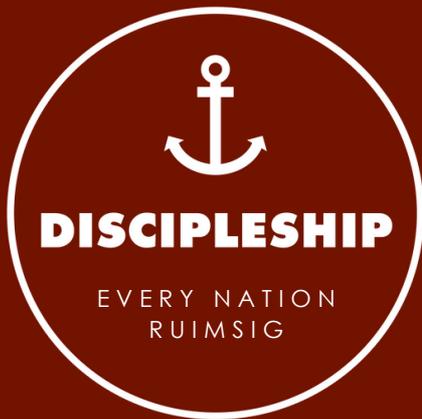
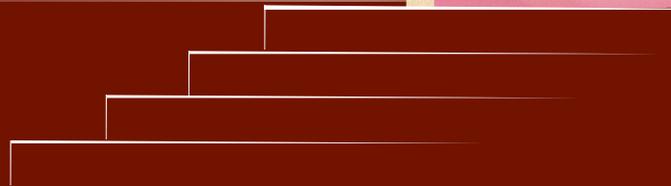




THE ATTRIBUTES OF *God*

Unveiling the Creator
of the Universe.



ENCOUNTER GOD SERMON SERIES
SMALL GROUP MATERIAL

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

UNVEILING THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE
SMALL GROUP MATERIAL



EVERY NATION
R U I M S I G

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

There are two reasons we are doing this study. Firstly, to make God known to the reader and secondly to set ourselves free to reveal God to the world. In short, we want to know God and to make Him known. We want to encounter God and impact the world.

As we examine God, attribute by attribute, it would be tempting to imagine that God is compartmentalized. For instance, we could imagine that sometimes He is being merciful and sometimes He's being just. But this is not true. God is whole and fully Himself all the time. At every moment He is being all the things we will discuss. There is no conflict between His love and His holiness, or between His wrath and His gentleness. God is all of Himself, all of the time. Even though there are certain attributes that may seem to contradict one another, this is not so. God is great enough and wise enough to bring every part of Himself to bear on every situation. For example, in Christ, God exhibited His love and His holiness at the same time. At the cross He displayed His anger toward sin, brought justice for all and at the same time had mercy and grace on everyone. Knowing the full spectrum of God's attributes allows us to cooperate with Him fully in every situation. It also allows us to recognize that which is not like Him. It allows us to see when we have misunderstood Him or where we have exalted other things or ungodly attributes above Him: it allows us to exalt God fully, and resist idolatry.

God hates idolatry, not because it degrades Him but because it degrades us. God doesn't need us to feel good about Himself, in fact, He doesn't need anything to feel good about Himself. He is complete in Himself. Whether we worship Him, or not, doesn't diminish or enhance Him. He is who He is and nothing we do or say can change that. However, He made us as the pinnacle of His creation with the job description of overseers of that creation. We were designed to receive His love, wisdom and holiness and dispense that to the earth through the delegated authority He gave us. We were to govern the earth as His ambassadors, emissaries of His grace. To worship anything, including a false understanding of God, is to place that ungodly thing above us, and to make ourselves subservient to it. Only YHWH is qualified to be our God and only mankind has been equipped to dispense God's love, wisdom and holiness to

creation. When we give up our position under God over creation to anything, then all of creation is plunged into futility. The created order is inverted. God hates idolatry not because it degrades Him, but because it degrades us and plunges all creation into darkness and chaos. To know God as He is, allows us to worship Him for who He is and gives all the world opportunity to see things in their right order.

Let's look at who God is. An attribute of God is something that is intrinsic to Him. That is, it is not something He does, but something He is. We can always rely on God to exhibit these things. God always acts like Himself, and he never suspends one of His attributes in order to exercise another. All of these things are true of God all of the time.

1 GOD IS THREE-IN-ONE

2 GOD'S ASECITY

3 GOD IS ETERNAL AND INFINITE

4 GOD IS GOOD

5 GOD IS HOLY

6 GOD IS GRACIOUS

7 GOD IS SOVEREIGN

8 GOD IS FAITHFUL

9 GOD IS IMMUTABLE

10 GOD IS IMMANENT

11 GOD IS LOVE

12 GOD IS MISSIONAL

WEEK 1

G O D I S T H R E E - I N - O N E

Genesis 1:1–3 (ESV)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. 3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)

18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Deuteronomy 6:4–5 (ESV)

4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

God is unique amongst all the gods for two reasons. Firstly, He's unique because He's real and not an idea fabricated by mankind. Secondly, He's unique because He's three in one – He's a trinity. This is the most fundamental truth about God. He is in relationship with Himself and has been long before He created us. God exists in perfect love: the Father is loving the Son and Spirit with perfect love and complete satisfaction. In turn the Son and the Spirit are in perfect love with the Father the Spirit and the Son, respectively. Every good emotion, thought and desire flow between them, binding them together in absolute unity and joy. Out of this perfect union, they created the universe, in order to invite us into the perfect love, joy and peace that they enjoy within themselves.

