

bethel
making disciples



Core Discipleship Curriculum

Module 2: God: Who is He and What's So Great About Him?

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God: who He is and what's so great about Him

LESSON 1

One God in three persons

Objective:

Each participant:

- has confidence in the unity of the Godhead and
- has a basic understanding of the concept of the Trinity.

Main Verse:

Deut 6:4

Preparation for Group Discussion

To be prepared for group discussion, at a minimum look up the Scripture verses in bold and answer questions 1-7. The reading has been divided into three sections that may be read all in one sitting or on three different days.

Section 1 The Bible Teaches One God

As we studied in the previous module, the Bible is God's revelation of Himself. It is the way that finite, created humans can truly know the infinite Creator. The Bible clearly teaches that there is only one true God. The Old Testament and New Testament are united in presenting only one God, unlike any other being. The following are a selection of Scriptures which teach this truth.

Old Testament Scriptures

- Exodus 20:3 "*You shall have no other gods before me.*"
- Deuteronomy 4:35,39 "*The LORD is God; there is no other besides Him.*"
- Deuteronomy 6:4 "*The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*"
- 1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 7:22 "*There is no God besides You.*"
- Psalm 83:18; 86:10 "*You alone are the Most High.*"
- Isaiah 43:10; 44:6,8; 45:18 "*Besides me there is no god.*"

New Testament Scriptures

- Mark 12:19,32 "*The Lord is one; there is no other besides Him.*"
- John 5:44; Romans 16:27; 1 Timothy 1:17 "*The only God.*"
- Romans 3:30; Galatians 3:20 "*God is one.*"
- 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 "*There is no God but one.*"
- Ephesians 4:6 "*One God and Father of all.*"
- 1 Timothy 2:5 "*There is one God.*"

All other "gods" are false and not gods at all. Demons – fallen angels – often pose as gods, showing signs and wonders and eliciting worship (Deuteronomy 32:17; 1 Corinthians 10:20). Satan is even called "the god of this world" in 2 Corinthians 4:4, referring to the power given to him over this world. But he is not the one true God. He does not share the character and authority of God. He can only do what he is allowed to do (Job 1:12).

The Bible also teaches that no one is like God. Claiming to be like God is what led to Satan's loss of his position in heaven (Isaiah 14:14; Ezekiel 28:2,14). That humans could be like God is the first lie Satan told Eve in the garden (Genesis 3:5).

Our culture surrounds us with different views of “God.” These ideas can penetrate our own world-views even without our awareness. The chart below shows some of the false views of God prevalent in the world today. It concludes with the way that God defines Himself in the Bible.

Name	Basic Idea	Related Concepts	Outcome
Atheism	There is no god	Cynicism, anti-religion	The determination to live without God in and for the world
Agnosticism	Don't know whether there is a god or not	Cynicism, fear of commitment	Don't want to change, to be a hypocrite, to be told what to do, to judge others, to be criticized, to decide
Deism	God is the Creator who set the universe and its laws in motion, and now lets it run	Rationalism	If I know the laws of science, I can explain, understand, fix everything
Polytheism	Many gods and spirits around us	Animism, some New Age, Mormonism, Occultism, Scientology	Gods can be manipulated or appeased to make my life go well; or, in the case of Mormonism, I can become a god and rule my own planet some day
Dualism	Two eternal forces that either clash or complement each other	Greek thought: <i>one good force, one bad force</i> ; Eastern thought: <i>Yin and Yang</i>	Evil and Good are equal eternal forces that oppose each other and must find a balance
Pantheism	All is God (God = Universe)	Most New Age, “Star Wars”, Romantic poets and philosophers	Everything is united and interconnected in spirituality; some beings are at a higher energy state than others
Panentheism	All is in God (Universe is within God)	Many Native North American religions, many schools of Hinduism, Christian Science	The universe is God's body living out His eternal mind and spirit
Personal Monotheism	There is one personal God	Orthodox Judaism, Islam, Jehovah's Witness, Unitarian	God is an eternal, all-powerful personal being
Personal Trinitarian Monotheism	There is one personal God who exists in three equal and distinct persons	Christianity	God is the original and eternal community of love

1. Which of these views do you gravitate toward or find in your own worldview?

Section 2 The Bible Teaches One God in Three Persons

Although the word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible, the concept is clearly present throughout both the Old and New Testaments. The word “trinity” was coined by Tertullian (A.D. 155-220), an early Christian author, theologian, and apologist. The word means “three in one” or tri-unity. The concept of the Trinity is a humanly incomprehensible truth. We can grasp it in part, but will not understand fully until we get to heaven.

Trinity does not mean that there are three Gods. It also does not mean that God appears as different beings at different times. Trinity means that the Godhead is made up of three distinct Persons who are in essence One. In other words, each of the Persons share fully and equally the exact same essence. The very essence that makes God who He is exists in each of the Persons of the Trinity.

By “Persons” is meant that each member of the Trinity thinks, feels, acts, and speaks, in contrast to some vague, impersonal force. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) summarizes the doctrine of the Trinity in this way:

“In the unity of the Godhead there are three persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.”

Bethel Church has summarized this doctrine in its statement of faith. The following is Bethel’s confession of faith in the Trinity:

“We believe in one God, creator of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While its members possess individual, personal attributes, the Trinity is without division of nature, essence, or being. (Genesis 1:1, Matthew 28:19, John 1:3; 4:24; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 4:13)”

2. Review each word in Bethel’s statement on the Trinity. What is new for you? Important? Confusing?

Trinity in the Old Testament

As mentioned above, the Trinity is a concept found throughout Scripture. A common misconception is that the Trinity was unknown until the New Testament. While it is true that the Old Testament often reveals in shadow or types what the New Testament reveals more clearly, the Old Testament carries within it the complete truth of God, including the Trinity.

In the original language of Hebrew, the Old Testament uses two words which are often translated into English as “one.” The first is *Yahid*. This word means an absolute unity or numerical one; only. *Yahid* expresses a simple concept of “one” used about 12 times in the Old Testament. Some examples include:

- Genesis 22:2,12 “your only (*yahid*) son Isaac.”
- Psalm 22:20 “my precious (*yahid*) life.”
- Zechariah 12:10 “they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only (*yahid*) child.”

