

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message. September 11, 2022 "Who/what is God?"

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing, and you can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. School has started back and we're cranking up our fall schedule. Our children's area is expanding, and we've moved check-in into the lobby. We also have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can see all that through our newly upgraded app, and social media sites. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. A great group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. If you're joining us online, we appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

II Recap.

Okay...where to start? Where to start? We began this series last week with a conversation about the current movement of people leaving the church called Deconstruction, describing that, and then giving that movement a more Christ centered perspective of what happens when we want to grow spiritually and called it 'renovation'. But there were truths from this thing called Deconstruction, (go back to last week's message if you want to learn more about this) that we can apply to the continual process of spiritual growth. Some of these are; honesty about where our beliefs come from, the process of pulling them out to see if they're actually based in scripture, and the hunger to experience God in fresh and new ways. We slowly walked through the healing of the man born blind in John 9 and saw all the many ways spiritual blindness manifests itself and how to spot it in ourselves. There's way too much to go through, but we just wanted to give everyone permission (like you actually need it) to follow your curiosity when it comes to spiritual growth.

III Sunday.

Okay...where to begin? Where to begin? Sunday was equally dense, and full of things to consider as was last week's message. This message came with a little 'from the heart' from Kal. These messages are not to pump us up about our relationship with God, or to reinforce what we already know. But to give connections, scriptural interpretation, for people far from God that you can share in your world. We're going to VERY briefly cover two specific things that were mentioned at the beginning of the message. Again, if you want more detail just watch the entire service.

1. Kal talked about the Higgs-Boson particle/field. What the heck...right? Basically this was predicted back in the 1960's as a grand unifying force that controlled everything we can measure. It's also referred to as the "*God particle*". What the H-B field does is bring matter, tangible things, out of chaos and formlessness into existence. Kind of like what we read in the creation account in Genesis 1.
2. The second thing Kal talked about was ways to talk about God. **Cataphatic** are the words we use to TRY, (we have to embrace the limitations of words) to talk about God. We say things like; God is-just, love, merciful, kind, compassionate, but knowing that words are so limiting. The minute we try to contain God in a word, then we miss all the other things God is. The other word to understand God is **apophatic**. Or using non-words, silence to experience God. The classic example of an apophatic

experience of God is Elijah on the mountain didn't find God in the mighty wind, the earthquake or the fire, but in the gentle whisper. An apophatic understanding of God is finding God in the silent places, *"be still and know that I am God"*, simply admitting there are no words that can contain him.

The primary passages used to describe God. Read **Exodus 3:13-15**, in which God explains who God is, and we'll unpack it a bit.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

Wrestle a bit with what you believe God meant when he said how he would be referred to.

What do you think God was trying to communicate?

How does this passage affect your understanding and relationship with God?

Here are some thoughts about that passage and how we can apply those truths to our life. An equally embraced interpretation of *"I AM WHO I AM"* is; *"I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE"*. Which has been understood as- you cannot contain me, and words fall far short of who I AM. This is an apophatic understanding of God. Yes, we have to use words. That's all we have to try to convey our understanding and relationship with God. But they are NOT God. This is what God was telling Moses. Both, I am for you, with you. But I AM more than you can understand.

Here are some take-away truths for us.

1. God cannot be contained. Any attempt to describe God, use any words to explain God, all fall short. Know, be keenly aware of our own limitations in understanding and describing God. We must always approach talking about God with self-aware humility. Knowing our words, understanding of our words, will always be colored by our experiences and interpretations. Why we MUST have an apophatic practice with God. *"Be still and..."*

How can you maintain and grow an uncontainable understanding of God?

2. God does not exist. God is existence. This is super woo-woo. God is not a thing, entity, George Burns for the old people, Morgan Freeman for the younger ones, or Alannis Morrisette for the ones who don't want to admit it. God is not this old dude in the sky. God is neither male nor female. God is spirit. He is everything and the essence of everything. Paul said:

Romans 11:33-36 (MSG)

Have you ever come on anything quite like this extravagant generosity of God, this deep, deep wisdom? It's way over our heads. We'll never figure it out.

Is there anyone around who can explain God? Anyone smart enough to tell him what to do?

Anyone who has done him such a huge favor that God has to ask his advice? Everything comes from him; Everything happens through him; Everything ends up in him.

Always glory! Always praise! Yes. Yes. Yes.

This ought to be read as a praise and celebration of the infiniteness of God. Paul is saying all of his and our understanding of God is inadequate. God is the essence of everything.

Everything comes from him; Everything happens through him; Everything ends up in him.

What practices can you put into place that can help you remember God is always with you?

III Challenge.

So, now what? How can I know who God is? How can this help me?

1. Trust and know that God is everywhere and in everything.

“Where can I go where you are not?” There is God everywhere...slow down and be still. It's not about knowing all you can know, figuring everything out, solving some cosmic puzzle. If you seek God you will find God.

2. You don't need to say the right words in the right way to connect with God.

Sometimes our silence, inability to voice what we're looking for, need is all we can do. Romans 8, *“the Spirit intercedes for us through wordless groans.”* It's not saying magic words or the right formulas. It's the desire to find God. Sometimes using words, sometimes no words. Cataphatic or apophatic.

3. Sometimes the path towards God isn't always defining God, but what's 'not God'.

Sometimes we begin by eliminating everything you can believe is not God. Often requires us to come up with a plumbline, a standard, that helps us set a trustworthy measurement to do that work. It's the humility to realize the better path towards God is letting go of things that we know aren't God, and embracing the silence of who God is, rather than creating this ginormous book of words about God.

Trust in this.

God is not dependent on our ability or inability to understand or describe who God is. God is just fine. We get to find words, and places, to know who God is by wanting to find him.. When we do, we will find a God who is thrilled, delighted, to be known by us. Because God has so much he wants for us. And THAT'S the only real thing you need to remember today. Higgs-Boson, cataphatic/apophatic are just tools. All of what we've covered here are just words. And they all fall far short. Just know, trust, embrace, God is amongst us and wants us to know him fully. That's a great place to start.