At creation we see God the Father being present “in the beginning,” we see the Spirit hovering over the water, and we hear the Word (the Son) being spoken into the chaos: “Let there be light!” With perfect cooperation the trinity brought forth creation.

The word for God in the first chapter of Genesis is the word Elohim, which is plural, letting us know that God in His trinity created the universe – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When Jesus commissioned us to change the world by making disciples, He tells us to baptise is present at the recreation or rebirth of humans as they become disciples and are baptised into the Kingdom of God. To be born again is to embrace the new life given to us by Jesus. This new life comes from the Father, by the Son through the Spirit.

Just as God is plural, a trinity, so He also is absolutely One. Throughout the Bible He is careful to insist that Israel and the Church know that there is only one God, not three. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one with each other and within that Oneness are distinct personalities: three in one. This is a mystery that is hard to understand, but then, a God who can be totally understood is a God that is like us and too small and powerless to be our saviour or our Lord. God is both One and Three at the same time. The trinitarian unity of God is majestic and awe-inspiring and somewhat beyond our intellectual grasp, but it is this bigness and beauty that gives us comfort – God is more than we can comprehend and better than we have ever imagined.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

- Because one of the most fundamental truths about God is that He is in relationship with Himself, we can know that He highly values relationship, and anything He does, or builds, will have relationship as one of its priorities. To build with God well, means that we must build well relationally. We must learn the art of loving each other earnestly, forgiving each other quickly, and treating one another with honour and grace.
- We are created in God's image and so we can expect some aspects of the trinity to be evident in the make-up of humans. The Bible alludes to the fact that every human has a physical body that functions in the physical universe, a soul that allows us to relate at a deeper level to one another and a spirit that allows us to be in relationship with God. To be human is to be body, soul and spirit. Consequently, to live well, means to give our bodies, souls and spirits what they need to thrive. It means being good stewards of our physical beings, of our human relationships and thought life and, most importantly, our relationship with God.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

How would you explain the trinity of God to someone?

What about God's trinity intrigues you the most? Why?

As a human who is body, soul and spirit, how can you live well with God and well with others?

A PRAYER TO PRAY:

Lord, help me to understand You more. Help me to relate to you in your fulness – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Show me more of Your glory. Let me see You more and know You better.

WEEK 2

G O D ' S A S E I T Y

Acts 17:24–25 (ESV)

24 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, 25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

God doesn't need our worship, He doesn't need our service, our giving, or for that matter anything about us. In fact, God doesn't need us at all. God is absolutely complete and whole within Himself. This quality of God's is known as His aseity, from the Latin *a se*, which means from oneself. In other words, God didn't come from anything, He is self-derived or self-originated. He owes nothing to anything and is sovereign over all. All things owe their existence to Him. He defines everything but is defined by nothing.

This can make God seem somewhat unconnected, unfeeling or remote, but this is not the case. Although God doesn't need us, He most certainly wants us. He is committed to all that He brought forth and most especially He is committed to us. This commitment, however, is not out of obligation, it is from joy. God is faithful to all He has made because it brings joy to the universe. God is faithful to us because He wants us to feel His love, know His glory and be like Him. In short, His love for us is supremely self-less. It is not about Him getting something from the relationship it is about Him giving what is needed in the relationship.

God doesn't need our worship, our service, or our giving. We need to worship Him, we need to serve and we need to give in order to be connected to Him and to be like Him. Being connected to Him allows us to fulfil the image of God that has been imprinted on us when He created us. To worship Him, serve like Him and give like Him satisfies the most fundamental truth about what it means to be human. Said another way, we do these things because this is what it means to be fully human – they fulfil our created design and give God glory. When God is glorified all of creation finds its purpose, striving and strife cease, and everything finds true rest in Him.

This attribute about God is extremely liberating. It means that we can't disappoint Him or harm Him, but we can mirror back to Him, who He is and thereby participate in His joy and delight. In relationship with Him, we can't lose, we can only gain.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US?

- We are supremely loved with a self-less and perfect love that comes from God. Learning to live in this love is one of the primary purposes of our lives on earth. Learning to give this love comes quickly once we have learned to be loved. To love God and others in response to His love for us, is to fulfill our purpose as human beings.
- We serve God and others in response to the way God serves us and gives Himself to us. We follow Christ's example, who, while on earth, gave up the privileges of being God in order to initiate a relationship with us and to serve us (Phil 2:5-8). Jesus served creation not so that He could get something but so that we could be saved. So, we follow Christ in serving each other that we may all come to a greater knowledge of Him.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

How did the concept of God's aseity impact you?

How does a person live in God's love and to give God's love, in a way that is authentic and relatable to others?

Do you have any questions about God's aseity? How do you think God can answer these questions for you?

A PRAYER TO PRAY:

Lord, give me grace to live in Your love more completely. Deliver me from fear and selfishness and show me how to be more like You. Let Your love be evident to others in all my words and actions.

