

SESSION 1

GOD THE FATHER



**“IN THE
BEGINNING GOD . . .”
(GENESIS 1:1, NIV).**



God.

An important word. A confusing word.

It is pretty hard to find anyone who doesn't really believe in God. Most people have some idea that God exists. However, with such a wide variety of concepts possible, many of the ideas may not be accurate.

An incorrect image of God, or even total ignorance about God, is a real problem. It is difficult to place our faith in something or someone we don't even know. The important matter for us as Christians, then, is to explore who the God of the Bible really is so we won't be confused in our beliefs.

To help us get a handle on the reality of God, we will try to answer three questions in this session. The first is, Who is God? The second, How do we know God? And the third, Who is God the Father?

LET'S GET STARTED.

Who Is God?

In case you're wondering, the question is stated correctly. God is a Person, so it would be incorrect to ask, What is God? That does not mean that God is a person like you and me--human beings with bodies and minds. Rather, it means that God is alive and has personal attributes. God did not suddenly come into existence, as we did. He has always been alive and will always be alive. It is God's existence (life) that makes all other life possible.

Let's explore that idea a little further.

To say that God has personal attributes means that God has characteristics that belong only to Him. We can name them, but we cannot fully understand them. One of God's characteristics, one of the features that makes Him God, is that God is beyond human understanding. If we could understand all there is about Him, He would not be God.

Three important attributes of God (and there are more) are these:

- **God is alive.**
- **God is holy.**
- **God is love.**

To say that God is alive is to say that God exists. God is not some impersonal force in the universe that causes things to happen. Though without a human body, God has describable characteristics--one of which is life.

To say, "God is holy," is to say more than we can imagine. There is a purity, a holiness to God that is beyond our human ability to describe. Set over against God's holiness, everything else in the universe is unholy, unclean by comparison. Even the most sacred thing we can imagine doesn't even come close to being as holy as God.

This thought brings us into close contact with the third characteristic--God is love. God lacks nothing. He is not incomplete in any way. He has no need to grow or develop. There is absolutely nothing that humans can provide that God needs. Yet, He loves. He loves all He has created--from the smallest atom to the most complex human being. He loves because God is love.

One of the ways we try to describe the completeness of God is to use some "all" phrases. We say that God is "all-powerful," "all-knowing," "all-loving." There is no room (nor need) for growth in any of God's characteristics because He is already complete and perfect in all of them.

To use words like "He" and "Him" when speaking about God does not mean that God is a male in the physical sense we know as male. Yet, the limitations of our human language make it difficult to describe God.

We should always use "God" when referring to God, but sentences become awkward very quickly if we don't revert to traditional pronouns. For example, John 3:16, a familiar verse, would be hard to read without using pronouns. "For God so loved the world that God gave God's one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." It would get even more complicated if we tried always to be even-handed in using masculine and feminine pronouns. For example, "For God so loved the world that He or She gave His or Her one and only Son, . . ." not only is that awkward to read, it also muddies our thoughts about God. God is beyond gender. God is neither male nor female in the human senses of those words. To argue about whether God is male or female or both lowers the discussion to the wrong level.

So, please remember that when we use masculine pronouns, we are doing so to be less awkward. However, we are also being less accurate because our human language cannot truly describe God as God really is. That is all part of the ultimate mystery about God.

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How Do We Know God?

If God is perfect (and He is), and if we can never fully understand God (and we can't), how, then, do we know God?

God reveals himself to us.

The Bible does not prove that God exists. Rather, it begins already acknowledging God's existence. We see this in the very first words of Scripture: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth . . ." (Genesis 1:1). Then the Bible goes on to tell the story of how God has been active in all of creation, including especially the lives of human beings.

Beyond the words of Scripture, we see evidence of God in other ways.

The beauty and complexity of what we call "nature" points to the existence of God. It is difficult to conceive that nature could exist in all its various forms without the guiding influence of God.

