

BASIC BELIEFS ABOUT WHO GOD IS

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

MERCIFUL

LOVING

HOLY

CREATOR

ETERNAL

PRESENT
EVERYWHERE

WISE

 ROSE
PUBLISHING

JUST

A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

God created humanity for relationships: relationships with each other, with nature, and with God. However, human sin separated us from God, turning what should have been a loving relationship into one filled with hate and disobedience (Rom. 5:10). Yet, God has reached down to us to deliver us from sin and death because he wants to have a relationship with us. In Christ, God has built a bridge that allows us to relate to him.

Deep, meaningful relationships require knowledge of the other person. The more we know God, the more our love can grow and mature. Also, our obedience and service will spring forth from this knowledge and love of God.

Then, how do we get to know God? Our relationship with God begins and ends with Jesus. We get to know God as we know Jesus. His death and resurrection have given us direct access to God. We now know Jesus and God in two ways:

1. Through the work of the Holy Spirit in each believer
2. Through the revealed Word of God

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the LORD.” —Jeremiah 9:23–24

“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” —John 17:3

It is good for us to be near unto God. It is eternity to know him intimately in our daily lives... That's the mark of believers. They know what joy there is in being near unto God, and they want nothing else. —Abraham Kuyper, Near Unto God

GOD'S ATTRIBUTES AS A WINDOW

Knowing who God is, his character and his nature, can be discovered through learning about his attributes. One way to think about God's attributes is by distinguishing between the attributes that belong only to God and the attributes that we also share with him—we share these attributes with God because he made us in his image. The first kind of attributes is called *incommunicable*, while the second kind is called *communicable*. In God, no attribute is more important than the others are. All of them, in conjunction, make God who he is.

INCOMMUNICABLE (THE ATTRIBUTES THAT ONLY GOD HAS)	COMMUNICABLE (THE ATTRIBUTES WE SHARE WITH GOD)
1. TRIUNE 2. ONE 3. TRANSCENDENT 4. INFINITE 5. ETERNAL 6. CREATOR 7. OMNIPRESENT 8. IMMUTABLE	1. LOVING 2. HOLY 3. GOOD 4. JUST 5. JEALOUS 6. MERCIFUL 7. SOVEREIGN (AUTHORITY) 8. OMNIPOTENT (POWERFUL) 9. KNOWLEDGEABLE (OMNISCIENT) 10. PATIENT 11. FAITHFUL 12. SPIRIT

The attributes of God provide us with a window through which we can contemplate who God is. As we contemplate and learn about God's character, we begin to grasp the glorious, loving, awe-inspiring, and holy person that is the only one worthy of our allegiance. Jesus modeled these characteristics in his life and ministry. By learning what they mean and how they apply to our lives, we can grow in our faith by being imitators of God.

Attributes that Only God Has

1-2 TRIUNE AND ONE

While being one, God is triune. It's easy to see that these two attributes exist in tension with each other. We know both are correct, but it's not easy to understand how they exist together.

- God is *one*: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). God is one in two ways: There is no other being like God. And God is the only real God. Because God is one, he is the only being worthy of praise.
- God is *triune*. God is one being who exists in three persons. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are three separate persons, but they all share the same divine being. This unity of persons is called the "Godhead." God is a person who desires to relate to his creation (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; Titus 3:4-6): "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (Matt. 3:16-17). We have a model for healthy personal relationships in the way the persons of the Trinity relate to each other.

- How does knowing that God is in a relationship with the Godhead help you have a personal relationship with him?
- God is one. Does he have any competition for your love and loyalties? Are there other things or beings that are more important to you than God? Should that be the case?

3-4 TRANSCENDENT AND INFINITE

When trying to understand God, we must humbly keep in mind two other attributes of God: he's *transcendent* and *infinite*.

Transcendent means that he's beyond the universe and beyond our intelligence and imagination. This attribute means that we naturally have limits to how far our understanding of God can go. It also means that God is not united, or somehow connected, with the created universe. He is outside the universe. When God's face is hidden from his people (Ps. 13:1; 22:24; Isa. 8:17), we are reminded that God is beyond us and only accessible to us because he reaches first.