WEEK 3

GOD IS ETERNAL AND INFINITE

Psalm 90:2 (ESV)

2 Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

“God has no beginning, end, or succession of moments in his own being, and He sees all time equally vividly, yet God sees events in time and acts in time.” Wayne Grudem

Revelation 22:13 (ESV)

13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

1 Kings 8:27 (ESV)

... Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you...

There is no beginning and end to God. He is infinite in every way. He is eternal and exists outside of time. He didn't begin and will never end. All of time is equally available to Him – our past, present and futures are clear and unobstructed to His sight. His size is infinite – He fills all things and beyond – nothing is hidden from Him. His attributes are never ending. That is, His wisdom, love, holiness, goodness, justice, mercy and every other characteristic will never be exhausted and, we will never get to the end of our discovery of Him.

Because God is not limited by space and time and because He is immense beyond our wildest imaginations much of who He is, is outside of our ability to comprehend. We can only know of God that which He has chosen to reveal to us. He chooses to reveal Himself to us through His Word, and this self-revelation has culminated in His greatest unveiling when the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ.

Because God cannot be fully comprehended by the human mind, faith is

required in our relationship with Him. Though we may not always understand, we can always believe in His goodness, faithfulness and sovereignty. Though we will never fully grasp all that God is, we are invited by Him into a vibrant, growing relationship with Him, in which we will always be learning. This journey of discovery is the great delight and privilege of all mankind and is one of the chief ends of our existence.

In contrast to us, His limitlessness allows Him to fully know all of creation. He knows and understands you better than you know and understand yourself. As the psalmist says, our thoughts are an open book to Him (Ps 139). He knows what we will say and do long before we put these things into action. Our motives and emotions are also as plain as day to Him – much more than they are to us. In fact, the best person to explain you to you, is God. As we walk with God, we not only come to know more of Him, we also come to understand ourselves better. Emotional intelligence, healthy self-awareness, excellence in building relationships, a strong moral compass and purity of thinking are some of the characteristics of maturity in Christ. These come as we know God better and allow Him to teach us about ourselves.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US?

- God knows everything and therefore knows us completely. He as the Holy Spirit, is diligent to direct us into righteousness, and consequently into joy-filled-living. He leads us away from temptation and into holiness. We can trust Him to lead us and teach us. Responding to Holy Spirit's conviction and direction will make for the best possible life.
- We are designed for God's presence and the pursuit of God and the consequent delight in discovering His magnificence and perfection is one of the chief ends of all mankind. The other chief end is that we glorify Him (Shorter Westminster Catechism, first article). Our enjoyment of Him, glorifies Him as does our obedience to what He has said.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

What about God's infinity inspires you or brings joy to you?

What part of this attribute of God do you think is important for people around you to know? How will you tell them?

If God's primary way of revealing Himself is through His Word, with Jesus being the ultimate Word of God. How will you pursue an ongoing and ever deepening relationship with Him through encountering Him in the Bible?

A PRAYER TO PRAY:

Lord, help me to understand more of you every day and help me become more like You as I discover You. In this discovery, fill me with joy and allow my delight to flow over as I tell others about what You have done for me and what You mean to me.

WEEK 4

GOD IS GOOD

Psalm 145:8–9 (ESV)

8 The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 The Lord is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has made.

“The goodness of God is that which disposes Him to be kind, cordial, benevolent and full of good will toward men. He is tenderhearted and of quick sympathy, and His unfailing attitude toward all moral beings is open, frank and friendly. By His nature He is inclined to bestow blessedness and He takes holy pleasure in the happiness of His people,” A.W. Tozer.

Psalm 118:1 (ESV)

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
for his steadfast love endures forever!

Matthew 5:44–45 (ESV)

44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

James 1:17 (ESV)

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

God is absolutely good. There is nothing but goodness in Him. In fact, as creator, He is the definer of good and the standard by which every other 'goodness' needs to be measured. That is, in order for something to be good, it must be like God. And because nothing can be like God by its own effort, for something to be good, it must come from God or be filled with God. As humans we don't have capacity to be good like God, but He has made a way for us to be filled with Him as we are born again and therefore to have His goodness in us. To be born again

is God's work of grace in our lives, allowing us to surrender the leadership of our lives to Christ and acknowledge Him as the only way to be restored to relationship with God. It facilitates us getting a new nature that is good and pre-disposed toward righteousness (Romans 6:18). In Christ we become new people and the goodness of God flows from us the more we yield to His presence in us.

Another aspect of God's goodness is that He is always thinking good thoughts about His children. He delights in our well-being and He longs for us to prosper and be in good health. He genuinely wants the best for us. His holiness makes Him impossible to approach when there is unholiness in us, but His goodness and love has made a way for us to be with Him through Christ. We can trust that God always welcomes us joyfully into His presence and is looking upon us with favour and kindness. His plans for us are good, better than we've ever imagined. And His demeanour toward us is always loving and gentle. In short, God is having a good day, every day, and you are included in His enjoyment of it. Joy, laughter and fun are part of the kingdom and an integral part of the Christian life. To enjoy God and what He has given you, speaks to the world that He is indeed good. To enjoy life in a Godly way glorifies Him and to enjoy your relationship with Him reveals His goodness to the world around you.

