

September 22, 2013 - God 101b

The challenge for us as we get into this topic is not that most people don't believe in God because most people do believe in some kind of higher power, or deity, or a god of some kind. The problem seems to be that sometimes our perception of who God is may not be 100% accurate. Our perception of God dictates how we interpret His actions and the things He does and things He says and also, how we relate back to Him and respond to Him. If our perception is off our interpretation of what He does is going to be off as well. If our perception is off then the way we respond and relate to Him will be off as well. I think that many people in our world have kind of a skewed perception of who the God of the Bible really is. It's kind of like, when you go to the fun house and you look into one of those wonky mirrors and the picture of yourself is just not quite right. It's a little off and it's a little misshapen. I think sometimes people are responding to the skewed-mirror picture of God as opposed to the actual picture of who God is. That happens for various reasons. Sometimes that happens because there are those who are intentionally against the God of the Bible and so they purposely are skewing our image of who He is and what He does. Some of that comes from people who are simply misinformed about who the God of the Bible is, so they are speaking about who they think He is but they are not fully informed about what the Bible actually says about God. Some of that has come through the ages from people who were dedicated followers of God but somewhere along the way picked up some ideas that were not entirely accurate about God and they have spread those around. Either intentionally teaching those to other people or unintentionally teaching them to people through their words and actions.

As we approach that this morning, I want to say very clearly off the start that I do not claim to have God figured out. In fact, I am quite certain that I do not have God all figured out. What we want to try and do this morning and as we go through this entire series, we want to continually go back to the Bible and see what it says and see what kind of picture of God the Bible tends to paint for us.

What we tried to do last week, we attempted to boil things down to just a couple fundamental foundational elements of who the Bible says God is. We said this isn't going to be 100% all inclusive. We could look at this many different ways, I'm sure but we feel like most of what we need to know about God, at least to start out, flows from these couple things. So we started out on that last week, at the end of the lesson time I said that we can't do this all in one week so we are going to have to continue on to next week. I want you to know that, that wasn't just some rhetoric ploy that I engaged in last week. I really intended to cover that in one week. This week, I had to send out a whole new schedule of sermons through October and November to all our worship leaders because I said "Sorry guys! I'm taking an extra week so everything is going to get bumped back a week and we'll have to shift things around to make room for that." I got to it last week and said, "this topic is just too big too large, too much to cover, for us to do it all in one week, so we're going to do part B this week and hopefully cover that in our time together this morning.

In the movie, National Treasure, it's kind of a modern treasure hunt sort of movie and at one point there's these special glasses that they find and they need to use these special glasses to read this invisible map. What happens is that with each different colour of lens that you use, you see a different picture on the map. You would use every different lens that you look through you would get a different perspective of what the map looked like. You would need to use all three lenses to get the complete and entire picture the map really was trying to tell you.

Now, that's kind of how I feel like as we approach our lesson this morning. That's what we're trying to do. We're trying to look through a couple different lenses and as we put those lenses together, we get a more complete and accurate picture of who the Bible paints God as and who the Bible paints God to be.

So, last week we started out and we said "The God of the Bible is Supernatural". That was our main point for last week. Really what that means is that, our God is unfathomable. He is unlike anything or anything else we have ever come in contact with. There's a whole lot of stuff about God that we can't even begin to wrap our minds around. We covered just a few of them last week, we said "God is eternal. He has no beginning; He has no end; He always has been and always will be. He is omnipresent. God is everywhere, all the time. There is nowhere that you can go that God will not be. He is omniscient. He is the all knowing. Everything that has happened; everything that will happen; how everything works, every thought, feeling, word, before it is thought, felt, or said, God knows it all. God is omnipotent. He is all powerful. There is nothing that God cannot do. But all powerful is not the same thing as all-controlling. At this time, in this world, God gives up some control to allow us to have free will." We put all of those things together and at the end, we said what adds to that, what magnifies that, is the fact that God is unchanging. He cannot become more; He will never become less. He has always been as He is right now and He always will be as He is right now. God is supernatural and that's the first thing we must understand. He is not like us. Not even the best of us. He is not just super strong or super fast or super smart or super cool, or superman; no God is completely supernatural. He is out of this world. Unlike anything else. Beyond our wildest dreams and imaginations; in a category all His own. God is inexplicable; indescribable; incomprehensible; and completely unfathomable. That's where we have to start. And if this picture of God is true then it's easy to see and even obvious where He kind of belongs in the world and in the hierarchy of life. If that picture of God is true then it's clear that He is the one that needs to be in charge. He is the one who has the right and maybe even the responsibility to make the rules and call the shots. He is the one who kind of sets the baseline for right and wrong. He is the point of reference from which all bearings in our life must be taken. On this point, everything else we examine, must be done in the light of the Biblical reality of who God is.

