

Introduction -Quick survey:

Are you more likely to **spend time** with someone you know well, or someone you're unfamiliar with?

Are you more likely to **trust** someone you know well, or someone you're unfamiliar with?

Are you more likely to **pour your heart out** to someone you know well, or someone you are unfamiliar with?

Are you more likely to **follow the advice** of someone you know well, or someone you are unfamiliar with?

This morning we are beginning a new summer series of messages that I'm calling "*What's God Like?*"

In this series we're going to talk about God's attributes. An attribute, as Webster defines it is- "An inherent characteristic, a word describing a quality." The Attributes of a person are the descriptions of their character...what they are like...how they relate to others...the marks of their personality and their character.

So, when we talk about the attributes of God we are giving "a description of who he is and what he is like." Over the next 12 weeks, we are going to be examining what God is like. We're going to talk about attributes such as his nearness, righteousness, wrath, mercy, grace, sovereignty, holiness, joy, goodness, and love.

[Transition] - Understanding what God's like will enable us to relate to him in a more healthy and effective ways. And it will enable us to help others know and related to God in more healthy ways. Becoming well acquainted with God, and how he operates, what he values and what cuts across the grain of his very nature has tons of practical value for us as we live out our lives and learn to follow him.

I want to make sure you know that this study that we are starting on today will not be some intellectual exercise for theologians, Bible scholars or those in our Foothill Academy.

I want this to be practical. I want this to immediately impact the way you feel about God, think about God, and connect with and relate with God. Having a healthy understanding of the attributes of God has several practical implications for our lives. I want you to consider some of them.

[Transition] - I want to start with what the Bible has to say about the value knowing the attributes of God.

The Bible teaches there is great value in knowing what God is like.

Jesus in his detailed prayer recorded in John 17 captures one of the core reasons we benefit from knowing what God is like. In his prayer to his Father, Jesus says, *"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."*

The Bible teaches that we were in effect made...designed to know God. We are not to just be familiar with God or be an acquaintance of God. That word 'know' in that verse means "to know, to perceive and to understand." Knowing God is directly coupled with gaining eternal life. Knowing God will involve a lifelong pursuit...yes, even an eternal process of getting to know and understand what God is like and how he relates and how he operates.

The prophet **Jeremiah** makes a powerful case for studying the attributes of God in Jeremiah 9:23. He writes, *"This is what the Lord says: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord."*

The thing that ought to drive us, the thing that ought to be at the top of the list of things we're committed to in life, the thing we would do well to prioritize is getting to know what God is like...getting to know and understand Him. God says if you are going to boast about anything, boast about knowing me.

God tells us what he wants more than anything else through the Prophet **Hosea**, "I don't want your sacrifices. I want you to know me; that's more important than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). Again, the thing God wants most from us is for us to know Him, not go to church more often, not just give more money, not just serve in more ministries.

What thrills God most is when you and I take the time to get to know him. That's God's love language, quality time, showing interest in learning what he is like and what makes his heart beat fast, as well as what hurts him.

[Illustration] - We're all relational people...we understand that. Few things communicate love and value more than when a person takes the time to get to know you, to really take an interest in you. Think back about when you were first getting to know your spouse, for example. Remember back about all the time you spent talking and listening. Remember how you felt and how energized you were because someone was interested in getting to know you, and you them?

[Transition] - Getting to know what God is like is our calling as believers. It is our great privilege and blessing. Listen to what some great students of God say about getting to know God's attributes.

What famous students of God have said about getting to know God:

A.W. Tozer in his classic work entitled, "The knowledge of the Holy" he writes, *"We do the greatest service to the next generation of Christians by passing on to them undimmed and undiminished that noble concept of*

God which we received from our Hebrew and Christian fathers of generations past” (Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy, Harper, 1961, p. 4).