The second Hebrew word that is translated into English as “one” is *Ehad*. It refers to a more complex concept of “one” in which a whole or a unity is made up of several parts. The reason that something is described as “one” is different than the reason in which it is many. Some examples include:

- Genesis 1:5 “So the evening and the morning were the one (*ehad*) day.”
- Genesis 2:24 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one (*ehad*) flesh.”
- Ezra 2:64 and Nehemiah 7:66 “Altogether the whole (*ehad*) assembly was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty.”
- 1 Chronicles 12:38 “All the rest of Israel were of one (*ehad*) heart to make David king.”

It is significant that in all the references to God being the only God, the word *Yahid* is not used to describe His oneness. The central verse of Jewish doctrine is Deuteronomy 6:4 “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one (*ehad*).” It is also important to note that the Hebrew words for Lord (*Adonai*) and God (*Elohim*) are used in plural forms to refer to the one true God. The plurality of God is also seen in references like the following:

- Genesis 1:26 “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness.”
- Ecclesiastes 12:1 “Remember now your *Creator* (plural) in the days of your youth.”
- Isaiah 54:5 “Your *Maker* (plural) is your *Husband* (plural).”

So it is evident that the Old Testament teaches a single God who is referred to in plural form. It also implies that the reason God is plural is because of three Persons:

- Deuteronomy 6:4 “The **LORD** your **God**, the **LORD** is one.”
- Numbers 6:24-26 “The **LORD** bless you... the **LORD** make his face to shine upon you... the **LORD** lift up his countenance upon you.”
- Isaiah 6:3 “**Holy, holy, holy** is the **LORD** of hosts.”

So it is evident that the Old Testament teaches a single God who is referred to in plural form. It also implies that the reason God is plural is because of three Persons.

The same three Persons that we see clearly in the New Testament (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are found in the Old Testament. References to the *Spirit* of God are numerous (Genesis 1:2). There are also references to God as one whose face man cannot see and live (Exodus 33:20), who is the *Father*. Finally, we see in the Old Testament references to God speaking with men face to face (Exodus 24:9-11; 33:11), which is Jesus the *Son*. There are other passages that refer to these three Persons of God in the Old Testament working together:

- Isaiah 48:16 “the Lord GOD (the Father) has sent me (the Son), and his Spirit.”
 - Isaiah 61:1 “the Spirit of the Lord GOD (the Father) is upon me (the Son).” (cf. Luke 4:18)
 - Psalm 110:1 “The LORD (the Father) says to my Lord (the Son) Sit at my right hand.”
3. All three Persons of the Trinity are found in Exodus 33. Read **Exodus 33:10-23**. Which verse(s) refer specifically to the Father? Which to the Son? Which to the Holy Spirit?

Trinity in the New Testament

The existence of the Trinity in the New Testament is more easily apparent. Some references to the three Persons of the Godhead are:

- Matt 3:16-17 The **Son** was baptized; the **Holy Spirit** descended like a dove; the **Father's** voice spoke from heaven
- Matt 28:19 Baptizing them in the name of the **Father** and of the **Son** and of the Holy Spirit
- John 14:16-17 The **Son** prays to the **Father**, who sends the **Holy Spirit**
- Ephesians 2:18 We have access to the **Father** through the **Son** in the **Holy Spirit**
- Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one **Spirit**, one **Lord (Son)**, one **Father**

Why is the Trinity important?

The Trinity is foundational to the Christian faith. It is crucial for proper understanding of God, how He relates to us, and how we can relate to Him. The Trinity is also the basis for community and love since the Godhead is the original and eternal community of love. The Persons of the Trinity relate to each other in joyful fellowship. Mark Driscoll puts it this way, “In the essence of what it means to be the Trinitarian community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is love.” John 14:31 and John 3:35 show the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father.

The Trinity and the Gospel

The way the Persons of the Trinity work together is basic to the gospel. God the Father sent the Son out of love and grace. The Son was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, lived a sinless life by the power of the Holy Spirit, and died and rose again by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit also works in and through us as Christians, applying truth, providing assurance, helping us to pray and live godly lives. Our salvation is to the Father, through the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

4. Read **Ephesians 1:3-14**. As you read, write down what the Father did/does, what the Son did/does, and what the Holy Spirit did/does.

Section 3 Unique Roles of Each Person of the Trinity

Each Person of the Trinity is fully and equally God and eternally distinct from the other persons. The Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Father (John 3:17; Romans 1:7; Gal 4:4). The Son is not the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is not the Son (Luke 3:22; John 14:16). The Father is not the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is not the Father (John 14:16; 15:26; Romans 8:27). Each one is distinct. The ancient illustration of the Shield of the Trinity is still helpful today:



The Father, Son and Holy Spirit work together to accomplish their goals in creation and redemption. In lesson four of the first module, we talked about the reason we study the Bible. We looked at the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:37-38 and concluded that the reason we study and the reason we do anything in our Christian lives is *to love God more*. It is God's purpose for us to love and enjoy Him, and only in loving and enjoying God will we be truly happy. Loving and enjoying God is what we call "glorifying God." John Piper articulates this concept succinctly in his defining quote, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."

God works for His own glory, which means that God works so that we will love and enjoy Him more (Isaiah 30:18). In this work, the Persons of the Trinity each have different roles, which are briefly summarized below.

Roles of the Father

- The first person of the Trinity in their mode of operation; indicated by the order they are commonly named (Matthew 28:19).
- The Foundation of our redemption (John 3:16).
- Dwells in unapproachable light and cannot be seen (Exodus 33:20; 1 Timothy 6:16).
- The Father and Begetter (John 3:16; John 1:10-12).