Now, with that image of God firmly fixed in our mind, we are ready to add the second lens to refine our vision of who God is and that's where we begin this week.

The God of the Bible is “Relational”.

That is to say that God, by His very nature, is a being who seeks and desires connection with others. God is hard-wired to build relationships with others. This is different, most if not all other gods we come across in our world and even in the ancient world, other gods like to keep their distance. They like to have as little to do with people as possible. There is very little contact between the gods and people. Often when they do interact with people it tends to be for their own selfish gains. Other gods require that humanity seeks them out or finds it's own way somehow. They want that we should make our way up to them, that we earn our way into their presence; that we ascend to some kind of higher plain to find them, but the God of the Bible, His very foundation is the God who desires relationship with us. He comes to us, where we are, to pursue relationship with us. This is fundamentally who God is. It is one of, if not the primary motivation for all that He does.

Now you may ask: Well, what makes you think that? What are you basing that premise on, that theory on? Well here is just a small sampling of some of the evidence that supports the relational nature of God. There are a lot of places that we could begin to look to see God's relational nature but we want to begin this morning by looking at this thing that we call “The Trinity”. The trinity is another one of those things about God that's kind of hard to wrap our mind around. We don't have time to fully explain what the trinity is all about this morning, and I don't know that I even could if we had all the time in the world. But simply put, the Bible describes God as one God, with three distinct persons; God the Father; God the Son; God the Spirit. Now, how that works is complicated and hard to explain, but what is important for us this morning is simply to recognize that God Himself, exists within community and relationship. There are passages scattered throughout the entire Bible that describe relationship between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Several of them are listed on your handout this morning, we're just going to key in on a couple this morning for time's sake.

We'll begin with the ones in John, Chapter 10:30. Jesus starts describing his relationship with the Father and he says: “I and the Father are one.” In John 5:19-20, Jesus says: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself, he can only do what he sees his Father doing because, whatever the Father does, the son also does. For the Father loves the son and shows him all he does. Yes, for your amazement, He will show them even greater things than these.”

So that kind of gives you a little bit of a sense of how God and Jesus works together and how they are one and how they work together and how they share everything within community.

One of the more famous passages out of the Bible, just before Jesus ascends to heaven, he gives his disciples these instructions, he says in Matthew 28:19: “Therefore, go make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Again, showing that there are kind of these three distinct persons within God that do

exist. Now, the bottom line of all this is, that we can know that God is a relational being, simply because, within Himself, there is a relationship that exists. Even if we don't understand exactly how that works, or even how that is possible, what we can understand is, some of the implications that follow from that.

There is evidence beyond the Trinity that support the relational being of God. Throughout the ages of the Bible and we'll begin in the Old Testament and very quickly go through and look at some examples. In the very beginning, in Genesis, Chapter 3:8-9 the writer of Genesis says this, this is about Adam and Eve in the Garden and it says: "The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord as He was walking through the Garden in the cool of the day and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the Garden, but the Lord called out to the man: 'Where are you?'" In God's ideal world, in the world as God designed it to be, it is a place where God walks among us and where God calls out to us and where that kind of intimate and personal first-hand relationship, exists.