We can expect good from God, because He is good.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US?

- To be a truly good person means to be in a loving relationship with God, with our actions and attitudes governed by that love relationship. It means we are yielded to, and filled with, God's presence.
- To be good to others means to be Godly toward them. It means to honour them as objects of God's love just as you are an object of God's love. It means to behave toward them as God behaves towards you. As Jesus said, "a new commandment I give to you, love one another as I have loved you (John 13:34)." This is impossible without God's grace, but we are never without God's grace.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

According to what you have read, what is the correct way to evaluate whether something is good or not?

How has the concept of God's goodness caused you to change the way you think about Him?

How can joy and fun act as witnesses of God's goodness to your friends and family?

A PRAYER TO PRAY:

Lord, I am so grateful for Your goodness. Thank You that You are always good to me and for me. I am delighted that Your plans for me are for good, to give me a great future in You. Help me to notice the good You are continually doing and to find joy in it.

WEEK 5

GOD IS HOLY

Psalm 99:9 (ESV)

9 Exalt the Lord our God,
and worship at his holy mountain;
for the Lord our God is holy!

Hebrews 12:14 (ESV)

14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

1 Peter 1:16 (ESV)

16 since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Leviticus 20:26 (ESV)

26 You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.

1 Timothy 6:14–16 (ESV)

14 to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

God is holy. He is absolutely pure, undefiled, and uncorruptible. He is described as dwelling in unapproachable light. That is, His moral purity, physical beauty and complete integrity are like an impenetrable light that radiates from His being. There is nothing that comes close to His magnificence. God is holy not by virtue of how He behaves, but by virtue of who He is. Holiness is His nature. He is without blemish, completely whole and right. His responses come from His nature and therefore His responses are always perfect and fully appropriate for every situation. God is perfect in every way.

God's holiness is not found in any other creature. God is completely one of a kind. If at any time unholiness was to be found in Him He would cease to be who He is – and this cannot happen – therefore nothing unholy may enter into God's presence. The only way for something to become holy is if God chooses to impart (transmit) or impute (credit) His holiness to that person or thing. To be holy that thing or person must be set aside from the ordinary to be a representative of God on earth. Its purpose would then be to reveal God to creation.

God chose the ancient nation of Israel to be set apart from the other nations so that it could represent Him to them. He chose them so that they could be holy unto Him. They were to maintain their holiness through the sacrifice of animals, whose blood would temporarily cleanse them from sin. Unfortunately, Israel consistently took on the practices and beliefs of the other nations around them and in so doing they lost their capacity to show God to those who didn't know Him. They rejected the holiness God wanted to give them. Jesus came to do what Israel couldn't. He came to reveal God to the world and through His blood, to make us holy. In turn we become set apart to reveal God to the world. We become holy as He is holy.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US?

- God's holiness is awe-inspiring and terrifying. Daniel, Ezekiel and John fell trembling before God when they saw it (Daniel 8:17; Ezekiel 1:28; Revelation 1:17). Isaiah, while seeing God's holiness, realised how hopelessly inadequate He was in light of God's perfection and cried out: "oh woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:5)." We were created for God's presence and intrinsically every human longs for majesty, wholeness and beauty – we long to partake of God's holiness. But without Christ, holiness is impossible to attain. Through the sacrifice Christ made of His own body, we are made holy, washed, purified, made whole by the blood of the Lamb.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

How have you thought about holiness in the past and as what you read today changed your perspective?

What inspires you about God's holiness?

How will you cooperate with what God wants to do through you as one of His holy people on earth?

A PRAYER TO PRAY:

Lord, I worship You in the beauty of Your holiness! Thank You that You have chosen me to be holy with You. Help me to cooperate with what You are doing on the earth by representing You to those around me.

WEEK 6

GOD IS GRACIOUS

Exodus 34:6 (ESV)

6 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)

16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Ephesians 2:8 (ESV)

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

John 1:17 (ESV)

17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

"Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines Him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving." A.W. Tozer

We don't deserve anything from God and yet He gives us so much. His nature is to be gracious, that is, to shower upon us gifts that we haven't earned. Long before we ever knew Christ, God was bringing rain to our gardens, sun to our holidays, wisdom to our decisions. So often we imagined that it was us who had cleverly organised the good things in our lives, yet it was always God.