5. Read **John 12:28**. To what end does the Father work?

Roles of the Son

- The second person of the Trinity in their mode of operation (Matthew 28:19).
- Submissive and obedient to the Father's will (Luke 22: 42; Philippians 2:6-8).
- Visibly reveals the invisible God to men (John 1:1-3, 14-18; Colossians 1:19; 2:9; Hebrews 1:3).
- Mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5).
- Only begotten Son (John 3:16).
- God-man; unites divine and human natures in one person (John 1:14).
- Makes atonement for sins; redeems (John 1:29; Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 5:9).
- Has all authority and judgment (Matthew 28:18; Acts 17:31).

6. Read **John 17:1**. To what end does the Son work?

Roles of the Holy Spirit

- Third person of the Trinity in their mode of operation (Matthew 28:19).
- Proceeding from the Father, through the Son (John 15:26).
- Inspirer, Revelator, and Illuminer of the Word (1 Peter 1:11; 2 Peter 1:21; John 16:12-14).
- Comforter (John 14:16).
- Convictor (John 16:8).
- Intercessor (Romans 8:26-27).
- Sanctifying power (Romans 15:16).
- The presence of God in the Church (Acts 13:52; Ephesian 5:18).
- Fruitful (Galatians 5:22).

7. Read **John 16:14**. To what end does the Holy Spirit work?

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God: *who He is and what's so great about Him*

LESSON 2

God's Nature (pt 1)

Objective:

Each participant:

- is familiar with central concepts about God and
- worships God out of this greater understanding.

Main Verses:

Romans 1:20-25

Preparation for Group Discussion

To be prepared for group discussion, at a minimum look up the Scripture verses in bold and answer questions 1-11. The lesson has been divided into four sections that may be read all in one sitting or on four different days.

Section 1: The Revelation of God

The direction for the rest of this curriculum is set by the topics in the book of Romans. The book of Romans is Paul's letter to the church at Rome, and may be described as Paul's thesis on Christian doctrine. While this course is not a study of the book itself, most of the topics have been taken from Romans. The module on God's Word came first to provide the proper respect for and trust in the Bible. The book of Romans, after a greeting and introduction, begins with the revelation of God.

1. Read **Romans 1:20-25**. Write down as many aspects of God as you can find in these verses.

As we just read, God has revealed Himself in creation and in the minds and consciences of humans. However, His most complete revelation of Himself, besides the person of Jesus, is in the Bible. There are many things we can know about God from His creation and our experiences, but for a more complete understanding we need God's own Word to tell us Who He is.

God's Shared and Unshared Attributes

Romans 1 gives us a glimpse into the nature of God. Since the context is showing the difference between humans and God, this section gives a good overview of God's unshared attributes. "Unshared" refers to the attributes of God that are His alone, which He does not share with humans or other beings (including Satan). They have little or no analogy in the human life.

Romans 1 does mention a few attributes that are shared in a limited sense. These attributes have some analogy or reflection in humans since we are created in God's image. These exceptions will be noted as we discuss each attribute. In the next lesson, *God's Nature, Part II*, we will focus more intently on the shared attributes of God.

Section 2: God's Invisible Attributes

For the remainder of this lesson, we will go step-by-step through the attributes of God mentioned in our key verses of Romans 1:20-25. In verse 20, Paul mentions God's "invisible attributes." In particular, he mentions His "eternal power" and "divine nature." There are several attributes of God that fit under these categories.

“We know something of the nature of finite spirits from our own self-consciousness, but we know the Infinite Spirit only by analogy, and therefore, only imperfectly.”

Spirit

Read **John 1:18; John 4:24; 1 Timothy 6:16.**

God is Spirit. As such, He is invisible. He has no material aspect to His being and no body (Luke 24:39). No one has ever seen God. As a spirit, God is personal. He is not a force or an entity. He has will, intelligence, feeling, self-consciousness and self-determination. Even though Jesus accommodated Himself to us by taking on a body, a body is not one of His attributes.

This first attribute happens to be one of the exceptions that we mentioned. We are made of body, soul, and spirit. Dr. Henry C. Thiessen comments on similarities and differences between the human spirit and God, "We know something of the nature of finite spirits from our own self-consciousness, but we know the Infinite Spirit only by analogy, and therefore, only imperfectly."

When we receive God's Spirit and are "born again," the spirit within us comes to life for the first time (John 3:5-6). Because God is Spirit and He makes our spirits alive, we can relate with God. We can know Him and we can worship Him (John 4:24; John 14:16-17). God reveals His invisible self to us through the person and work of Jesus and through the Bible.

2. Read **John 14:16-17**. Jesus said we would "know" the Spirit because he would dwell with us and be in us. Do you have this "knowledge" or do you find it hard to relate to an invisible God? Explain.

Eternal

Read **Psalm 90:2 and Revelation 1:8.**

God is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. He reads time like we read a book and writes Himself in as a character. There has never been a time when God did not exist.

It can be comforting to know that God has an eternal perspective on our lives, seeing the end as well as the beginning. His timing is perfect.

3. Read **Psalm 90:12**. What is one area of your life that you have been viewing from a temporary perspective? How would viewing this area in light of eternity change your behavior?

Powerful and Sovereign

Read **1 Chronicles 29:10-13; Job 42:2; Philippians 3:20-21.**

God is omnipotent, which means all-powerful. He is able to do all He wills, but, as Dr. Thiessen puts it, “since His will is limited by His nature, this means that God can do everything that is in harmony with His perfections.” There are some things which God is unable to do: 1) Things that are contrary to His nature, like lie (Hebrews 6:18) or sin (James 1:13); and 2) things that are absurd or self-contradictory, like making a round square. These do not limit God’s omnipotence since these are not acts of power.

God’s sovereignty can also be included in His omnipotence. Sovereignty refers to God’s authority. He is supreme in rule and authority over all things.

God’s power and authority are the greatest refuge Christians have. No matter what happens in our lives, we can be assured that God is in control over it and is working it for our good.

4. Read **Romans 8:28**. Is there an event in your life – past or present – that you have wondered why God allowed to happen or that has created resentment between you and God? Briefly explain. Pray that God will help you release your bitterness and need for control and that He will enable you to trust Him in even the hardest of times.

Section 3: God’s Divine Nature

In Romans 1:20, when Paul refers to the “divine nature,” he is talking about the things that make God distinctly God. The following attributes fit this description. Though they may not be exactly the ones Paul had in mind, they are appropriate in this context.

