

## ATTRIBUTES OF GOD – WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

Instructions for Leaders in RED.

**Leader's Notes:** *In preparation for this lesson you may want to read the excerpts given regarding knowledge of God, revelation, general v. special revelation, and the attributes of God. The Leader's notes can be found at the end of this lesson. They are included to stoke your interest and passion for the lesson you are teaching, not so much to provide material you will use.*

### Lesson Outcomes:

- 1) Students will understand that, through the Bible, God has revealed himself to mankind through his actions and his attributes.
- 2) Students will learn to approach the Bible as God's self-revelation, seeking to know him better.

### OPENER:

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Give students handout for this study and have them silently fill out the opening question(s). Give them a couple minutes for this, once it seems like most of them are done, move on to discussion.

**ASK:** Let's talk about what you wrote on the handout. Imagine that one of your closest friends was asked to write a paragraph that describes you. Your friend wasn't allowed to describe you physically (e.g. brown eyes, tall, etc.), but could only describe the things you do and your character. What would they write about you?

### INTRODUCTION:

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Read over this ahead of time. Feel free to use these words or your own.

We are now in our fourth week of a study that's called, "The Core." It's called that because, in this series of studies, we're going to learn about the core beliefs and foundations of the Christian faith.

**ASK:** Who can tell me what we studied during the last few small group meetings? [See if they can recall specific details about the lessons on the Scriptures, e.g. the Bible is trustworthy, it is about God, it is for our instruction in living, etc.]

We spent the first three lessons talking about the Bible itself and why it is worthy of our devotion and attention. We talked about how the Bible, ultimately, is about God. We learned that that, since God's the expert on God, the Bible is useful for us to learn about who he is. But, what does it tell us about him? That's what we're going to talk about together tonight.

### A LETTER FROM AND ABOUT GOD:

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Imagine you had to write a detailed report for your science class about how to sustain life in another galaxy.

**ASK:** Would that be easy or difficult? [Take some of their answers]

I would say it's more than difficult; it's impossible because you've never been to another galaxy! Furthermore, our best powers of observation and strongest telescopes can only give us the faintest idea of what other galaxies look like, but they don't give us any clear answer on whether life can be sustained there.

Now, imagine that a creature from another galaxy came and explained, in detail, how life works in his galaxy. He drew pictures and patiently answered every question you had.

**ASK:** How difficult would it be to write your report then?

This is similar to the task of trying to understand who God is. We can learn quite a bit about God just by looking around – theologians call that “natural revelation” because certain truths can be known about God naturally. But, if we were to try to figure him out completely through natural revelation, we would be stuck because our powers of observation simply aren't good enough. But, the Bible—which comes from God—tells us the things we could never hope to know otherwise! Theologians call this special revelation – God takes special and extraordinary steps to reveal himself, and the Bible is the truest source of special revelation. In short, the Bible is our cheat sheet to figure out who God is!

[If your students are interested, you can talk about the difference between general revelation and special revelation as outlined in the leader's notes.]

## **HOW DO WE LEARN ABOUT GOD?**

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In the Bible, we learn about God in two ways: [have them write this in their handouts] through his actions and his attributes.

The idea of learning about God through his actions is pretty straightforward. If a random stranger walked up and punched you in the face, you'd have a pretty good idea about the type of person he was based on that one action.

But, the Bible also highlights what are known as God's “attributes.”

**ASK:** Who knows what an “attribute” is? [Take some answers from the group]

An attribute is “a quality, character, characteristic, or property belonging to a person, thing, or group.” In essence, an attribute is a character trait of God. An attribute describes how God is. A very smart Bible teacher named A.W. Tozer wrote a book that talked about the attributes of God and he defined an attribute like this: “An attribute of God is whatever God has in any way revealed as being true about Himself.”

It's important to remember that God's attributes and his actions can't really be separated because God's actions are always motivated by his attributes. Think about the example of the guy who randomly punches people in the face. That action (punching people in the face) is motivated by the attribute of him being cruel. Same with God; his actions flow out of his attributes, they express his attributes, and they allow us to better understand his attributes.