The biggest gift He has given us is the gift of salvation through Christ. We can't earn it, we don't deserve it, we couldn't make it happen without Him. We are saved by grace...but it doesn't end there. We continue to live in Christ by grace. The good things we do as Christians are empowered by His presence in us. That is, He gives us the wisdom, courage and ability to do good things. In all of our activities we can rely on God to give us what we need to do the right and

effective thing. As Isaiah said, when we wait on Him, we rise on wings as eagles, we run and don't become weary, we walk and don't faint (Isaiah 40:31). Also, we can expect God's power in us to give us abilities that are beyond our own natural ones. We are not limited to what we can achieve in our own strength. We can rest in God's grace, knowing that He is opening doors for us and giving us capacity beyond our years or experience.

God's grace toward us is a like a flow of resources and ability that is unearned but dependable. God isn't gracious in fits and starts, He's always gracious. Grace is His continual attitude toward you. The only thing that can stop it is our pride (James 4:6). Pride is that thing that says we don't need God, or that we are able to accomplish things on our own without God. It is that thing that makes us erroneously feel that God is unnecessary, or we are sufficient without Him.

Separated from God we can do nothing, united to Him we can accomplish more than we've ever imagined. Said another way: His grace alone sets our limits.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US?

- God empowers us to do good things through His presence in us. This is His grace in action in us. We can rely on Him to give us greater internal capacity for good than we have on our own. This means that the right response in every situation is always within our grasp. In essence, we never have to sin again. Of course, we may end up sinning, but then we can simply repent, receive His forgiveness and continue receiving His grace for good works and right living.
- God organises our environments for Kingdom success. This is His grace in action in the world. We can rely on Him to direct our paths and steer our lives in the right direction. We can expect good things to come to us. And even when good things seem to be withheld from us, we can know that, because God is gracious, anything withheld from us will end up for our good and other, better things are on their way.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

How has God's grace been manifesting in your life? That is, what good things has God been doing for you and through you?

How would you define God's grace to someone else?

Are there any areas of pride and self-sufficiency in your life that could be hindering God's grace in your life? How can you remedy this?

A PRAYER TO PRAY:

Thank You, Lord, for Your grace in my life. Help me to recognise what you are doing in me and in my environment. Help me to show others how Your grace is available to them also.

WEEK 7

GOD IS SOVEREIGN

Psalm 135:6 (ESV)

6 Whatever the Lord pleases, he does,
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and all deeps.

Daniel 4:34b–35 (ESV)

...for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
35 all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
 and none can stay his hand
or say to him, "What have you done?"

Hebrews 1:3b (ESV)

... he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Isaiah 55:11 (ESV)

11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
 but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

God is sovereign, He is ruler of everything. He does what He wants, when He wants, how He wants. And because He is good, this is a good thing.

God being sovereign implies that He is absolutely free: unfettered and unhindered in doing what He wants. God is not under the control of anything, not even for a split second. This reassures us that He is always free to bring His full nature to bear in every situation. He can always be His full, loving, merciful, just and holy self. He is completely unhindered and therefore able to do as He chooses. He cannot be manipulated, coerced or forced to do anything He has not already decided to do.

For God to be sovereign He must be all-knowing. If there was one piece of knowledge somewhere that God did not have, then in that place, the entity that held that knowledge would be in charge of that moment, and He would not be governing. So, when the Bible declares God to be sovereign it implicitly declares Him omniscient (all-knowing) at the same time.

Just as omniscience and complete freedom are implied by God's sovereignty, so is His all-encompassing authority and power (His omnipotence). In being sovereign God holds all authority and exercises absolute power at any time He chooses. He is the most powerful being in existence. God always knows everything, always holds all-power and is always completely free – beholden to no one. He is sovereign over all the affairs of the universe and over all the affairs of mankind.

God rules by decree. His sovereignty is revealed by the supremacy of His Word. What He says is final, His Word does not return to Him void (Isaiah 55:11) and what He has said always comes to pass. The most reliable commodity in the world is God's Word. It can always be relied upon because it never fails. If God said it, then it's true. In fact, truth is defined by whether God said it or not. For something to be true, God must have spoken it. Our entire universe exists because God uttered it into existence. And all that we can feel, touch, see and know is upheld by His Word (Hebrews 3:1). He governs this world and us in light of His nature. We can be sure that every decision He makes and action He takes are dictated by His love and wisdom.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US?

- Mankind's free will does not refute God's sovereignty. Our free will only exists to the extent that God has willed it and is limited to the things that He has given us responsibility for. We are free within the world that God has given us stewardship over – and we are accountable to Him for that stewardship. It was and is His good pleasure to give us dominion under Him over the earth. In so doing He remains ruler of all and supreme sovereign over all.
- If the world is in a mess, it is not because God has made it so, rather because it is because we have ill-used the freedom He gave us. God's sovereignty means that ultimately, He will restore all things to the good way He wants it and destroy all evil. Jesus' death and resurrection offers us a way to be on the right side of this restoration.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

How does the concept of God's sovereignty make you feel?

How does the reality of God's sovereignty alter the way a person lives their lives?

What do your friends think about the sovereignty of God and do you think their concept is correct?