God is also beyond our understanding because he is *infinite*. This means that God is above our standards. He's not only wise or gracious; no one is wiser or more gracious than he is. It also means that God has no limits because he is beyond limits. This is an encouraging thought when we face troubles and trials: "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2; see 1 Kings 8:27; Job 5:9; Ps. 145:3).

- God is so much greater than we are. He knows the future, he laid out the universe, and he planned our lives. Through Scripture, God has given us hints about what he is like, but it also says God's ways are mysterious and they are good beyond our imagination. How does this affect the way we worship God?

An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children. He does not distribute Himself that each may have a part, but to each one He gives all of Himself as fully as if there were no others. —A.W. Tozer

5-6 ETERNAL AND CREATOR

While being *infinite* refers to limits—and God has no limits—being *eternal* refers to time. God does not have a beginning or an end. Before all things were, God already existed: “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8; Deut. 33:27; Ps. 90:1–2; Isa. 40:28; Jer. 10:10; Jude 25).

If God is eternal—he existed before anything else—it also means that God is *creator*. No one created God, but he created all things. God’s existence doesn’t depend on anything; he is free from obligation. God doesn’t owe anything to anyone. We can trust that God always wants what is best for us because—unlike human authorities—God’s loyalties are not compromised.

7 OMNIPRESENT

As an *eternal* and *infinite* God, God is also not limited by space. God is *omnipresent*—God is present everywhere. God is present at all moments of our life. God is always accessible because he is always present. We can be strong and courageous because God will never leave our side. We can’t hide from God or escape his rule over our lives. There is nowhere to run away from God. His love finds us everywhere: “No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Josh. 1:5; Ps. 33:13; Ps. 139:7–12; Jer. 23:24).

- REFLECTION
- We all have experienced betrayal of one kind or another. Often, it happens when other people’s commitments prevent them from keeping their word to us. However, God doesn’t experience those conflicts of interest. Nothing will stop him from loving us. What keeps us from trusting God fully? What would our lives be like if we did?

- God often calls us to do things we’d rather not do—forgive, love, speak up, care for others. What happens when we try to ignore God and run from him?

8 IMMUTABLE

Finally, since God is *eternal*, *infinite*, and *omnipresent*, we can be sure that he's always the same; he's *immutable*—God doesn't change. He will never become evil, or weak, or hateful, or cruel. No matter what happens to us or to our surroundings, we can depend on God, our firm foundation, to always remain the same. We can learn God's attributes, essence, nature, and we can trust that it will always be consistent and unchanged. God's nature is reliable and trustworthy.

These incommunicable attributes remind us what an awesome and glorious God we worship. Also, they show that although God is so far away from any of our common experience, he still reaches out to us, he still desires to relate to us in personal, intimate ways.

- Find a rock and hold it in your hand. Squeeze it, knock on it, and try to bend it. The rock is pretty hard to move or change, but with enough pressure or heat it would probably change. God, however, doesn't change no matter what you do.
- How is God's changelessness a comfort to you?

But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.

—Psalm 33:11

God is perpetually the same: subject to no change in His being, attributes, or determinations. Therefore God is compared to a Rock (Deut. 32:4, etc.) which remains immovable, when the entire ocean surrounding it is continually in a fluctuating state; even so, though all creatures are subject to change, God is immutable. Because God has no beginning and no ending, He can know no change. He is everlastingly 'the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning' (James 1:17).

—A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*

JESUS: A MODEL OF GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

God is spirit. We can discern some of his attributes in nature—for example, his power in the storms, his goodness in the bounty of the earth, his love in the loving actions of people around us. We also know about God's attributes through the Scriptures.

The book of Hebrews teaches us that “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Heb. 1:1–3). Jesus models the attributes of God, especially the communicable attributes (see page 8).

