Chico Alliance Church
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Knowing God Series #1

"Set Your Heart to Seek the Lord"

Introduction

Early education in America once considered knowing God the chief pursuit of education. One early college declared, "Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning." Their dual motto was "For the glory of Christ and "For Christ and the Church" What college was this? Harvard was founded by the Reverend John Harvard in the 1600's. Their original seal had the word "Truth" for Christ, for the Church". Today's seal contains only "Veritas" (Truth). The fact is, nearly every one of the first 123 colleges and universities that sprung up in the colonies did so to train ministers; including Harvard, Yale, William and Mary, Brown, Princeton, and Dartmouth which was established to train missionaries to the Indians. Columbia University (King's College) established in 1754 advertised its chief aim to teach and engage children to know God in Jesus Christ." These all considered Theology Proper, the theological label given to this study, as the queen of all courses of study." I refer to these only to show the importance of the pursuit of the knowledge of God held far back as our early beginnings as a nation.

Of course, my desire is not to just increase information concerning God but to actually come to know Him better through a deeper study of His revelation concerning Himself. We learned awhile back that the "fear of the Lord" effectively dispels all other fears along with a multitude of other blessings. Proverbs clearly declares that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

We find the importance of knowing and seeking God all through the Bible. Jesus Himself affirmed in His prayer to the Father that, "This is eternal life that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." How many really know God? How can the finite know the infinite? How can the mortal hope to enjoy relationship with the Immortal? How can flesh and blood interact with the Eternal Spirit? How can limited intellect comprehend the incomprehensible? Yet knowing God is the key to eternal life. True fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
Scripture explicitly invites us to experience God.
O taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him! O fear the LORD, you His saints; for to those who fear Him there is no want. Psalm 34:8-9 (NASB)

like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. 1 Peter 2:2-3 (NASB)

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Hebrews 11:6 (NASB)

God evaluated many of the people in the Old Testament by this phrase: "And they set their heart to seek the Lord." To seek is to pursue, to give attention, draw near, cling, long for, thirst, desire to know. The intensity of our pursuit depends on several factors.

1 -- Our ability to search.
2 – Our sense of need for the thing sought.
3 – The value we have assigned to the thing sought

When it comes to God, we were designed to relate to him on a personal level and He longs for us to seek intimate fellowship with Him as a person. Somewhere along the line we have become trapped in the eddy of our culture. We live in a culture that has lost their capacity to seek God. Pursuit of the one true God has been devalued in the wake of pursuit of our inner self, the god within and aliens from outside our experience. And, like the church of Laodicea, even true believers have lost a deep sense of continual need for Christ. We have our own ways of reversing the curse. Programs, technology, education etc. We do not seek Him because we don't really sense any need or urgency to seek Him. Even our evangelism methods perpetuate a "life insurance" kind of mentality. Not, do you want to experience restored dynamic relationship with the God of the universe? But do you want eternal life? Do you want to escape eternal hell? Who wouldn't! Hell insurance sells so we do all we can just to get the customer to sign up. We urge a verbal agreement to the terms of the policy from our perspective, perhaps even convince them to sign a commitment. The terms of the agreement are clear. Say these words and you will have the assurance of heaven and protection from hell. Without ever explaining the current personal implications and immediate benefits of restored relationship the customers with a false sense of assurance tuck the policy away in a safe until the appropriate time.

Christianity is not about escaping hell and entering heaven. The Gospel offers restored relationship with the eternal God. The Gospel demands turning from worship of the creature to proper response to the true and living Creator. From Genesis to Revelation, the focus of Scripture is restored relationship with God; not how I feel or what I get out of it or what God is going to do for me. The enemy has subtly diverted us to a repulsive man-centered theology.

Finally, we have lost an appreciation for who God is. We have lost the wonder of knowing God. All of this contributes to our failure to continue to seek Him.

Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works! Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice! Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually! Psalm 105:1-4 (ESV)

The Psalmist calls us to pursue relationship with the Lord but to seek His influence and daily interaction in our life. Our purpose statement begins with continually cultivating deeper relationship with God. Imbedded in the core of every believer is a burning for connection to the eternal. It is time we fan those burning embers into a flaming fire. We all know what it feels like to really want something. We think about it. We dream about it. We set out attention on it. We plan for it. We make time to pursue it. Let's ask God for a passion for Him. Let us set out heart to seek the Lord.