A PRAYER TO PRAY:

Lord, thank You that You are in charge of my life and thank You that you are in charge of the world. I receive Your peace as I remember that You are moving all of my life and all of the world toward a magnificent, Jesus-filled future.

WEEK 8

GOD IS FAITHFUL

2 Timothy 2:11–13 (ESV)

11 The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

12 if we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we deny him, he also will deny us;

13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself.

Hebrews 10:23 (ESV)

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

God is not just desirous of relationship with people. He is committed to those relationships through agreements, covenants and promises. From the start of the Bible we see God making commitments to mankind. He makes an agreement with mankind to give them every seed bearing plant for food and defines the extent of their freedom (Genesis 1:29; 2:15-17), He institutes the covenant of marriage (Genesis 2:24), He makes a covenant with Noah that the seasons will always continue (Genesis 8:22), He covenants with Abraham to bless him and to bless all the nations of the earth through him (Genesis 15:1-6), He made a covenant with Israel at mount Sinai in which he defined how Israel was to be in relationship with Him (Deuteronomy) and finally He made a covenant with all of mankind through Jesus to rescue us from our sin and corruption as we accept Christ's work on the cross.

Throughout the Old Testament, God outlined and defined how He would relate to us and how we should relate to Him. Every agreement or covenant that God made with His people consisted of instructions as to what His part would be and what our part would be. Usually, He promised to watch over and bless us and in turn He asked us to walk righteously with Him and with each other. He also often outlined for us the negative consequences of walking away from His covenant

and therefore out from His blessing. Through the Bible we see God being relentlessly faithful to what He has said. However, this has not been true of any person or nation. We have all fallen short of the relationship. We have violated His trust, scorned His love and ignored His desires. In short, we have been relentlessly unfaithful.

God's remedy is mind-blowingly generous and jaw-droppingly gracious. Through Christ He takes all the consequences of our disobedience and unfaithfulness and bases His promise to bless us, not on our obedience, but on His faithfulness. He guarantees the promises through His own blood. This means that now we are accepted into His presence regardless of our behaviour. And the beauty of the arrangement is that in His presence we are changed into new creatures whose behaviour is pleasing to Him.

Through the ultimate agreement, which supersedes all other agreements, and the corresponding sacrifice Jesus made for us, we are reconciled to God eternally.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US?

- Everyone of God's promises can be trusted. God has proven Himself faithful even to His own detriment. That is, in Christ He suffered in order to be true to what He had said. He promised to redeem us all and He did it, even though it incurred great pain for Jesus. In addition, the resurrection of Christ proves that God has the power to do everything He has said. Nothing, not even death can defy Him. We can be confident that God will always and can always do what He said.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

What promises can you think of in the Bible that are relevant to you? Write them here and memorise them so that you can hold onto them when you are discouraged or facing tough times. God will be faithful to them.

A PRAYER TO PRAY:

Lord help me to believe what You have said. Give me courage to respond to Your promises with my obedience. Show me how to be faithful as You are faithful. Allow me to reveal to others how faithful you are.

WEEK 9

GOD IS IMMUTABLE

James 1:17 (ESV)

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)

14 if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

“All that God is He has always been, and all that He has been and is He will ever be.” A.W. Tozer

Hebrews 13:8 (ESV)

8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

God is wonderfully stable and complete in His perfection – He is not developing or progressing as there is no improvement that would make Him any better than He is now. This quality of God's is called His immutability. It means He doesn't change.

Because God is perfect, He has no need to change. Because He is perfectly formed there is no need for Him to grow. Because He has perfect wisdom there is no need for Him to change His mind. It is the immutability of God that enables Him to be our rock and our strong tower, the place that we can run to for stability and safety (Psalm 18:2).

And yet, the Bible seems to indicate times in which God relents from a course of action or discovers something He didn't know before. How can this be? God unchangingly responds to changes we make. That is, it is an unchangeable fact about God that He relents or changes His course of action in response to our repentance, or in response to our turning to Him in prayer. His love for us causes His ears to always be attuned to our voices and His faithfulness to the covenant

He has committed to, makes Him predisposed to respond to our prayers. This predisposition is constant and unchanging. He has hard-wired into His relationship with us, His loving responsiveness.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US?

- Our prayers make a difference. When we turn to God in prayer, God responds to the change in our posture by bringing His love, wisdom, power and grace to bear on the situation. We can be certain that God will always respond speedily to our prayers with the best possible solution. His wisdom not our desires will dictate the ultimate outcome but as we engage with Him in prayer our desires have a tendency to align with His wisdom. The world changes when we pray. We change when we pray. God is faithful to respond to our prayers with powerful goodness. Something always happens when we pray.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

How would you describe God's immutability to someone else?

How does God's unchanging nature give you security?

How have you seen God respond to your prayers?

A PRAYER TO PRAY:

Lord, give me the willingness to repent where I need to, confident that You will meet my repentance with kindness. Thank You that I can depend on You because You never change. I can always expect a loving, righteous response from You and I can depend on You to be with me in every situation. Thank You that You respond to my prayers.