- Jesus showed his *love* for all people (Luke 7:47; Mark 10:21). His love is especially clear in his sacrifice: “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16).
- Jesus demonstrated a life without sin (Heb. 4:15)—he was *holy*. His sacrifice on our behalf was perfect and sufficient because: “Such a high priest truly meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens” (Heb. 7:26).
- Throughout his ministry, Jesus showed compassion and *mercy*: for the multitude (Matt. 9:36), for the unfortunate (Matt. 20:34), for Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37), for the leper (Mark 1:41).
- Jesus is *faithful*. He promised to be with us always (Matt. 28:20), and we can rest knowing that “the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one” (2 Thess. 3:3). For this reason, we can be “confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

Attributes that We Share With God

9 LOVING

The first communicable attribute—this means that we share that characteristic with God—is that God is *love*: “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8; Jer. 31:3; John 3:16; 13:34). Because of human rebellion and sin, God could justly destroy us. Yet, because of his love, God has extended his grace and forgiveness to us. His love for us—and the love we see in the Godhead, among the persons of the Trinity—is an example of how to love: “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). God’s love is best seen in Jesus: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

- Bring to mind the name of one person you love or have been in love with at some point in your life.
- What are some things you expect or expected from that person?
- What are some things that person expects or expected from you?
- How does this type of love differ from the love of God? How is it the same?

10 HOLY

While *love* drives God’s grace, his *holiness* sets natural limits to how we can relate to him. It’s not that God’s love and holiness are in a struggle; rather, they complement each other. God is separated from sin and evil. Therefore, in our sinful state, we cannot approach God or even be near his holiness. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice for us, we can now be in a relationship with God. The cross of Jesus bridged the chasm between us (a sinful people) and God (The Holy One). God expects us to be holy—“Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2; Ps. 99:9; Isa. 6:3; 1 Peter 1:15).

- Pour a tablespoon of oil in a glass of water. Watch to see if the oil mixes with the water. The water and the oil will always remain separate; the oil will not corrupt the pure water.
- “Holiness” means separate from sin. Why is God’s holiness so important?

11 GOOD

In God, we learn that love is more than a feeling: it's active and dynamic. The engine that moves love to action is God's *goodness*. We experience God's goodness in his love, patience, provision, and compassion. All good things in our lives come from God's goodness: "The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made" (Ps. 145:9; Ps. 25:8; Nahum 1:7; Rom. 2:4).

12 JUST

As *holiness* balances *love*, God's *justice* balances his *goodness*. God is *just* because he judges with fairness and always does the right thing. God will judge the whole world (Rev. 20:13), and the wrongs will be righted: "The LORD within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail, yet the unrighteous know no shame" (Zeph. 3:5; Ps. 33:5; Ps. 97:1-3; Isa. 42:1).

REFLECTION

- Write down five things you're grateful for and then thank God for his goodness and for blessing you with those five things.

- When Christ comes again, he will right the wrongs: He will judge those who have cheated us and been cruel to us, but he will also look at our lives and judge our selfish and self-righteous behavior toward others. All of our hidden deeds will be made known. All of our worst thoughts will be revealed. When you go to the Lord in prayer, what do you need to be forgiven for?

13 JEALOUS

Because of our sin, we reject God. Yet, he's the only being worthy of praise—as seen in the incommunicable attributes. In our rebellion, we offer our allegiance to idols and make God secondary. God is *jealous*. God does not share his glory with anyone or anything. God wants first place in our lives. He wants our loyalty over any other thing—even good things such as family, friends, church group, and country: “Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Ex. 34:14; Deut. 4:24; Zech. 8:2; James 4:5).

14 MERCIFUL

Although *justice* demands that “the wages of sin is death,” God’s *mercy* paves the way for “the gift of God [which] is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). God is *merciful*. Out of his love and goodness, God’s mercy holds rightful judgment against sin and evil to allow the salvation of those who come to him in faith: “But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God” (Deut. 4:31; Neh. 9:31; Dan. 9:9; Rom. 9:14–18).

