

# Developing a Sturdy Faith

## Part 1 - Who is God?

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### Opening

- Our series is based on the series “Secret Church” from Pastor David Platt

### Who is God?


Today’s talk is ‘Who is God?’ – so to prepare, I googled that phrase to find the answer – and if you do that, you will get a huge set of documents returned to you with all types of answers and images.

- He was an old man with a white beard
- he was someone with 8 arms
- A person with the head of an elephant, a body that was blue, heads hanging on a belt
- a statue of a serene, sleeping Asian man
- a statue of a cow
- a very muscly man holding a thunder bolt
- Morgan Freeman apparently thinks he is God!

### Meet God

#### **Psalm 46 (NIV)**

***God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall to the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. There is a river whose stream makes glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.***

*** God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts His voice, the earth melts. Lord almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes war cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow, shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. ‘Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be***

***exalted in the earth.’ The Lord almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.***

## Who is God?



You’re on a mission trip and you meet someone who has never heard of God – they want you to describe him to them. What do say?



Or you’re walking down the street in Carnegie and over coffee a friend asks you to describe God – what do you say?

## Do you know Him?

Do you know God? I mean really know him today?



***Jeremiah 9:23-24***

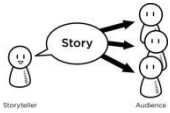
***This is what the Lord says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of His wisdom or the strong man boast of His strength or the rich man boast of His riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight’ declares the Lord. Do not boast about how smart you are. Do not boast about how intellectual you are. Do not boast about how rich you are. You have one boast in this life, and it is that you know God.’***

Do not boast about how

- smart you are
- intellectual you are
- rich you are

You have one boast in this life - that you know God.

## The Rabbi



My father runs a men's group and he occasionally will have visiting speakers come along. The night that I visited with him, he had invited a Jewish Rabbi to come and speak to the Christian men. He was very respectful of his audience ... but it was not his politeness for the group that impressed me. It was his abject humility in the way that he talked about His God. I had never heard a Christian leader talk about God like this man ... his humility and respect for his creator was striking. I thought then – the church has lost their understanding about who God really is. We have made God into our best friend and lowered Him to our level ... and I too had done this.

## Redefining God

There was an article in the **Wall Street Journal** entitled **Redefining God** - listen to the thesis of the article:

***"Across the country the faithful are redefining God, dissatisfied with conventional images of an authoritarian or paternalistic deity. People are embracing quirky, individualistic conceptions of God to suit their own spiritual needs."***

We think, "Sure say - that is what the culture is doing."  
The surprise is that no - it's what the Church is doing!

### A Dangerous Tendency

We have this dangerous tendency today to create God, redefine God, to be who we want Him to be. And really we create a god who looks a lot like us. He's a nice, middle-class western style God. He looks a lot like us, and he thinks like us, and he's comfortable with our lifestyles.

He's comfortable with our:

- self-saturated lukewarm faith
- apathy
- half-hearted devotion to him
- materialistic indulgences

He's comfortable with all those things, because we are. We fashion a god who looks a lot like us.

## We risk worshipping ourselves

If this is the case, then when we gather together every Sunday, or the church that you are a part of gathers together for worship, and you sing songs, lift your hands out to God, this God that you've created, the reality is you're not worshipping God. **You're worshipping yourselves.** And even when we are known as a people who worship in the Church, the reality is that the object of our worship has been grossly mis-defined.

## The Golden Calf

Consider the importance of knowing who God is – the Israelites are camped at the base of Mount Sinai – Moses is spending lots of time meeting with God; he disappears up the mountain for 40 days and the Hebrews remain behind.

Now the Jews have a pretty good idea who God is – they have seen him do many miracles:

- produce nation destroying plagues (frogs, river of blood, boils)
- part the Red Sea & destroy the Egyptian army
- produce food & water in the midst of the desert

They had experienced his manifest presence as He led them through the desert as a:

- pillar of fire by night
- pillar of cloud by day

And yet – the Jews were surrounded by cultural and religious influences from pagan peoples took on their practises. They created an idol – something that would represent God to them was acceptable and pleasing to themselves.

And God ultimately rejected their image of Him.