WEEK 10

GOD IS IMMANENT

Acts 17:28a (ESV)

28 for 'In him we live and move and have our being';

"The God of the Bible is no abstract deity removed from, and uninterested in his creation...[the whole Bible] is the story of God's involvement with his creation."

Wayne Grudem

Psalms 46:11 (ESV)

11 The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

Matthew 1:23 (ESV)

23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel"
(which means, God with us).

God is so big that He fills all His creation and beyond. He is pressed against the barriers we have erected in our hearts, and He is making His way into every crevice there. God is immanent. That is, He is present with and within His creation. There never has been a time, nor will there be a time when God is not with us. Our capacity to perceive God's presence, however, is impaired by whether our spirits are renewed through Christ or not. God is Spirit and He fellowships with our spirits. To experience God's presence as He meant us to, we must be born again.

Two special times in history must be noted. Firstly, there was a time when God took on human flesh and was with us in the form of Jesus Christ. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be Emmanuel (God with us). In being with us, Jesus gave mankind a concrete experience of God the Father. He showed us who God really is and all our experiences of God today must be judged through what Jesus said and did. Jesus is the "radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature," (Hebrews 1:3). And secondly, at Pentecost, God the Holy Spirit was poured out in a physically tangible way, He rested on them like tongues of fire

and they spoke in other tongues as He gave them ability (Acts 2:1-4). We have access to this same experience today. God is with us in the form of the Holy Spirit, today and every day.

God is with His creation and intricately involved in what is happening in our world. He is close to us as we rejoice, and He's close to us when we mourn. He's involved in our everyday world and delights to walk with us and talk with us as we go about our normal human lives. God is with us, and this makes all the difference.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US?

- We are never alone. There is no task you will ever have to accomplish without the help of the Holy Spirit. There is no decision you will ever have to make without Him. We can learn to notice His presence with us by acknowledging Him in our thought life and in our understanding. Reminding ourselves that He is with us often will help us to live in greater emotional wholeness and personal success.
- We can believe for miracles in every situation. All of God is available all the time. We just need to reach out for what is already there. And, as we wait for our miracle, we can know that God is with us, helping us, loving us and guiding us through every day.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

How can you remind yourself about God being with you every day?

What difference does it make to you that God is with you always?

What evidence have you seen lately that shows that God is with you and the people around you? How best could you remind them about this?

A PRAYER TO PRAY:

Lord help me to notice You with us. Give me evidence of Your presence with me and give me opportunities to tell others that God is near them too.

WEEK 11

GOD IS LOVE

1 John 4:16 (ESV)

16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

1 John 4:10 (ESV)

10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 Corinthians 13:4–8 (ESV)

4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends...

1 John 4:18 (ESV)

18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

To be awash in the love of God, lost in His never-ending passion, to feel His expansive and inexhaustible embrace and be overwhelmed with His surprising and never-ending generosity – is the longing of every human soul. Every addiction and compulsive obsession are substitutes for the infinite and intimate love of God.

God is love, is not the same as love is God. For there are many human ways to love that fall short of the nature of God but are lauded and exalted in popular culture. The love seen in romantic comedies and sung about by our favourite music artists, although delightful to think about, cannot compare to the gentle, strong, selfless and fiery love of God.

A.W. Tozer defines fear as the painful emotion we feel in expectation of harm coming to us. Yet, the Bible tells us that God's perfect love casts out fear. Only One powerful enough to truly keep us safe is capable of dispelling fear. Only the

sovereign Lord of all is able to guarantee our eternal safety. Only God's love is able to set us free from fear. Only God who is in charge of all things is strong enough to love us completely. All other loves are lesser loves. Not wrong in themselves but not fully what we are looking for.

To think that we know what love is, is to imagine that we have completely figured God out. There is no end to the immensity of God's love because like all His attributes God's love is infinite. The apostle Paul describes God's love as being patient, kind, not envious or boastful, humble, honouring, selfless, supportive, hopeful and enduring (1 Cor 13:4-7). If one wants to know God's demeanour toward us, this is it!

Not only does God's love dispel fear, it also establishes identity. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son (John 3:16) or put another way God so loved us that He became one of us. He identified Himself wholeheartedly with us and in so doing made a way for us to be identified as His. Like a proud father loves to be seen in public with His children so God publicly identifies us as His. He has set His seal on us. Holy Spirit in us and on us made it known to all that we are His and in so doing has guaranteed us a place in His eternal Kingdom. Indeed, we belong, we are safe and we are significant because God loves us.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US?

- All love that we know from human sources no matter how lovely, is inferior to God's love. We are growing in our understanding of love and the more we know God's love the more we can give love to others that is closer in character to God's love. Receiving God's love well enables us to give love well.
- Receiving God's love takes practice. We have to learn to open the 'love channels' of our hearts and fill the 'love tanks' of our souls with the sure knowledge that God is with us. We belong, we are safe and we are significant – in short, we are loved. The more we believe this the better we get at receiving it and the better we get at giving it to others.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

How has your mind been stretched by the concept of God's love?