Self-Existent

Read **Exodus 3:14; John 1:4; John 5:26.**

God is self-existent. He has life in Himself and needs no outside source. God also declares that His self-existence is His defining characteristic, the Name by which He is to be known (Exodus 3:14-15). Existence is in the essence of God, out of which all other attributes flow.

God’s self-existence is rooted in His nature, not His will. This means that God is not His own cause; if that were true, He would have the power to annihilate Himself.

Because God has life in Himself, no one can take away God’s life or destroy Him. Even when Jesus died, He didn’t lose His self-existence. He also gave up His life willingly; no one took it from Him (John 10:17-18). We can have confidence that God will never be destroyed.

5. What difference does it make in your thoughts, actions, or attitudes that God is self-existent?

All-Wise and All-Knowing

Read **Romans 11:33-34; Hebrew 4:13**.

God knows all things at all times. He has perfect knowledge, perfect understanding, and perfect wisdom. This means that God knows all facts, properly perceives and interprets these facts, and perfectly applies them in every situation. We call God's perfect knowledge omniscience.

This is another attribute of God that is reflected in humans. He gives us the abilities to know, understand, and be wise and wants us to increase in these abilities.

Because God's knowledge and wisdom are unfathomable, we can trust that His judgment is best. Because God's knowledge is perfect, we can rejoice that He knows the worst and darkest of our hearts - even before we realize it ourselves - and loves us anyway. We can be completely open and honest with Him because He already knows it all.

6. Read **Psalm 139:1-6**. Does God's complete knowledge of yourself make you uneasy or give you comfort? Why? Take some time to talk to Him about it.

Omnipresent

Read **Psalm 139:7-10; Joshua 1:9**.

God is present in all places and all times. He is not bound by space or time. He can be present in different ways in different places and at different times. When He promises to be with us (Joshua 1:9), He is promising His Presence in a special way.

God's omnipresence means that there is nowhere to hide from God. It is foolish to think that we can run from God. But it also means that God's presence is with us in every situation and place. There is nowhere we can go that He cannot go with us.

7. Is there a place or situation you are afraid to face? Briefly explain. Thank God for His continual presence with you and ask Him to make His presence more evident to you as you enter that situation.

Immutable

Read Hebrews 13:8.

Immutability means that God is unchanged and unchanging in His character and being.

Because God does not change, we can be confident in every attribute and promise of His. We can rest securely in our salvation because it is rooted in the character of God.

8. Read **Malachi 3:6**. Praise God that His character is constant, which means that your place in His family is assured.

Section 4: God's Glory

Glorious

Read 1 Chronicles 16:27-29.

Back to the first chapter of Romans, in verse 23 Paul refers to the glory of God. The glory of God encompasses His majesty, beauty and worth. Majesty comprises God's greatness; God is great in strength and joy and every good thing. God's beauty is hinted at in creation, displayed in His gracious actions toward humans, and is found fully in His presence (Psalm 27:4, 96:6). Paul says God is worthy of honor (Romans 1:21), worthy of thanks (v.21), worthy of worship (v.25), and worthy of service (v.25).

Because God is glorious, we have reason to rejoice and to worship Him. He is infinitely worthy of our worship. We should center our lives around seeing God's glory increased in the world and basking in it eternally.

9. Read **Psalms 26**. What did David love that caused him to order his life in a certain way (verse 8)? List four things that David did in verses 1-3. List four things he did not do in verses 4-5. What hinders you from fully loving God? What do you need to do to grow in your love for Him?

Creator

Read **Genesis 1:1; Colossians 1:15-17.**

God is the Creator of all things (Romans 1:25). He is the author and sustainer of all life. His creation reflects His qualities and is under His authority.

Because God created and sustains all life and His glory is shown in His creation, His people should have a heightened respect for God's creation.

10. Read **Psalm 19:1-6.** What is one thing you do to show respect for God's creation (environment, animals, people, etc.)? What is one thing you can do this week to increase your respect for God's creation?

Blessed Forever

Read **Jeremiah 32:41 and 1 Timothy 1:11**

Blessed means happy. God is the most joyful being in the universe (Romans 1:25). He loves being God; this is clearest when we see the delight of the Father in the Son (Matthew 3:17), who is the reflection of His own glory (Hebrew 1:3). He takes pleasure in all He does (Psalm 115:3). He rejoices in doing his people good.

The good news is that God invites us to enter into his happiness. He wants His joy to be in us (John 15:11) and our joy to be full (John 15:11, 17:13). He wants us to spend eternity with a happy God (Matthew 25:23).

11. Read **John 15:11.** Has your idea of God been a happy God or a scowling judge? Explain. Pray that God will help you see Him as He truly is and that His joy will be in you.

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God: *who He is and what's so great about Him*

LESSON 3

God's Nature (pt 2)

Objective:

Each participant:

- has confidence in the many perfections of God and
- aspires to be more like Him.

Main Verses:

Exodus 34:1-8

Preparation for Group Discussion

To be prepared for group discussion, at a minimum look up the Scripture verses in bold and answer questions 1–11. The reading has been divided into four sections that may be read all in one sitting or on four different days.

Section 1: Reviewing God's Unshared Attributes

Continuing with the theme of the previous lesson, we will now look more closely at the shared attributes of God. These are ways in which God allows us as human beings to reflect Him. In Romans 1:20-25, we looked at several unshared attributes and a few shared attributes of God. In review, the unshared attributes we looked at are:

- Eternal
- Powerful
- Self-Existent
- Omnipresent
- Glorious
- Immutable
- Creator

God's Shared Attributes

The shared attributes we saw in lesson 2 are:

- Spirit
- All-Wise and All-Knowing
- Blessed

In this lesson, we will look at six more of God's shared attributes taken from Exodus 34:6-7. These verses are the defining revelation of God in the Old Testament.