After the Garden of Eden, God goes on and He builds a relationship with a man named Abraham and his son Isaac and then, his son, Jacob. When each of those particular men, the Bible records for us, this kind of very personal, very hands on, close personal relationship that God builds with each one of these men and their family. Eventually, that grows into God's relationship with an entire Nation, the Nation of Israel.

I think it's interesting that when you get to the Book of Exodus, and Moses at the burning bush, and God calls out to Moses from the burning bush. This is how God identifies Himself to Moses, He said, in Exodus 3:6: "I am the God of your father. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. At this, Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God." God comes to Moses and He said, I am God and I'm going to identify Myself to you by saying this: I'm the God of your father, and I'm the God of your ancestors. I have been the God of your family for generations and generations. There is this ongoing relationship between me and your family, Moses and this is who we are and this is how we are connected. That's one of God's favourite descriptors of Himself in the Old Testament. "I'm the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." He often comes to His people and identifies Himself with that connection.]

His probably second favourite description of Himself is to come to people and say: "I am the Lord your God." Just take a minute to think about that. God comes to His people and he doesn't just say 'I'm God, listen up!' He comes to them and He says "I am the Lord, your God." God establishes relationships with His people on an ongoing basis.

One of the most profound stories about God being a God of relationship comes from the prophet Hosea. Fascinating story. Hosea's life becomes an allegory for God's relationship with His people, the Nation of Israel. Hosea has this wife and he loves his wife and he treats his wife wonderfully but his wife continually runs off and leaves him and runs off with other men. Hosea is continually pursuing her and bringing her back and loving her; and forgiving

her; and welcoming her back. Even sometimes at great cost to himself. That is the kind of relationship that God says ‘That is the metaphor for how I am with My people. I love my people like a husband loves his wife and I will pursue her and I will redeem her and I will forgive her and I will bring her back time, and time, and time, again, because that is the relationship that I have with my people.’ That’s how God lives out, at least on His end, His relationship with people.

That same kind of metaphor continues in the New Testament except that, this time, it is Christ who is pictured as the groom and the church who is pictured as the bride. We read, there’s several places, but in Revelation 19:7, we read: “The wedding of the lamb has come and the bride has made herself ready.” And so, this picture is painted for us in the New Testament as well. When you look at Jesus, himself, when Jesus was born they call him ‘Immanuel’, which means: God is with us. Even Jesus’ name gives that sense of relationship with people. As you think about what Jesus did in his ministry he spent three years just living with his disciples. Walking with them; eating with them; talking with them; sleeping at the same houses at night; just spending time and time together building a relationship with them. Kyle talked to us this morning about communion and how communion is just a relational activity. It’s an experience together that Jesus initially shared with his disciples and now we share as well.

Jesus, throughout his ministry, paints so many word pictures for us. One of his word pictures comes out of John 10:11, he says: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.” And again, Jesus paints a picture for us of someone who is willing to sacrifice, who is willing to give, who is willing to protect, who is willing to lay down himself to extend relationship to his people.

In Luke 15:20, he tells another story about himself as a shepherd and how if one sheep wanders away the shepherd will leave the 99 in the fold and he will go out and he will search and he will scour and he will hunt until he finds that one sheep that has lost it’s way and bring it back home.

Following that story, he tells a story about a young boy who takes all of his inheritance and runs off to a far away place and spends all his money. He runs out of money and doesn’t have a job and so he comes home to beg forgiveness from his father. When he does, Jesus says: “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son and threw his arms around him and kissed him.” Jesus says: “That’s how God is with you. He is a loving Father. He is waiting for your return. He is hoping desperately to repair the connection, to restore the relationship, between Him and you.”