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was England’s most famous preacher in the mid 1800’s. He said, *“Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued, investigation of the great subject of the Deity. The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ and Him crucified and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity.”* (C. H. Spurgeon, as cited by Pink, The attributes of God, p. 80.)

[Transition] - Now, while all of this may sound very “heady” or intellectual, I want to say again that getting to know what God is like is not some sort of academic or intellectual exercise. A clear and healthy knowledge of what God is like and how he operates touches many different, very practical areas of life.

[Illustration] - Think about this: Crazy ideas about God can make you crazy! Neurotic ideas about God reinforce neurotic ideas about life. This is where secular psychotherapy misinterpreted what they were hearing. They thought all faith in God was the cause of neurosis. In reality, it was just confused thoughts of God that contribute to confused emotions and thinking.

Please realize, the flip side is equally true. A Biblically accurate understanding about what God is like brings health, balance, stability, and wholeness to a person.

J. I. Packer said, *“Knowing about God is crucially important for the living of our lives...Disregard the study of God, and you sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you. This way you can waste your life and lose your soul”* (J.I. Packer, Knowing God, Downers Grove: Inter-varsity Press, 1973, pp. 29-30).

[**Transition**] - Getting more and more familiar with what God is like has a number of practical benefits for you.

The practical benefit of knowing what God is like:

1. Greater understanding enables greater love.

This is basic but completely true. Sometimes the more you know about a person the more difficult it is to love them. But, when it comes to knowing God, the more full your understanding of what he is like the more full your love grows for him. To gain a greater understanding of what God is like, which is the goal this series, is to grow more and more fond of him and more and more attached to him.

2. Understanding begets more understanding.

The beauty of God's character is that each of God's attributes compliment other attributes. For example, understanding the power of God has implications when considering the love of God. Knowing how the wrath of God compliments the holiness of God enriches our understanding of the Love of God and the mercy and grace of God, which of course, informs our salvation.

[**Transition**] - A third reason it is important for us to study the attributes of God in the Bible is so that...

3. Understanding God's attributes informs our perspective of God.

Some people hold ideas about God based solely on their relationships with their parents or other significant adults in their lives. For example, today is Father's Day; there is a natural proneness to transfer the attributes of our earthly father directly onto our heavenly Father. If we had a great dad then this might not be so bad, but if our dad was major league dysfunctional then chances are we will subtly relate to our heavenly Father like we would our earthly father. We will subtly come to believe that our heavenly Father will relate to us like our earthly father. Same goes for how our earthly moms related to us.

So, if we grew up believing that our earthly father or mother was impossible to please, then guess what? We will hold somewhere deep in our hearts that God is impossible to please as well. It is crucial for us to base our understandings of our heavenly Father on the revealed truth of God's word, not our experiences with human relationships.

In one of his letters to Erasmus, Martin Luther said, "*Your thoughts of God are too human.*"¹ In other words, your thoughts of God are based too much on what you know about how other people function and not on how God has demonstrated himself to function and how he has revealed himself in the Bible.

4. Understanding God's attributes enhances our worship.

When we worship God, we praise him for who he is. Our worship and praise are a response to who he is and how he relates with us. Knowing the attributes of God opens our awareness of what God is like and gives us ever increasing motivation to praise him and worship him. If we don't really understand how awesome God is or how powerful or how merciful he is, then our praise of him is sort of "ho-hum." It's half-hearted because it is half-informed.

The Psalmist says, "I will thank the Lord because he is just, I will sing praise to the name of the Lord most high" (Psalm 7:17). And, "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good! His faithful love endures forever" (Psalm 107:1).

5. Understanding God's attributes enhances our prayer life.

Knowing God's character not only instructs us about what we should pray for—that which is in alignment with his character—but it also assures us God is able and willing to answer our prayers. When you are clear on the attributes of God, you can pray confident that God is dependable and

¹ Cited by Arthur W Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1975, p. 28.

powerful and has your best interest at heart. Knowing God makes your prayer very strategic not just some sort of wishful thinking.