They are God's own declaration of Who He is. They are quoted throughout the Old Testament back to God in prayer and praise and back to God's people in prophecy (Numbers 14:18; Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2)

1. Read **Exodus 34:1-8**. Write down as many characteristics of God as you can find from these verses.

Section 2: Holy, Compassionate, and Gracious

Holy

Read 1 Peter 1:14-16; Revelation 4:8

Holiness ranks highly among the attributes of God and regulates many of the others. By holiness we mean that God is absolutely separate from and above creation and absolutely separate from evil. Though He does not declare His holiness in Exodus 34:6-7, it is implicit in His commands just before revealing Himself to Moses. No human or animal was to even come near the mountain where God's glory was revealed.

Job and Isaiah responded to the holiness of God with humility, contrition, and confession (Job 40:3-5; Isaiah 6:5-7). Henry C. Thiessen notes,

"Right views of the holiness of God lead to right views of sin."

2. What sin in your life is preventing you from being holy? You don't need to share with your group, but take some time before small group to humbly and remorsefully confess to God.

“There is nothing I can do to make God love me more. There is nothing I can do to make God love me less.”

Compassionate and Gracious

Read Psalm 103:13.

The first thing God says about Himself is that He is compassionate and gracious. The Hebrew word here translated as “compassionate” (or sometimes “merciful”) refers to the deep love which a mother or father has toward their children. It is a feeling of love and mercy for the helpless.

Grace is a similar concept that ties more closely to the unworthiness of the recipient. Grace is unmerited favor; it is freely bestowed by God on whomever He chooses. There is no way to earn His compassion and grace. Philip Yancey defines grace this way: “There is nothing I can do to make God love me more. There is nothing I can do to make God love me less.”

Once we have received and realized God's deep, unearned compassion and grace, it suddenly becomes a lot easier to extend these qualities to others.

3. Read **Exodus 33:19**. Do you ever feel like you have the right to be loved by God? Or do you feel hopeless and not good enough for God to love you? Explain.
4. Who in your life needs to be shown compassion and grace? What is one thing you can do this week to show it to that person?

Section 3: Patient and Love

Patient

Read Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9.

God is slow to anger. He endures us in our disobedience. He is exceedingly patient and long-suffering, wanting all to come to repentance.

This is especially true for Christians; for us there will never be condemnation (Romans 5:1) because God's wrath was poured out on Christ. Everything God feels toward us as Christians is gracious. When we sin, as we are so prone to do, God does not treat us as an angry, condemning parent would. As a loving Father, He graciously and patiently corrects us (Hebrews 12:3-11).

5. Read James 1:19. Does "slow to anger" describe you? What relationships require extra patience from you?

Love

Read 1 Chronicles 16:34; 1 John 4:7-8.

The Apostle John writes in his first epistle (1 John 4:8, 16) that "God is love." This is different than saying "God is loving." God defines love by His existence and exemplifies love in His actions. God's love for humans is expressed fully and perfectly in His redemption (John 3:16). According to Rev. Charles F. Whiston in his book *Instructions in the Life of Prayer*, in redemption "we watch God meet our evil with his own unconquerable, redeeming, agonizing love; meet it, stop it, overcome it."

Though God's love involves feeling, it is more than a transient affection. God consciously and deliberately chooses to love us and save us (Deuteronomy 7:7-9; Ephesians 1:3-5). The word used in this Exodus passage for love is *Hesed*, which is commonly translated as "lovingkindness," "steadfast love," "unfailing love," or simply "love." This word describes the kind of love that is binding: covenant-making love. It is this love that compels God to devote Himself to His people to work for their good and to keep His promises.

God wants us to love the same way that He loves (John 17:26; 1 John 4:7-8). He wants us to love Him and to love others (Matthew 22:36-40) with a steadfast, committed, devoted love.

6. Have you had any relationships of binding love (e.g. parents, children, best friend, marriage)? How do you think that love similar is to God's love for us? How might it differ?

7. We are called to love others as God loves us. With God's binding love in mind, what should your relationships with your small group members look like? How do we extend this kind of love to people who don't know God?

“By the truth of God we mean that God's knowledge, declarations, and representations eternally conform to reality.”

Section 4: Truth, Just, and Righteous

Truth

Read 1 John 5:20; 2 Timothy 2:13.

Many today ask with Pilate “What is truth?” (John 18:38). Entire generations have given up on discovering absolute truth, wanting only what is true for each individual. Amidst this sea of relativity, God stands as a solid beacon of Truth. Henry C. Thiessen explains, “By the truth of God we mean that God's knowledge, declarations, and representations eternally conform to reality.” In other words, God is the Ultimate Reality (1 John 5:20; see also Jeremiah 10:10; John 3:33; 17:3; Romans 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 6:10).

We experience the truth of God in His veracity and His faithfulness. Veracity means that what God says is true and can be depended upon (Hebrews 6:18). God's faithfulness means He will fulfill and keep all of His promises (Deuteronomy 7:9).

8. In what way do you struggle with truth (for example: lying, “bending” the truth, doubting there is Truth, unfaithfulness)? What can you do to align more closely with the God of Truth?

Just and Righteous

Read Nehemiah 9:33; Romans 3:21-25; 2 Timothy 4:8.

God declares to Moses that He will “by no means leave the guilty unpunished.” We get our own deep sense of justice from God Himself. We can rest assured that all the horrors and oppression and evil in this world will be avenged by God (Deuteronomy 32:35).

We can also rest assured that justice has already come to those who hold Christ as their Lord and Savior, because He bore the just punishment for us. Thus, we do not need to fear God's wrath. God's justice accepts the substitution of Jesus Christ's punishment instead of our own (Isaiah 53:5).

As with each of these shared attributes, humans are created to reflect God's justice. More particularly, as children of God, we ought to seek justice for our neighbors (Isaiah 58:6-7, 9-10).

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2. Kevin J. Conner, *The Foundations of Christian Doctrine: A Practical Guide to Christian Belief*. (Portland, OR: City Bible Publishing, 1980).
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God: *who He is and what's so great about Him*

LESSON 4

Descriptions of God
in the Bible

Objective:

Each participant:

- is familiar with the basic biblical titles of God and
- has a glimpse of God's character through His descriptions and images.