There are benefits in the seeking and the finding.

He will let you find Him. 1 Chron 28:8

There is blessing and reward. Ps 119:2; Isa 30:18; Heb 11:6; Ezra 8:22; Psa 34:10; 17:15

He will grant increased understanding. Prov 28:5

Seeking Him intensifies our praise. Psa 22:6

Seeking revives our heart. Psa 69:32; Jer 29:10-14;

John 5:39-40 "You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.

Before we take a brief flight over the territory we are about to explore I want to share a concern expressed by A.W. Tozer concerning believers today that grabbed my attention.

> *Canon Holmes, of India, more than twenty-five years ago called attention to the inferential character of the average man's faith in God. To most people God is an inference, not a reality. He is a deduction from evidence which they consider adequate, but He remains personally unknown to the individual. "He must be," they say, "therefore we believe He is." Others do not go even so far as this; they know of Him only by hearsay. They have never bothered to think the matter out for themselves, but have heard about Him from others, and have put belief in Him into the back of their minds along with various odds and ends that make up their total creed. To many others, God is but an ideal, another name for goodness or beauty or truth; or He is law or life or the creative impulse back of the phenomena of existence.*
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> *These notions about God are many and varied, but they who hold them have one thing in common: They do not know God in personal experience. The possibility of intimate acquaintance with Him has not entered their minds. While admitting His existence they do not think of Him as being knowable in the sense that we know things or people.*
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> *Christians, to be sure, go further than this, at least in theory. Their creed requires them to believe in the personality of God and they have been taught to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven" (Luke 11:2). Now personality and fatherhood carry with them the idea of the possibility of personal acquaintance. This is admitted, I say, in theory, but for millions of Christians, nevertheless, God is no more real than He is to the non-Christian. They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle. The Pursuit of God A.W. Tozer*

I have a hunch that this accounts for the apparent absence of genuine pursuit of God among believers today. Can you remember the intensity associated with first getting to know your spouse? Somewhere along the way we lose our first love. The same is true with our relationship with God. Jesus rebuked the Ephesian church for having lost their first love. Let us set our hearts to pursue Him with a new passion. Let us pray to know Him beyond an intellectual exercise but as a personal experience.

DISCLAIMER

My relationship with God at this time is not at the level I believe it can be. I am asking you to start from where you are and join me on a quest to move further in our relationship with God to new levels. Second, I am fully aware that I am attempting to explain the unexplainable, to comprehend the incomprehensible. Should I have a million years and a vast vocabulary, I would not even begin to paint an adequate portrait of our infinite God. I will be ecstatic if I can just succeed in increasing your understanding of God and stir a new longing in you to know Him better.

What is God like? Tozer sums it up very well.

> *"As I begin my search in the things around me, I find at the outset that the question cannot be answered except to say that God is not like anything that is, he is not exactly like anything or anybody. When we try to imagine what God is like, we must of necessity use that which is not like God as the raw material for our minds to work on, and thus, whatever we visualize God to be, he is not, for we have constructed our image out of that which he has made, and what he has made is not God. If we insist upon trying to imagine him, we end up with an idol, made not with hands but with thoughts; and an idol of the mind is as offensive to God as an idol of the hands. You see, when we are left to ourselves, we tend immediately to reduce God to manageable terms. We want to get him where we can use Him, or at least know where He is when we need him. We want a God we can in some measure control."*
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> *"What is God like?" If by that question we mean "What is God like in Himself?" there is no definitive answer. If we mean, "What has God disclosed about Himself that reverent reason can comprehend?" there is, I believe, an answer both full and satisfying. For while the name of God is secret and His essential nature incomprehensible, He in condescending love has by revelation declared certain things to be true of Himself. These we call His attributes."*

God did not intend to hide Himself from His creatures. The creature, being the created, simply does not have the capacity to fully comprehend the Creator. Yet God is a self-reveling God who not only wants us to know Him but to seek to know Him.

God has imbedded knowledge of Himself in every creature – His signature.
God reveals Himself in what He has made.
God reveals Himself through the Holy Spirit inspired written word.
God revealed Himself through Jesus the Living Word.