6. Understanding God's attributes helps us tell our story of God.

Knowing God enables us to witness more effectively for him. It helps us become better ambassadors for him. Knowing what God is like not only helps us live in a way that honors him before the people in our lives, but it also gives us confidence and enthusiasm as we relate him to others.

[Illustration] - Think about those times when you have had the opportunity to tell old friend about a new friend you've met. They both know you, but they don't know each other. So, you have the opportunity to tell your old friend about the new friend and why you like hanging out with them, and why you like them, and why you've become friends. Obviously, the more you know about your new friend, the better you're able to accurately describe them.

[Transition] - The more familiar you are with what God is like, the better you can describe him and talk about him to others. The final reason for getting a better grip on the attributes of God I want you to consider this morning is the character of God is the basis and standard for all human morality.

7. Understanding God's Attributes reveals the basis for morality.

God as the creator and sustainer of the world and our galaxy built into his creation certain laws and principles that are born out of his very character and nature.

A study of the attributes of God will help us understand the reason and rationale for the moral absolutes in life. If we don't understand the attributes of God, we will not understand the moral and ethical structure he has built into our world. And if we don't understand that, we will find ourselves trying to buck it or trying to live counter to it rather than in cooperation with it.

The trends of moral and ethical relativism is not new enlightened or informed thinking, it is a recycle of the time of the Judges in Israel when the Bible tells us "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." If you do not know the attributes of God, that is where things drift.

[Quote] - Tozer said, *"It is impossible to keep our moral practices sound and our inward attitudes right while our idea of God is erroneous or inadequate."*²

[Transition] - I want you to see one prime example of a person in the Bible whose life was impacted greatly by his knowledge and familiarity with the attributes of God. Job knew what God was like, and it made all the difference in the world.

Job endured because he knew what God was like.

Job, by God's assessment, was "a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:8). God was proud of him. Satan however, asked to challenge Job with disasters claiming that Job was a fully devoted guy because God had blessed his life so much. Satan claimed that once Job hit some hard times in his life, he'd turn his back on God. Having confidence that Job would only shine more brightly, God allowed the challenge.

As Job endured the disasters and tried to make sense out of why they were happening to him he was counseled by three of his friends which only added further to his suffering. They made this worse because they didn't understand what God was like.

A couple of times Job got pretty 'sideways' about what was happening, and he complained to God. God corrects him and corrects his thinking by reminding him that God is God and Job is not. God reminds Job of his

² Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. viii.

attributes. The attributes of God put Job back on track, spiritually speaking, and assured him if he knew God, he knew enough.

His suffering was never explained because it ultimately came from the hand of God. At the end of the story God speaks some very interesting words. Chapter 42:7 says, *“And it came about after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has.”*

These words indicate something very important. They reveal that God distinguished between Job and his response to his affliction and his three friends with their response to his affliction. Job’s friends were wrong! They needed to repent. Why? They did not speak what was right about God. They did not have a clear grasp of who God was and how he operates. They didn’t understand his attributes. They didn’t know what he was like.

However, the attributes of God caused Job to think rightly about God and to thus respond rightly to his suffering. Certainly, he learned some things along the way, he wasn’t perfect, but it was his insight into who God was and how he operates that made all the difference for how he was able to make it through all his trials.

Job is a great example for us because he shows us that a clear understanding of the attributes of God doesn’t mean that you and I will avoid trouble or heartache or pain in life.

Instead, one of the things Job’s experience teaches us is that understanding who God is and how he operates, understanding his attributes can enable us to successfully navigate through the hardship we encounter in our lives.

Conclusion

Gaining a greater understanding of the attributes of God enables us to relate to God and to relate God to others in a more healthy way. I hope you will make it a point to be here each session, and as you gain a greater grasp of God's attributes you will enjoy all the benefits of knowing God more fully. Next week, we begin with the nearness of God.