Main Verses:

- *Genesis 1:1;*
- *Exodus 3:14;*
- *Joshua 5:14*

Preparation for Group Discussion

To be prepared for group discussion, at a minimum look up the Scripture verses in bold and answer questions 1–6. The reading has been divided into four sections that may be read all in one sitting or on four different days.

Section 1: Introduction

Names in the Bible are intimately connected with a person's character and purpose (e.g. **Genesis 3:20; 5:29; 2 Samuel 12:25; Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:13**). Though we cannot fully know or comprehend the fullness of God's character and the depths of His purposes, He reveals Himself in the name *Yahweh*.

The various titles and descriptions of God also give us glimpses into His character and purposes. In this lesson, we will explore the primary biblical titles of God and look briefly at the many descriptions of God connected to those titles.

Yahweh: God the Redeemer

In **Exodus 3:14**, God introduces Himself to Moses as "I AM THAT I AM," indicating that God is the "Self-Existent One." This name defines God fully. It is so sacred to the Jews that they do not pronounce it, but substitute the word "Lord" when reading the Bible. The four letters in Hebrew that make up this name are "YHVH," which is how we get our English pronunciations of *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*.

The name *Yahweh* is God's personal name. It is used of God in relationship with His people, referring to the loving and relating God who devotes Himself to His people in covenant-relationships and redeems them. In your Bible, you will usually see this name translated as "LORD," and sometimes as "GOD."

Yahweh and its shorter form, *Yah*, are compounded with other descriptions that tend to be linked with some need of man. The following are some examples:

- *Yahweh Yireh* (Gen 22:13-14): The LORD will Provide (commonly known as *Jehovah Jireh*)
- *Yahweh Rapha* (Ex 15:22-26): The LORD Who Heals
- *Yahweh Nissi* (Ex 17:15): The LORD my Banner (Victory)
- *Yahweh M'Kaddesh* (Ex 31:13): The LORD Who Sanctifies
- *Yahweh Kanna* (Ex 34:14): The LORD Who is Jealous
- *Yahweh Shalom* (Jud 6:24): The LORD is Peace
- *Yahweh Shaphat* (Jud 11:27): The LORD is the Judge
- *Yahweh Sabaoth* (1 Sam 1:3): The LORD of Hosts
- *Yahweh Elyon* (Ps 7:17): The LORD Most High
- *Yahweh Raah* (Ps 23:1): The LORD my Shepherd

- *Yahweh Hosenu* (Ps 95:6): The LORD our Maker
- *Yahweh Gibbor* (Is 42:13): The Mighty LORD
- *Yahweh Tzidkenu* (Jer 23:6): The LORD is our Righteousness
- *Yahweh El Gmolah* (Jer 51:56): The LORD of Recompense
- *Yahweh Nakeh* (Ezek 7:9): The LORD Who Smites
- *Yahweh Shammah* (Ezek 48:35): The LORD Who is Present

1. Which of the compound *Yahweh* descriptions meets a felt need of yours? Which are surprising or odd to you?

Section 2: Elohim: God the Creator

The Bible starts with the phrase “In the beginning, God created.” (**Genesis 1:1**) The word used here for God is *Elohim*, which is the plural form of *El*. *El* means strong, powerful, and mighty. This title of God is used to refer to God in relation to His creation, His sovereignty, and His work.

Elohim and *El* are often compounded with other descriptions that show God’s power or an attribute of God in relation to His creation. The following are some examples:

- *El-Elyon* (Gen 14:8) or *Elohim-Elyon* (Ps 91:1-2): God Most High
- *El Roi* (Gen 16:13-14): God Who Sees Me
- *El Shaddai* (Gen 17:1): God Almighty
- *El Beth El* (Gen 31:13): God of the House of God
- *El Elohe Israel* (Gen 33:20): God, the God of the Prince of God
- *Eloah* (Deut 32:15): The One God
- *El Gibbor* (Is 9:6): The Mighty God
- *Elohim Sabaoth* (Ps 80:7): God of Hosts
- *Immanu El* (Is 7:14): God with Us

2. Which of the compound *El/Elohim* descriptions show you that God is powerful?

God’s personal name, *Yahweh*, is often paired with the title *Elohim* throughout the Old Testament. You will see this in your Bible as “the LORD God,” and it may be thought of as referring to the Redeemer-Creator.

Another common title for God in the Old Testament is *Adonai*, which means Lord or Master (**Joshua 5:14**). This name refers to God as the Almighty ruler and judge. When you see the name the “Lord GOD,” in your Bible, it is the translation of *Adonai Yahweh*.

Section 3: Descriptions of God in the New Testament

The Lord Jesus Christ is the predominant name of God in the New Testament. This is not surprising since Jesus is God's fullest revelation of Himself to humans. The word "Lord" connects Jesus back to the personal name of *Yahweh*, since "Lord" was spoken in place of pronouncing the Name of God.

Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, which means "Salvation." Christ is from the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Meshiach* or Messiah, which means "Anointed One" and has the association of being the One that was promised. Together, the terms Lord Jesus Christ describe God as *Yahweh* the Savior and Chosen King.

Some other descriptions of Jesus in the New Testament are presented below:

- Immanuel (Matthew 1:23): God with Us
- Rabbi (John 13:12-17): Teacher, master
- Lord (Romans 10:13): Master and authority
- Logos (John 1): The Word of creation
- I Am (John 8:58): Same as *Yahweh*
- Son of God (Matthew 11:27): Messiah, obedient to the Father, part of the Trinity
- Son of David (Matthew 9:27): Merciful Messiah
- Son of Man (Matthew 8:20): Human, Suffering Servant of God, Heavenly Messiah

The first Person of the Trinity is commonly called the Father in the New Testament, whereas that term is rarely used of God in the Old Testament. The title "Father" expresses the covenant relationship expressed by *Yahweh* in the Old Testament in a whole new way. It shows God as a loving Father who cares for and relates to His children.