So, with that in mind, we're going to read through a series of Scriptures and see if we can identify God's actions and attributes that each passage reveals.

### **GOD'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY:**

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(As you go through these passages, the students will be asked repeatedly to think through what the passage reveals about God and to write their responses on their handout. Not all of the passages are easy and they aren't intended to be. They need to think. If they're really struggling, help them to focus in on the idea of actions and attributes mentioned or revealed in the passage. There are some ideas and discussion points below for each passage, but see what the students come up with. The thoughts below are not "the right answers," just some thoughts to help the discussion along.)

Turn in your Bibles to Exodus 3. Moses has been watching sheep in the desert and then God appears to him and gives him a task. **READ** Exodus 3:7-10. What do we learn about God from this passage? [He is compassionate, concerned about his people (attributes) and rescues them (action)]

Okay, now turn in your Bible to Job 38. Job was a man who suffered greatly in life and assumed that God was not being fair. God responds to Job and gives him a new perspective. **READ** Job 38:1-18. What do learn about God from this passage? [God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and the Creator (attributes) and he created and sustains and governs all the creation (actions)]

Let's turn to the New Testament now and see what more we can learn about who God is. Turn to 2 Corinthians 5. Paul is writing to the church in Corinth and, at this point, discusses reconciliation (You may need to explain what reconciliation means – the restoration of relationship between two alienated parties). **READ** 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. What do we learn about God from this passage? [God is forgiving and gracious (attributes) and because of these attributes, he reconciled us, doesn't count our sins against us, provided the substitute, and makes us righteous (actions)]

Finally, let's look at what the Apostle John has to say about God in 1 John 4. John's letter is meant to encourage his readers to remain faithful to God and to inspire them to live the kind of life God desires. **READ** 1 John 4:7-10. What do we learn about God from this passage? [God is love (attribute) and because of his love, he sent his Son and provided the atoning sacrifice so our sins could be forgiven (actions)]

We have looked at a few attributes of God, but the Bible reveals an innumerable amount of them. As we continue to read our Bibles and seek to know God better, we will discover more and more of them. And it's important to realize that all of God's attributes are equally valid, equally active, and equally compatible. No one attribute cancels out another. God is completely harmonious, and all of his attributes are equally active in all of his actions.

[There are further thoughts on the unity and harmony of God's attributes in the leader's notes.]

## **ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION:**

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So, no matter where we turn in the Bible, it tells us about God. This means that when we read the Bible, we need to approach it with the proper frame of mind. When we read the Bible, any part of it, our first question needs to be “What does this tell me about God?” (Have them write that on their handout)

Any other questions that come up from reading a passage in the Bible (like, “What should I do in response to this?”) must come after we have spent the proper amount of time considering what the Bible is telling us about God. Until we do that, we will never get the right answers to any of the other questions.

## **REFLECTION: Isaiah 40:12-31**

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Have them use their handout for this reflection time. Give them about 5 minutes or so (or until they all finish) to complete this. It says:

*Turn in your Bible to Isaiah 40. Once there, read verses 12-31 and then, once you’ve finished reading, consider the picture of God presented in that passage. How would you summarize Isaiah’s depiction of God here?*

Have a few of them read their responses and then **SAY:** In this passage, we get a sense for how exalted and magnificent God is. He’s so high above us and everything, but yet, this same God has chosen to reveal himself to us and to speak to us so that we can know him and walk in his ways. This is an incredible thought!

*Take a few moments and write out a prayer to God, celebrating his character, thanking him for revealing himself and for his other actions in your life, and asking him to reveal himself even more as you study his Word.*

## **PRAY:**

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Pray with your group that as you read through and study the Scriptures this year that God would reveal himself clearly through the Bible. That each of us would come to treasure him even more as we see exactly who he is in the pages of the Bible.

If you have time, have your students read the prayers they wrote at the end of the Reflection section.