> *For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. John 1:17-18*

Jesus not only explained Him but exhibited Him.

> *"Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? John 14:9 (ESV)*

Keep in mind that the bulk of information recorded in the Scriptures concerning God's nature and attributes was communicated in the context of relationships. Our assertions concerning his nature and attributes have been learn by watching His interactions with His creatures (God did) as well as assertions made by the inspired writers (God is). Compiling data from all these sources provides enough information to gain some idea of the nature and attributes of God which must always be views as a balanced whole.

I. The nature of God

A. God is Spirit

In opposition to the views of materialism, we understand that the Godhead is in essence spirit. He is not limited by physical constraints.

"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:24
"See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." Luke 24:39
And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. Col. 1:15

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Tim. 1:17

Jesus took on flesh and physical attributes only at the incarnation. God in His essence is discerned and known on a spirit level and perceived within the spirit of man. He could manifest physically, but his essence is spirit. The Israelites were cautioned not to try to represent God by any graven or physical image because such a representation would severely distort the infinite reality of His nature. The essence and nature of God is so infinite that no physical representation could properly communicate or accurately represent Him; so don't try.

B. God is personal

Scripture declares God to be personal, contrary to the view of pantheism which maintains that this universe in its ever changing conditions is but the manifestation of the one ever changing universal substance which is God; thus all, everything is God, and God is everything; God is all, all is God; a necessary but unconscious force working in the world. Scripture recognizes in God all of the elements of personality such as intelligence, mind, will, reason individuality, self-consciousness and self-determination. In order to truly have intimate communion all the elements of personality must reside in both parties. God is person, not force or influence. This truth is all through Scripture in God's interaction with His creation, in His very names, in declarations of thinking, feeling, and choosing.

C. God is a Triunity (three in one)

The teaching of the Triunity of the Godhead address dualism (good and evil gods), polytheism (many gods) trithesim (three distinct gods) and unitarianism (no trinity). Scripture is clear as to the existence of ONE God. A careful consideration of the text of Scripture compels us to embrace the doctrine of the Triunity.

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! *Deut. 6:4; Isa 44:6; 1 Cor. 8:4; 1 Tim. 2:5*

These passages focus on the unity of God. There are other passages that compel us to adjust our views to include a triunity view. The word triunity is an attempt to equally communicate the teaching of Scripture regarding one God existing in three persons.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." Genesis 1:26

The New Testament even more clearly compels us to embrace a Trinitarian view of God.

The **Father** is recognized as God. I Cor 8:4-6; Eph 4:3-6; James 2:19
Jesus is recognized as God. John 6:27 Mat 9:4; 28:18; John 12:9; Col 1:17; John 1:1
The **Holy Spirit** is recognized as God. Acts 5:3-4; ICor 2:10; 6:19; John 3:5-6,8

Matt 28:18 teaches oneness and threeness by associating equally the three Persons and uniting them in one singular name. "Baptizing them in the name (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit ." Matt 3:16-17; 2 Cor 13:14 associates equally the three Persons. Some attempt is made to divide various activities to particular persons in the godhead. Although certain activity is more clearly associated with certain persons of the Triunity, a careful analysis of the whole

Bible demonstrates all of the Godhead involved in all of the divine work. Below is a quotation from an early church document designed to clarify teaching regarding the Godhead.
We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. Athaniasian Creed (year 318)

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals but one eternal. As also there are not three untreated nor three incomprehensible, but one untreated and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; And yet they are not three Lords but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say; There are three Gods or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

"The doctrine of the Trinity is, in its last analysis, a deep mystery that cannot be fathomed by the finite mind. That it is taught in the Scripture, however, there can be no reasonable doubt. It is a doctrine to be believed even though it cannot be thoroughly understood." (Evans)
Man attempts to make everything understandable. Only by revelation would we ever wrestle with a concept as complex as the Trinity. Some have offered illustrations to reconcile the idea of three existing in one essence. Ultimately all illustrations fall short.