An important title for the Holy Spirit in the New Testament comes from John 14-16. When Jesus was explaining how His ministry could possibly continue through His disciples when He was gone, He promised to send the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-31; 16:5-15). He calls this person of God the Holy Spirit, the Helper, and the Spirit of truth. The Greek word (*paraclete*) translated Helper (in the ESV, NKJV, and NASB) is also translated appropriately as Advocate (NLT), and Counselor (NIV). Jesus calls Himself the first Helper (14:16) during his ministry, and in this role the Holy Spirit will continue Jesus' work and remain forever with and in the disciples. In this role, He teaches with authority, adhering strictly to Jesus and His message, maintaining, expanding, completing the work of Jesus, leading disciples into all truth. The Holy Spirit's witness to Jesus is an accusation before the world that sin is on their side and righteousness and triumph on Jesus' side. (See also Romans 8:26; Mark 13:11)

Besides being the Helper (see also Romans 8:26 and Mark 13:11), the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God, Spirit of the Father, Spirit of the Lord, Spirit of Jesus, Spirit of holiness, Spirit of Christ, Spirit of the Living God, Eternal Spirit, Spirit of Truth.

3. **Read John 14:16, 25-26; Romans 8:26; Mark 13:11.** In what ways have you experienced the help of the Holy Spirit? What need are you facing this week in which you need His help?

Section 4: Poetic images of God in the Bible

Since we cannot fully comprehend or describe God, images are helpful to give us a more complete picture of Who God is. There are images of God in the Bible taken from human experience (anthropomorphic images), and images taken from creation.

Anthropomorphic Images of God

- Bridegroom – Isaiah 61:10
 - Husband – Isaiah 54:5
 - Father – Deuteronomy 32:6
 - Judge and King – Isaiah 33:22
 - Man of War – Exodus 15:3
 - Builder and Maker – Hebrews 11:10
 - Shepherd – Psalm 23:1
4. Pick two of the anthropomorphic images of God and look up the Scripture references. What do these images tell you about God?

Images of God from Creation

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| • Lion: Isaiah 31:4 | • Fire: Hebrews 12:29 |
| • Eagle: Deuteronomy 32:11 | • Fountain: Psalm 36:9 |
| • Lamb: Isaiah 53:7 | • Rock: Deuteronomy 32:4 |
| • Hen: Matthew 23:37 | • Shield: Psalm 84:11 |
| • Sun: Psalm 84:11 | • Daystar: Revelation 2:28 |
| • Morning Star: Revelation 22:16 | • Vine: John 15:5 |
| • Light: Psalm 27:1 | • Chief Cornerstone: Ephesians 2:20 |
| • Torch: Revelation 21:23 | • Root of Jesse: Romans 15:12 |
5. Pick two images of God from creation and look up the Scripture references. In what way is God like that object or animal?

Images of Jesus

- Shepherd: 1 Peter 5:4
 - Master: John 13:13
 - King of kings: Revelation 19:16
 - Lord of lords: Revelation 19:16
 - Deliverer: Romans 11:26
 - Advocate: 1 John 2:1
 - Bishop and Guardian of our Souls: 1 Peter 2:25
 - Second Adam: 1 Corinthians 15:45, 47
 - Firstborn: Romans 8:29
 - Head of the Body: Colossians 1:18
 - Physician: Luke 4:23
 - Chief Apostle: Hebrews 3:1
 - Great High Priest: Hebrews 3:1
6. Pick one image of Jesus and look up the Scripture reference. What does the image say about Jesus? What does it say about us as humans?

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1. Mars Hill Church booklet *Gospel Class*. Unpublished; out of print.
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God: who He is and what's so great about Him

Meeting the Objective

Each lesson has at least one objective for each member of your small group. How do you know if your disciples have met the lesson objectives? It will be up to you as leaders to pay attention during discussion and conversations afterwards to gauge where each one is at. For each lesson we have provided evaluation questions you can ask yourselves after each meeting to determine whether your small group has met the lesson objectives or not.

If your group has not met the lesson objective, consider spending some extra time in this area, utilizing some of the resources at the end of this module.

Consider praying about these areas for your group members and keep them in mind throughout this week's meeting.

Lesson 1

Objective

Each participant has confidence in the unity of the Godhead and a basic understanding of the concept of the Trinity.

Evaluation Questions

1. Are my disciples confident that there is only one true God?
2. Do they feel comfortable with the concept of the Trinity?
3. Can they briefly describe the Trinity (i.e. three distinct Persons that are the same in essence)?

If you can answer in the affirmative to the above questions, the objective has been met. If you are unsure about the answers to any of these questions, ask your group some of the following questions:

1. How many gods does the Bible teach that there are?
2. Are the gods of other religions also gods?
3. Briefly describe the Trinity.

Lesson 2

Objective

Each participant is familiar with central concepts about God and worships God out of this greater understanding.

Evaluation Questions

1. Do my disciples have basic, even if unclear, ideas of each of the attributes of God discussed and clear ideas of at least a few of them?
2. Do my disciples believe in each of the attributes of God discussed?
3. Have my disciples' awe and love for God increased?

If you can answer in the affirmative to the above questions, the objective has been met. If you are unsure about the answers to any of these questions, ask your group some of the following questions:

1. What does it mean that God is... (pick a few: Spirit, Eternal, Powerful, Sovereign, Self-Existent, All-Wise and All-Knowing, Omnipresent, Glorious, Immutable, Creator, Blessed)?
2. Are there any attributes of God in this lesson that you have a hard time believing? (If so) Why?
3. Has anything you learned in this lesson changed your view of God or feelings about Him? (If so) How?

Lesson 3

Objective

Each participant has confidence in the many perfections of God and aspires to be more like Him.

Lesson 3 Evaluation Questions

1. Do my disciples have basic, even if unclear, ideas of each of the attributes of God discussed and clear ideas of at least a few of them?
2. Do my disciples believe in each of the attributes of God discussed?
3. Have my disciples' awe and love for God increased?
4. Do my disciples show signs of wanting to be more like God?

If you can answer in the affirmative to the above questions, the objective has been met. If you are unsure about the answers to any of these questions, ask your group some of the following questions:

1. What does it mean that God is... (pick a few: Holy, Compassionate, Gracious, Patient, Love, Truth, Just, Righteous)?
2. Are there any attributes of God in this lesson that you have a hard time believing? (If so) Why?
3. Has anything you learned in this lesson changed your view of God or feelings about Him? (If so) How?