So it's absolutely important that we see and understand who God is – as He reveals himself to us. That way our worship to Him remains pure and undefiled.

Consider John 4:23

 **John 4:23**

***“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”***

You might have wondered “why worship in ‘truth’?” It’s because we can worship God the wrong way – we can worship an image that is not God (something that we have made ourselves) and so we are actually worshipping ‘falsely’ or ‘in error’ or ‘devoid of truth’.

## The reason for this talk


We are not here for us today – to be entertained. There are better things that you could have done with your time.

We’re here to be **equipped** so that we can teach others. The church must be more than receivers of revelation – it must be replicators of that revelation out to the world.


## What comes to mind when you think about God...

A.W Tozer wrote a little book called, “Knowledge Of The Holy” which you can download and read as a free PDF. It’s well worth your time ...

Check out one of his quotes:

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


What comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you. He goes on,

 ***"Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question 'What comes into your mind when you think about God?' we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man. Were we able to know exactly what our most influential religious leaders think of God today, we may be able, with some precision, to foretell where the Church will stand tomorrow."***

So have a think about that. What you understand of God affects what your life is going to look like – tomorrow and in years to come.

What our church leaders understand about God will affect what the Church looks like tomorrow and in years to come.

He goes on,

 ***"It's not a cheerful thought that millions of us who live in a land of Bibles, who belong to churches and labour to promote the Christian religion, may yet pass our whole life on this earth without once having thought or tried to think***

***seriously about the being of God. Few of us have let our hearts gaze and wonder at the I AM ...***

***Such thoughts are too painful for us. We prefer to think where it will do more good - about how to build a better mousetrap, for instance, or how to make two blades of grass grow where one grew before. For this we are now paying a too heavy price in the secularisation of our religion and the decay of our inner lives."***

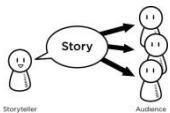
Tozer challenges us today – about the trivial things that we fill our minds and conversations with when we neglect contemplating and looking at this being who is God.

Last quote I want to put before you at the start here. It's when Tozer says,

***"The heaviest obligation lying before the Christian Church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of Him—and of her."***

I think there are few things more important we can do together on a Sunday morning than contemplate the being of God and who He is.

## Thailand



I remember walking around the streets of Chiang Mai in Thailand and stopping outside a temple. I listened to the priests chanting – I smelled the incense and watched the people as entered the temple to offer their prayers, prostrate on the ground.

And all this love, devotion and hope was being invested and poured into false gods – to idols made from human hands. It must pain the heart of God that people are so lost – and it should pain your heart and mine, that the reason so many people are lost is because the church has failed to share the truth about who God is.

## So that's our foundation...

Three reasons we come together today in church:

1. **To Know God's Glory** We are gathered because we want to see God in all of His greatness. We want to contemplate His character. To breath in His beauty, His majesty, His power, His magnificence, His terror, His brilliance.
2. **To Learn God's Word** We need to learn God's word - this is the foundation for our knowledge of God. The only way you know the glory of God is through His Word so

we'll be looking at lots of scriptures.

3. **To advance God's Kingdom** It's not about you and me – it's about being equipped that we might take what learn inside these walls and take it outside to the lost – to those who need to know about this God.

## Study Start

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We're going to look at 2 keys aspects today – next week we'll unpack more about the person of God. So firstly,

### 1. Can we know God?

*Psalm 145:3 says, "His greatness no one can fathom."*

- The reality is God is incomprehensible
- We can never fully understand any one single thing about God
- We can know something about God's love, power, wisdom and the other attributes that we're going to talk about tonight, but we can never know His love, power, wisdom or other attributes exhaustively.

This is key for us to understand - we can know something about Him, but we can't know Him exhaustively.

- His omniscience is an attribute unique to Him alone – it's not an attribute that we enjoy - so clearly we can't know God exhaustively.

#### The Reason

- We are finite, created and sinful
- God is infinite, uncreated and without sin – this is His greatness!

So, we can't know God fully because of both our sinfulness and His greatness.

#### Sin Hinders Us

Our sin hinders us from glimpsing the fullness of God and our sin keeps us from knowing God as completely as we could.