Paul picks up this same picture in Romans, Chapter 8:15-16 and he says: “You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you have received a spirit of sonship and by Him we call Abba Father. The spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.” Paul says ‘we call Abba Father to God.’ Abba is not a formal word, it is

a personal, intimate word. The most close approximation in English that we could probably come up with, is to use the word 'Daddy' or 'Papa' or 'Mama'. And Paul says that is the relationship that God wants to connect with us. This personal, intimate, relationship with his people. John marvels at that in 1John 3:1 and he says: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God." And that is what we are.

The Bible is filled, cover to cover, with examples of God's desire to create and maintain and restore relationship with His people and that is the underlying theme of the entire Book. If you read the Bible, the entire book is all about God's effort to create and maintain and restore relationship with people. And that says that God wants to have a relationship with you!

Now, you may look at that and say "Well that's kind of nice but that's kind of small potatoes compared to what we talked about last week. Isn't it? I mean, being relational, compared to being eternal and all powerful, that seems kind of small in some ways. Well, there's two answers to that question. The first is that, being relational is far more important and far more incredible because of what we talked about last week. It is one thing for an ordinary human being to want to have a relationship with us, but when a God who is so extraordinarily supernatural desires an intimate relationship with us, that is truly incredible.

Second, the relational nature of God is critically important because it helps us explain a whole lot of other things in our world. Have you ever had this experience where you notice that a woman was feeling sick an awful lot lately? She seems to be really picky about her food and she really has no appetite and she's put on a couple pounds and she seems to be really moody and touchy these days? You observe all that and then, someone comes along and says "Oh! She's pregnant!" And you go "Oh! Well that all makes sense now, right? That's kind of how the relational nature of God is. When we understand the relational nature of God we look at a whole lot of other things and we go "Okay! Now that all makes sense now." Let me give you a few quick examples of what I mean.

Relational nature of God explains, at least to me, creation. Did you ever ask yourself why God created the world in the first place? And even more than just creating it, why did he create it with such diversity and wonder and beauty. God could have created the world just kind of monotone. Just kind of one terrain; one species of animal; one species of fauna; He could have done that if he had wanted to, but instead, God gave us mountains and oceans and prairies and deserts and forests, a wonderful variety. God gave us all kinds of different plants and fruits and vegetables to cross the earth. God gave us an incredible variety of animals. Just consider the uniqueness and strangeness of the ant eater and the armadillo and aardvark and that's just the first page of the dictionary. The variety within the animal kingdom is so diverse. Probably one of my favourite examples is the duck billed platypus. He has a duck's bill, otter's feet, a beaver's tail. He has venom like a snake in a little thing on his back foot. He's a mammal but he lays egg, she lays eggs. Now, what is going on there? I can't help but think that when God looks at the duck billed platypus, He looks at that thing and He says "Oh! They're going to get a kick out of this one!" Right? That's

why God created such a variety for us to enjoy.

I remember preparing for the arrival of our first child and all the excitement and the enthusiasm that went through that. When that happens you want to decorate the nursery and put up all these pictures and all these different things. I remember buying a crib set. It was this whole package of stuff that we spent, I don't know how much. We brought it all home and we set up the crib all nicely with all of this stuff we had bought and we took a picture and then we took everything out because you're not allowed to put any of that stuff in a crib with a newborn. So we took it all out and threw it in the closet. But we were so excited about this process, we had the blanket and we had the bumper and we had the things on the wall and we had the mobile that spun around and around and around the crib. I remember, one day I was at Walmart and I came across this big bin of stuffed animals that were like, big! I saw those and I was so excited I bought three of them and then I went to three or four Walmarts because they had different animals. So we had like a dozen of these stupid big stuffed animals. I bought them all and I brought them back and I threw them into what I knew was going to be our nursery. I knew our son wouldn't care about them, he wouldn't even notice that they were there for months and months and months. But I was so excited about this relationship that was about to begin that I just couldn't help but just decorating it all and bringing it all and bringing all of those things to what would be his world.