4. Does knowing more about Who God is make you want to be more like Him? (If so) Why? (If not) Why not?
5. How does it change your thoughts, actions, or attitudes that God is... (pick a few: Holy, Compassionate, Gracious, Patient, Love, Truth, Just, Righteous)?

Lesson 4

Objective

Each participant is familiar with the basic Biblical names of God and has a glimpse of God's character through His names and images.

Lesson 4 Evaluation Questions

1. Do my disciples have basic ideas of what *Elohim*, *Yahweh*, and *Adonai* mean?
2. Can they recognize where each one is used in an English translation of the Bible?
3. Do my disciples have a basic understanding of what Jesus, Father, and Helper?
4. Is God's character more apparent to my disciples now than it was before this lesson?

If you can answer in the affirmative to the above questions, the objective has been met. If you are unsure about the answers to any of these questions, ask your group some of the following questions:

- In a sentence or two, can you explain the name or title (*Elohim*, *Yahweh*, *Adonai*, Jesus, Father, Helper)?
- When you see the term (LORD, GOD, Lord, God) in the Bible, which name is it referring to?
- Do you feel like you have a clearer picture of God's character from studying His names? How so?
- Do you feel like you have a clearer picture of God's character from studying His images? How so?

Suggested GROW group meeting plan

1. *Prayer (5 min)* Alternate who begins the group's time in prayer, beginning with leaders, then asking those who are comfortable. Pray for the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in your midst as you meet tonight.
2. *Icebreaker (10 min)* There are suggestions in the following section for icebreakers that go along with the lesson. Consider using them or finding ones of your own.
3. *Discussion (30 min)* Discuss the answers to the homework questions. If some people have not done the homework, look up the verses together.

There may be more questions than your group can discuss in 20-30 minutes. Keep the conversation focused and moving, and decide beforehand which questions you would like your group to focus on if you cannot touch on all of them.

4. *Prayer (30 min)* This is time for group prayer including intercession and petition. Allow some time for prayer requests, but don't let them dominate the time. If you

think that will be an issue, have each person write their requests on a card, then trade and pray for the person whose card you have. Have a leader close and focus on issues from the discussion and the impact of the Bible in our lives.

5. *Worship (15 min)* Worship is our response to the glory of God. Here are some suggestions of songs on the following subjects:

The Trinity	Some Attributes of God	Some Names of God
Holy, Holy, Holy (hymn)	Beautiful Beyond Description	Jesus, Name Above All Names
Father, I Adore You	Mighty to Save	Jehovah Jireh
Blessed Assurance	Faithful One	El Shaddai
	Hallelujah (Your Love is Amazing)	
	We Fall Down	
	Amazing Grace	
	Everlasting God	

6. *Fellowship (30 min or more as desired)* Provide snacks or assign a group member to bring refreshments. Take time to get to know one another and be aware of others' life situations. Remember that fellowship is about building up the Body of Christ, not just chatting. For example, this is a good time to follow up on prayer requests, talk about what you and others are learning from their Bible reading, or what God is doing in your lives.

Suggested Icebreakers

Lesson 1

Find groups of three objects that have one thing in common (i.e. things with wheels, things that are blue, things used for seeing). Divide the group into two teams. Set out one group of three items and give a point to the first team to figure out the commonality. Repeat using the next group of objects.

Lesson 2

Find copies (print from the internet) of famous paintings. Make a game out of guessing who the artist was.

Transition to the study by saying something like this: "Great artists leave distinctive qualities behind that tell you who the artist was and something about him. Creation is a kind of art by the Original Artist, God. In the key verses for this lesson, Paul says that God's masterpiece has left no doubt about who the Artist behind it is."

Lesson 3

Have each of the people in your group bring a picture of one of their children as a baby (if all have children) or of one of their parents. Take them anonymously and spread them on a table or pin them up on a board so all can see them. Have a number for each picture and a paper for each person to guess who belongs to which picture. Transition to the discussion by linking the similarities between parents and children to the similarities between God and humans made in His image and/or God and His children.

Lesson 4

Have each person share a nickname from childhood/high school and what, if anything, the name says about them. Transition to God's Name and descriptions.

God: *who He is and what's so great about Him*

Theology (Trinity, Nature and Attributes of God)

- *Systematic Theology*, by Henry C. Thiessen, is a good overview of biblical doctrines.
- *The Foundations of Christian Doctrine*, by Kevin J. Conner, is a practical guide to the beliefs of Christianity. Could be used as a small group study for those theologically inclined.
- *Basic Christian Doctrines*, edited by Carl F. H. Henry, has two chapters on the attributes of God and one on the Trinity.

Trinity

- *God in Three Persons*, by Millard J. Erickson.
- *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses*, by Robert Bowman.
- *The Trinity*, by Edward Henry Bickersteth.
- *The Forgotten Trinity*, by James C. White.

Attributes of God

- *The Knowledge of the Holy*, by A. W. Tozer, is a classic text on the attributes of God.
- *Praying the Attributes of God: A Guide to Personal Worship through Prayer*, by Rosemary Jensen.
- *The Attributes of God*, by Arthur W. Pink, is a classic book written by a pastor.
- *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*, by John Piper, is a unique look at God's attributes.
- *Knowing God*, by J.I. Packer.
- *The Doctrine of God*, by Herman Barinck.
- *The God You Can Know*, by James C. White.

Names and Images of God

- THS 501 Person of God Outline, by Gerry Breshears, available on the Western Seminary website. Contains information on the Trinity and the nature of God as well. http://www.westernseminary.edu/papers/Index_Breshears.htm
- *Thirty Days of Praying the Names and Attributes of God*, a resource from the Navigators: <http://www.navigators.org/us/resources/items/Thirty%20Days%20of%20Praying%20the%20Names%20and%20Attributes%20of%20God>
- *Lord, I Want to Know You*, by Kay Arthur, is a Bible study that walks through the names of God.