There is a practical significance of the Truth of the Triunity of the Godhead.
Other than the fact that the Scripture teaches the truth of the Trinity there are some practical considerations from the doctrine. It is the very essence of God to exist in community. Throughout all eternity the Father, Son and Holy Spirit existed in perfect, selfless community. Instilled in the depths of our soul as image bearers of the Trinity is a deep desire for true community. Ingrained in us is a passion for belonging to a community of beings intimately acquainted with and committed to each other no matter what. A mind-bending concept is found in Jesus' prayer to the Father in John 17.
"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. John 17:20-21 (ESV)
Jesus prayed for all present and future followers that they would experience the same oneness experienced by the original perfect community and become united with that community.

D. God is infinite

I will expand on this later but for now it is important to understand that God has no limitations whatsoever regarding any aspect of His nature or attributes.

II. The Attributes of God

The specific truths we learn through study and observation of the text concerning God are called "attributes." An attribute is anything that God has in any way revealed as being true of Himself. These attributes describe what is true of Him.

He does not have wisdom, He IS wisdom.
He does not have love, He IS love.
He loves because He IS love.
He creates because He IS Creator.
He does because He IS!
He enlightens because He IS light.
What He does reflects who He is.
He cannot be or do otherwise.

Students of the Scriptures and theologians approach and organize these attributes or characteristics of God in different ways. Each names them differently, organizes them differently and numbers them differently. I have tried to organize these powerful truths concerning God in a logical arrangement.

I believe that all of the attributes of God can be reasoned or deduced from just three.
I will share these and an overview of where we will be digging in this goldmine of thoughts over the summer and perhaps beyond. This is my absolute favorite subject and I am fired up to get back in the mine.

A. God is infinitely great in His ability / capacity
B. God is infinitely pure in His morality
C. God is infinitely good in His relationships

These three attributes are the foundation for all the others. A study of the gods worshipped throughout history reveals serious undesirable flaws.

If God had all ability but was mean or corrupt, He could not be God.
If God demonstrated all love but lacked ability, He could not be God.
If God extended goodness but lacked moral fiber, He wouldn't be a God worthy of worship.

Now let us take each one of these three attributes and deduce the others.
Since God is infinitely great or unlimited in His ability and capacity…

He would be unlimited as to time – **Eternal**
He would be unlimited as to His relationship to anyone or anything else – **Self-existent.**
He would have no need of anyone or anything – **Self-sufficient.**
He would have no reason to change since He is infinite – **Immutable** (unchangeable)
He would have unlimited power – **Omnipotent**
He would have unlimited knowledge – **Omniscient**

He would have no limitation as to space – **Omnipresent**.

He would be far beyond human comprehension – **Incomprehensible**

Since God is infinitely pure…

He would perfectly conform to His own standard – **Righteous / Just**

He would be infinitely separated from all that is contrary to His own moral law -- **Holy**

He would perfectly respond to evil – **Anger/Wrath**

He would demand absolute Justice for violation of His standard – **Sovereign judge**

He would always act according to truth – **Truth**

He would not tolerate rebellion or rejection of His -- **Jealous**

Since God is infinitely good in all His relationships…

He would perfectly love -- **Love**

He would extend grace to sinners -- **Grace**

He would extend mercy to the miserable -- **Mercy**

He would be kind and gentle -- **Kind and Gentle**

He would exercise long-suffering in His dealings with the insufferable – **Longsuffering**

He would willingly forgive -- **Forgiving**

He would never fail to keep a promise -- **Faithful**

I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever.
*Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised; and His **greatness** is unsearchable.*
One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.
On the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate.
And men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts; and I will tell of Your greatness.
*They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant **goodness**,*
*and shall shout joyfully of Your **righteousness**.*
Psalm 145:1-7

Next week we will land the plane and hike to the goldmine where we will search for the nuggets of truth related to our infinitely great, pure and good God. Not just to know more but to truly taste and see that the Lord is good. To know Him is eternal life. To know Him is life.

By the way, God embedded these same capacities in His ultimate Creation. Being created in His image we have a longing for greatness, a longing to live in purity and a longing to extend goodness to others. We will never be God, but as His called ones we will one day be like Him.

O God, I have tasted Your goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want You; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Your glory, I pray, so I may know You indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." Then give me grace to rise and follow You up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long. In Jesus' name. Amen. A.W. Tozer

Set your heart to seek Him – Decide to take the summer to seek Him!