- even when all sin is removed from us, we will still be finite and God will still be infinite
- when we get to heaven we won't be infinite like God
- we won't be God

That means that for all of eternity we will increase in our knowledge of Him.

Consider this - God is:

- infinite in His love
- infinite in His power
- infinite in His wisdom

If that's true, and we are always going to be finite (not infinite), then the reality is we will be learning more, and more, and more about His love, and His power, and His wisdom and, all that He is for all of eternity.

## 2 Responses

1. If in pride we want to be equal to God in knowledge, this will **depress** us.

Some people think, "I'm never going to get there? Never going to understand it all? I mean you think after a cool 400 billion years I might be closer." But the reality is, no, we will not be any closer.

2. if in humility we want to live to adore and worship God, this will **delight** us.

I want you to let this picture soak in, that for all of eternity, day after day after day, we will never tire of learning more and more and more and more about the love, the grace, the mercy, and the power of God. And this is huge.

Sometimes when people think about heaven, they say, "If heaven is going to be perfect won't it be perfectly boring?" We think, "That's a long time - eternity. I mean, don't you get tired of that?" The reality is you can never get enough of this God and for all of eternity we will learn more and more and more about Him.

## The Resolution

Though we cannot understand God fully, we can understand God **truly**. Some might think if you can't understand God fully, then what's the point? Why even try?

Well the reality is that we can't understand Him fully, but we can understand Him truly. Everything Scripture tells us about God is true. So based on Scripture, even though we don't have exhaustive knowledge of God, we do have true knowledge of God. So everything we talk about in these studies, we're talking about that which He has revealed to us, and we can know that it is true, though not exhaustive.

So the answer to our first question "Can we Know God?" – is a resounding "Yes!"

God is **knowable**.



## 2. How do we know God?

Let's read 1 Corinthians 2:9-16

Starting at verse 9 gives us some context. Listen to what Paul says,

### 1 Corinthians 2:9

***But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man, The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."***


Paul is quoting from the Old Testament - Isaiah 64:4. See the contrast, because in the next verse Paul says the word "But."

That word signals to us that we've got a contrast. Paul pretty much says that in the Old Testament, no mind has seen, no ear has heard, no eye has seen, no mind has conceived of what God has prepared." No one can even imagine it.

Then he says in contrast, "***But God has revealed it to us by His Spirit***" (1 Cor. 2:10). So it's not hidden. It's revealed to us.

### 1 Corinthians 2:10-16

***But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.***

*** These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.***

Now I want you to follow with me here. I want you to look at a truth, and some conclusions from this truth. What this passage is teaching us is that **only the Spirit of God knows the fullness of the glory of God.**

## **If We Want to Know God, then We Need the Spirit to Reveal Him to Us**

Who knows the mind of a man, or the thoughts of a man, but the spirit of a man? The only one who knows the thoughts of God, the glory of God, is the Spirit of God. That means if we want to know God, then we need the Spirit to reveal Him to us. If only the Spirit of God knows the fullness of the glory of God, then if we want to know God we've got to have the Spirit to reveal Him to us.

## **A People Who are Desperate to Know God will be Desperate for His Spirit**

Here's the reality – only people who are desperate for the spirit of God get to know God.

If we want to know God and the Spirit of God is the only one who knows the fullness of the Glory of God, then we must grow more desperate for the Spirit of God.

This prompts us to ask a question of ourselves and our church:

- Q. Are you desperate for the Spirit of God?
- Q. Is our church desperate for the Spirit of God?
- Q. When people look on your life, on our church – do they see people desperate for the spirit of God – desperate to know God?

It is a convicting question - because the answer reveals something about us to us.

- If we're not desperate for His Spirit, it is a sure indicator that we have grown content with knowing little about God.

So the answer to our 2nd question “How do we know God?” – is through the Spirit of God. By being filled with the Spirit of God, being led, taught and transformed by the Spirit of God.

We have a unique opportunity today to meet this God we have been talking about. He removed the barrier through the blood of His son, Jesus, by paying the price that you and I should have – for taking the punishment for our sin that we deserved, Jesus has removed our sin.

Let's pray.