A couple of weeks ago, Sawyer and I were out in the back yard, it was a clear night so he wanted to look at the stars. We were out there looking at the stars and I was pointing out, Okay, there's the North Star; there's the Big Dipper and all those different things. Then, in a great parenting moment I said "Sawyer! Look up. Straight up." And then I said "Okay, now spin around really fast" and he spun around and around....and finally he stopped and said "That was cool" and then he kind of wandered and staggered all over the ground and fell down. Then he said "Let's do that again!" In that moment I realized that, I think the stars are like God's mobile over our crib. God just threw those up there so we could stand just like a baby does when he looks at the mobile going around and go "Wow! That's incredible." And God created all the world just because he wanted to create this relationship with us. God created humans because His desire was to have a relationship with them. He created the rest of the world just because He was so excited about the impending relationships that were coming that He created such beauty as an expression of His love for people. That significantly impacts the work and value I place on myself and on every other person and on creation, itself.

Relationship also explains free will. Why would God give us free will? Especially if He is omniscient and knows what we're going to do with it. Have you ever asked yourself that? If God knew what we were going to do with free choice, why would He even give it to us? If He knows that, given free choice, people will end up defying Him; denying Him; resisting Him; disobeying Him and shaking their hands at Him, why would He give us the choice in the first place? And the answer is: Because you cannot have relationship without choice. There is no love without the option to hate. There is no obedience without the option to

disobey. There is no affection without the option to hurt. God was not interested in robotic adoration to boost His ego or bolster His self esteem. What He wanted was a close relationship with people.

So, what about the Law? Why did God give us all these rules. I mean, Okay, give us free will then give us all these rules on top of it. Why let us make our own choices but at the same time, tell us how we're supposed to live? Well, if you examine the instructions of God on how to live life, you will quickly discover that they are all based on one of two things. They are based on what is best for nurturing our relationship with God and what is best for nurturing our relationship with other people. Consider the Ten Commandments as many of them as you can remember off the top of your head and you'll notice that each and every one of them are about one of two things. Either nurturing your relationship with God, or nurturing your relationship with other people. Jesus is asked what he thinks the greatest commandment is in Matthew, Chapter 22:34-40 and here is his reply. He says:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. Love your neighbour as yourself.” All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments. Jesus says, the whole law is summed up in these two things: Nurture your relationship with God. Nurture your relationship with other people.

And probably the greatest thing that needs to be explained to me because I just don't understand it; I don't get it; I can't grasp it; is this concept of unconditional love. I love it, but I don't get it. How can God love us unconditionally? Why wouldn't He, at some point, cut us off? Why wouldn't He at some point say 'Okay, enough is enough'? Why would He keep forgiving us and extending grace, especially knowing that we're going to that we're going to fail Him again; that we're going to reject Him again? And the answer is: Because His desire for a relationship with us is SO STRONG He simply cannot give up on us. He is so committed to doing whatever it takes to create and maintain and restore relationship with us that He came to Earth, He became flesh and blood; He died on the cross, just to reach out to us and re-unite us with Himself.

We must view everything we read in the Bible; everything we experience in life; everything we see in the world around us; through the lens of a supernatural God who desires to create; maintain; and restore a relationship with people.

In John, Chapter 17:3, just before His arrest and trial and crucifixion, Jesus prays a lengthy prayer that is one of, if not the only, prayer that we have of Jesus that is actually written out what he actually says. In the prayer, Jesus prays this, he says: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” And knowing, in this case, is more than memorizing facts or retaining data, knowing in this case is a personal and intimate experiential thing. It is a relationship. And Jesus says in his final prayer: Here is what life is all about. Relationship with God.



I'm going to leave you with a quote from Randy Harris in his book *God Worked*. He says: "What are we doing here? We're trying to live in a relationship with a God who created us to live and trust in love. That is our purpose. God created us that way and then looked at us and said "Now that's good." What we're trying to do is call the world to come and live in a trusting, loving, relationship with God, because we know that this is the very purpose for being and everything we do, is aimed at that one purpose."