## **LEADERS' NOTES:**

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### ***Regarding The Knowledge of God:***

*From "Knowledge of the Holy," by A.W. Tozer:*

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

*From "Institutes of the Christian Religion," by John Calvin*

And here again we ought to observe that we are called to a knowledge of God: not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart.

*From "Knowing God," by J.I. Packer:*

What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set for ourselves in life? To know God. What is the "eternal life" that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. "This is life eternal. That they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment, than anything else? Knowledge of God. "Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me" (Jer 9:23f). What, of all the states God ever sees man in, gives him most pleasure? Knowledge of himself. "I desire...the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings," says God (Hos 6:6).

*From "Systematic Theology," by Lewis Sperry Chafer*

At no point does the devout soul feel its limitations more than when confronted with the responsibility of a due apprehension of the Person of God.

### ***Regarding Revelation (not the Book, the act of God revealing)***

*From "Systematic Theology," by Louis Berkhof:*

The word "revelation" is derived from the Latin "*revelatio*," which denotes an unveiling, a revealing. In its active sense it denotes the act of God by which He communicates to man the truth concerning Himself in relation to His creatures, and conveys to him the knowledge of His will: and in the passive sense it is a designation of the resulting product of this activity of God.

*From "Systematic Theology," by Lewis Sperry Chafer:*

Having made man in His own image and having endowed man with the capacity to commune with Himself, it is reasonable to expect that this competency in man would be exercised; that in due time God would disclose to man truth concerning Himself and His purposes...God, we are told, came down and talked with Adam in the cool of the day. But if unfallen man needed the impartation of knowledge, how much more does the fallen man, whose whole being is darkened, need to be taught of God! To the latter must be given the added truth regarding sin and redemption. God has spoken. To this end the Bible has been written, and the revelation to man of that great body of truth which man could not acquire for himself and which the Bible discloses is its sublime and supreme purpose.

### ***Regarding General and Special Revelation:***

*From "Doctrine," by Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears:*

God reveals himself to everyone everywhere through general revelation. General revelation includes creation, common grace, and conscience....Through creation—the heavens and earth, flower and fly, galaxy and

quark—God has made himself and his power, love, and glory known. People everywhere see his wisdom, majesty, power and divine nature, justice, and goodness...God's common grace includes the water we drink, food we eat, sun we enjoy, and rain we need, as God is good to the sinner and saint alike.

For anyone to have a saving knowledge of God requires that, in addition to general revelation, they must also receive and believe special revelation. This is because while general revelation is good and true, it is not sufficient for someone to know that God became a man and died on the cross in our place for sins...God continues to reveal himself today, and the primary way he reveals himself is through the divinely inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Bible. The Bible is uniquely and solely God's completely trustworthy revelation to us today.

*From "Institutes of the Christian Religion," by John Calvin:*

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God. This, therefore, is a special gift, where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens his own most hallowed lips.

### **Regarding the Attributes of God:**

*From "Systematic Theology," by Lewis Sperry Chafer:*

Though wholly inadequate, man's conception of God is measured by those characteristics which he attributes to God. The Bible presents a revelation which, though limited by the restrictions that language must ever impose, is of a Person, and this revelation attributes to Him those exalted qualities which are His...The attributes of God present a theme so vast and complex and so beyond the range of finite faculties that any attempt to classify them must be only approximate as to accuracy and completeness. So, also, the attributes are so interrelated and interdependent that the exact placing of some of them is difficult if not wholly impossible.

*From "Knowledge of the Holy," by A.W. Tozer:*

The study of the attributes of God, far from being dull and heavy, may for the enlightened Christian be a sweet and absorbing spiritual exercise. To the soul that is athirst for God, nothing could be more delightful.

What is God like? What kind of God is He? How may we expect Him to act toward us and toward all created things? Such questions are not merely academic. They touch the far-in reaches of the human spirit, and their answers affect life and character and destiny.

The harmony of His being is the result not of a perfect balance of parts but of the absence of parts. Between His attributes no contradiction can exist. He need not suspend one to exercise another, for in Him all His attributes are one. All of God does all that God does; He does not divide Himself to perform a work, but works in the total unity of His being.