REFLECTION

- It’s easy to allow family, friends, hobbies, and recreation to take first place in our lives. Even good things, such as career, church activities, and loyalty to country, can get in the way of following God. Make a list of the 10 things you spend the most time and money on and rank them in order of importance. What would be the most difficult ones to give up?

- Read Matthew 18:21–35.
- Reflect on a time you withheld mercy from someone or someone didn’t show you mercy. How did this lack of mercy affect your life?
- How does God’s mercy affect whether or not you show mercy to someone else?

15 SOVEREIGN (AUTHORITY)

God is *sovereign*. This means that God rules the universe and that he is not ruled by anything or anyone. Also, it means that nothing is beyond God's control: evil, death, blessings, relationships, all things happen within his authority. God has absolute *authority*, while humans have a limited authority in different areas of life. As a *sovereign God*, he provides faithfully for his creatures, in general, and for his people, in particular: "How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears" (2 Sam. 7:22; Ps. 33:8–11; Isa. 46:9–11; Dan. 4:32–35).

- When the storms of life seem to overwhelm you and all seems lost, what do you think Jesus would want to tell you?

16 OMNIPOTENT (POWERFUL)

Being the creator of all things gives God the authority to be king. God is *all-powerful*—*omnipotent*. God has the power to do whatever he pleases, but he never contradicts his nature. He can meet our needs and can help us through any trial, no matter how overwhelming or impossible to overcome it may be. Unlike God who can do all things, humans have power limited by our condition as creatures. With the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, God will also raise us from the dead and give us victory (2 Cor. 4:13–14; Phil. 3:10; 1 Peter 1:5; Gen. 18:13–14; Isa. 40:25–26; Jer. 32:17).

- Make a list of all the obstacles in your life that seem impossible to overcome.
- Pray that our omnipotent God will take care of each of the items in your list.

17 KNOWLEDGEABLE

As you pray to God, know that he already knows what you need. God knows all things—he is *omniscient*. God knows the past, the present, and the future. God knows our hearts. He knows what we think, say, and do. Nothing is a surprise to God. Nothing catches him off guard. Whereas God knows all things, humans have a limited knowledge. Our knowledge is limited by our condition as creatures. “Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13; 1 Sam. 2:3; Ps. 139:1–6; 147:5; 1 John 3:20).

- In what way does God’s knowledge of every person and every situation comfort you?
- How does knowing that God knows everything about you—that you can’t hide from God—help you grow closer to him?

18 PATIENT

God is *just* and *holy*, and he will judge all people; however, God is *patient* and slow to carry out his righteous judgment. God waits patiently for his people to repent and come back to him. God sent his only Son, Jesus, to atone for our sins and appease that judgment and condemnation. Now, God waits patiently for people to turn to Christ in faith: “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Ex. 34:6; Ps. 86:15; Jonah 4:2; 2 Peter 3:8–9).

- Read the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11–31). This parable illustrates God’s love and patience for the lost.
- Which son do you most identify with and why?
- What are some ways you can exercise the attribute of patience?

19 FAITHFUL

God is *faithful*. In our relationships, we're afraid to become vulnerable and allow someone to take advantage of us. However, God is faithful to his word. He'll do just as he said. He'll never take advantage of us. We can trust that God will be faithfully good to us, show mercy and forgiveness to us, and do justice in the world. When we are in trouble, we can completely rely on God's promises, because God is faithful: "Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses" (2 Kings 8:56; Deut. 7:9; Ps. 57:10; 1 Thess. 5:24).

- How has God shown his faithfulness in your life despite your failures?
- How have you responded to God's faithfulness?

20 SPIRIT

Finally, it is important to remember that God is spirit. It means, first, that God does not have a body. When the Bible speaks of God's face, hands, or any "body language," it is using comparison with our bodies that we can understand and relate to. It also means that God is the source of all life. Whereas God is spirit, humans have both a spirit and a body. "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and truth" (John 4:24; 1:18; Acts 17:24; 2 Cor. 3:17; 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16).

- How does creation point you toward the invisible God?
- How has the physical human being, Jesus Christ, helped you develop your relationship with God, who is spirit?