How would you describe the love of God to someone else?

Who do you know that needs more of God's love? How will you show it to them?

A PRAYER TO PRAY:

Lord, show me Your love. Fill me now with Your love and teach me always to be filled with Your love. Open my eyes to see how You are loving me and show me how to love others well.

WEEK 12

GOD IS MISSIONAL

Habakkuk 2:14 (ESV)

14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Genesis 3:15 (ESV)

15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

John 3:16–17 (ESV)

16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Ephesians 1:3–4 (ESV)

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him...

"Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God." David Bosch

“...God and not the church is the primary subject and source of mission.”
Christopher Wright.

It is common to think that the Church is called to be on God's mission, but it is much more fundamental than that. God is a missional God. He knows that everything is better off under His leadership and therefore is always on a mission to bring all that have left His loving rule, back under His leadership.

If God was a dictator who demanded that everything was done His way, He would not need to be missional at heart. Nothing would ever be out of His command. But God is a free God who has made humankind free to decide on who they will give allegiance to. As a result, we and everything under our influence have rejected the rulership of God and He is on a mission to reveal His love and goodness to us and influence us back to Him. God is on mission because He is missional. He knows you, me and all of creation are better off under His rulership. His church was initiated to be on mission with Him. “It is not so much that the church has a mission, but that God's mission has a church,” Ed Stetzer.

Eternally God has been and will be missional. It is this characteristic of God that allowed Him to create human beings with free will, because He knew that even if we rejected Him, He would win us back. The Bible tells us that before the creation of the world Christ had already died for us and our names were already written in the book of life (Rev 13:8; 17:8). In other words, His plan for rescuing the world has always been. His missional nature is the safety net of all creation. God has a plan to make things right and that plan is already in action and has always been in play. As soon as Adam and Eve fell God announced that a seed of the woman would crush the serpents head (Gen 3:15). In other words, a plan was already in place to rescue us from our rebellious folly. God is that plan – He is infinitely loving and rescuing. Nothing evil can prevail against His mission to bring everything back under His loving and good command.

To be with Jesus means to be on mission to see that all the world comes back under His loving rule. This mission is a mission to influence through persevering love using the power of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:4). We proclaim what Christ has done and we demonstrate His love for the world through good deeds. In all this God confirms the validity of our mission through miraculous signs and wonders (Mark 16:20). We can expect miracles as we are about His business.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US?

- To be on God's mission is fundamental to being a Christian. This mission is not limited to moving to a foreign nation to preach the gospel to people who haven't heard it before – although that is a valid expression of the mission. It is also sharing Christ with our friends, families and colleagues. It is bringing God's will and way into all we do so that the justice and love of God is shown to the world. God's mission is seen as we do small, godly things daily and when we stand heroically for what is right. Most of our mission will be seen in daily acts of justice and kindness and in sharing what Christ has done for us with those that we know.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

Reread the scriptures and quotations at the beginning of this section. What has God spoken to you as you read them?

Who has God placed in your mission field? Make a list of five people and pray for them as you brush your teeth every day.

Who from your list can you contact this week? Think of something loving and encouraging to say to them and think of a way that you can invite them to church or connect group.

A PRAYER TO PRAY:

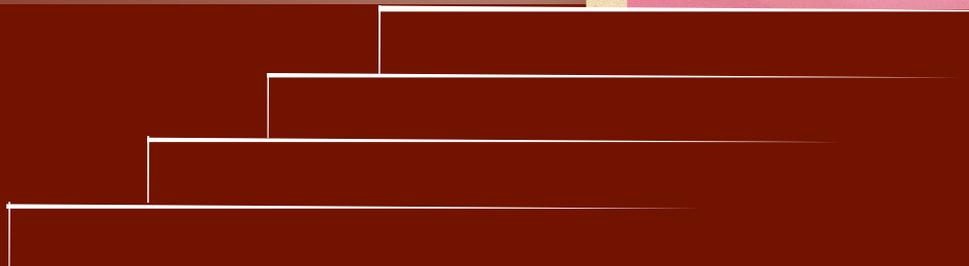
Lord, thank You that You planned my salvation before you made me. I am so grateful. Help me to live on mission with You so that many more may come into Your Kingdom. Give me courage and wisdom to know what to say and when to say it as I reach out to my family, friends and colleagues. I thank you in advance for the miracles you will do as I pray for people. Show me who to pray for. May You be glorified in all I do and may the world come to know You more through my life. Amen.

For Further Reading:

Pink, A.W. *The Attributes of God. Digital Fire*, New Delhi, 2020

Tozer, A.W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. General Press, New Delhi, 2019

St. Athanasius the Great of Alexandria. *On the Incarnation*, preface by C.S. Lewis, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 2011



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