Life as we know it seems to have a purpose. That purpose only makes sense in relation to an existent God, not in meaningless and random occurrence of events.

The very fact that we have conscious thoughts, that somehow we know we are alive, seems to indicate that there is an existence beyond ourselves. That existence is God. All life comes from and is sustained by God.

The universe seems to follow a moral structure. Some things are always right; some are always wrong. This built-in "moral compass" comes from the characteristics of the perfect God who created this universe.

Though the outward forms of religion vary across the planet, one thing is constant: human beings everywhere have a desire to know God. It is God who has placed this desire for meaning within the human race. Not all people are aware of or respond to this universal desire. Nevertheless, God has placed it within us so that we might find Him when we seek.

Theological controversies and arguments exist in nearly infinite numbers in our world. At many points throughout the pages of this material, we would have opportunities to engage in some of those discussions. Nevertheless, such engagement is beyond the purpose of these sessions. Our goal is to help us understand the basics of the Christian faith. So, we will often make belief statements that could be (and are) arguable, but we will leave those controversial discussions for another time and place.



Who Is God the Father?

Remembering that our goal is to place our Christian beliefs accurately in God, we must begin to zero in on who the true God of the Bible is. As revealed in Scripture, God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God the Father is the focus of this session.

To call God “Father” does not mean God is a human man. God is beyond gender identification. Rather, “Father” is a biblical way of expressing how God is responsible for everything that exists. In our human experience, a father is necessary for new life to begin. (A woman is necessary too, but she can’t create life alone.) In the world in which the Bible came into written form, fathers were responsible for nearly everything having to do with the maintenance of life. Fathers were responsible for providing everything a family needed in the way of material goods. Fathers were the voices of authority; they laid down the rules by which the family conducted itself. So, it is natural Scripture would draw on the human image of “father” to try to explain the relationship God has to His people.

“Father” also expresses God’s actual relationship to Jesus. God himself fathered Jesus in Mary through the action of the Holy Spirit. Jesus referred frequently to God as His father, often causing His enemies to become angry at Him. Later New Testament writers also referred to God as the father of Jesus.

Since we understand how earthly families are created and function, “Father” is a good way of expressing God’s relationship to Jesus and to us. However, “Father” is not the only description of God. Scripture also talks about God as “King,” “Judge,” and “Shepherd.” Here are three biblical examples:

- **“The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed, he is girded with strength. He has established the world; it shall never be moved; [his] throne is established from of old; [he is] from everlasting” (Psalm 93:1-2).**
- **“The Lord sits enthroned forever, he has established his throne for judgment. He judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with equity” (Psalm 9:7-8).**
- **“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake” (Psalm 23:1-3).**

Our attempt in these pages is to avoid using any technical theological language. We want to explain our beliefs as simply as possible so that as many people as possible can understand what we believe.

However, technical theological terms do exist in abundance. Therefore, we have provided some definitions that will at least introduce some of the terms that Christians will encounter in discussions of belief. These explanations, located on the margins where appropriate, are called “Church-Speak.”

CHURCH-SPEAK:

Trinity The doctrine of the Trinity states that the one true God reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is not three gods who act as one. The Trinity is one God who reveals himself as three Persons. The word “Trinity” does not appear in the New Testament, but the doctrine of the Trinity is true to the way God is spoken of in the Bible. The doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery. No one completely understands it, but the Bible and Christian experience make the doctrine necessary.

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What We Know

God the Father

Who is God?

How Do We Know God?

What we know about God is what God has revealed to us. We know that God exists. We know who God is and what God is like from a variety of ways that God “talks” to us. God speaks to us through the stories of the Bible. God speaks to us through His Holy Spirit. God speaks to us through other people. And God speaks to us through life’s events.

Who is God the Father?

Most importantly, Christians have a personal relationship with God, who loves us and cares for us in every way possible. What more is there we need to know, really?