

BELIEVE SERIES Lesson Two

The Three-in-One God

Key Verses: 2 Corinthians 13:14; Romans 1:20
Key Idea: I believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Key Question: Who is God and how can we know Him?

Just as Scripture is the highest source of information about itself, God is the highest source of information about himself. That makes sense, for if there was a higher source of information about God, then God wouldn't be God. Therefore, it is important that any study of God looks at what God says about himself – found on the pages of Scripture.

God Exists

Scripture simply assumes God exists. The first verse of the Bible – "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1) – matter-of-factly presents God as Creator without any proof for his existence or actions.

Scripture also tells us that all persons everywhere have a deep, inner sense that God exists, that they are his creatures and that he is their Creator. In Romans 1:19, Paul writes that even for the wicked, this sense is "plain to them, because God has shown it to them." Although many today do not acknowledge that God exists, Paul says this is because "they exchanged the truth about God for a lie" (Rom. 1:25), therefore actively or willingly rejecting some truth about God's character and existence that they originally knew. In essence, they convince themselves that "there is no God" (Ps. 10:4).

The knowledge of God that Paul refers to can be "clearly perceived...in the things that have been made" (Rom. 1:20). Every created thing gives evidence of God and his character. But human beings – created in the image of God – give the most evidence of God's existence and character.

God is Knowable

Not only does God exist, he exists in such a way that we can know things about him and come to know him personally.

We will, however, never fully know God. He is infinite and we are finite. "His greatness is unsearchable," too great to ever be fully known (Ps. 145:3). "His understanding is beyond measure" (Ps. 147:5). God's knowledge is "too wonderful" for us; it is so high, we "cannot attain it" (Ps. 139:6), and if we could count God's thoughts, we would find them greater in number than the sands of the earth (Ps. 139:17-18).

While we will never fully know God, we can *personally* know God. Jesus said eternal life was found in knowing him and knowing "the only true God" who sent him (John 17:3). This is far better than simply knowing about God. In fact, in Jeremiah 9:24, God says, "Let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me."

In addition to knowing God, we can know about him from what he tells us about himself on the pages of Scripture. For example, Scripture tells us God is love (1 John 4:8), God is light (1 Jn 1:5), God is spirit (Jn 4:24), and God is righteous (Rom. 3:26). Some of God's attributes will be easier to understand, because they are attributes he shares with us; others may be more difficult to grasp because they are attributes that he doesn't share with us. Because we are finite creations of an infinite Creator, we will never fully understand everything there is to understand about any one of God's attributes. Even so, there is tremendous value in learning God's attributes, for in them we will find the true things about Himself that He wants us to know. And as people created for God's glory (Isa. 43:7), we can bring him glory as we imitate him by exhibiting likeness to his attributes.

BELIEVE SERIES Lesson Two

God is Independent

God's independence means he doesn't actually *need* us or anything else in creation for anything. He did not create us because he was lonely or needed fellowship with other people. God always has been perfectly and completely happy and fulfilled in his own personal existence. Paul says in Acts 17:24-25, "The God who made the world and everything in it...does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, *as though he needed anything*, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything."

However though God is completely independent, he also *chooses* to give us value and significance. He allows us to be important to him! Indeed, all creation glorifies and brings him joy. As he says in Isaiah 43:7, "Everyone who is called by my name...I created for my glory." And Zephaniah says God "will rejoice" over us "with gladness" and "exult" over us "with loud singing" (Zeph. 3:17). Although God does not need us, he allows us to bring joy to his heart – joy that results in loud singing! That is a sign of true significance.

God is Unchangeable

God is unchangeable, but not in every way we might think him to be. Instead, he is unchangeable only in the ways the Scriptures tell us he is unchangeable: God is unchangeable in his being, attributes, purposes, and promises. The psalmist praises God for being the same (Ps. 102:27). God affirms this when he, in reference to his attributes, says that he does not change: "For I the Lord do not change" (Mal. 3:6). When God stays the same in his being and attributes it is in direct contrast to us: Our beings will change and our attributes will change. God, on the other hand, will stay the same forever.

In addition, God is unchangeable in his purposes. Once he has determined he will bring something about, it will be achieved. For "the counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). His individual plans for eternity (such as those found in Matt. 25:34 and Eph. 1:4, 11) will come to pass.

God is also unchanging in his promises. As it is written in Numbers 23:19; "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?"

Even so, there are places in Scripture that seem to suggest that God changed. For example, God did not punish Nineveh as promised, when the people repented (Jonah 3:4, 10; for other examples, see Ex. 32:9-14 and Isa. 38:1-6). But these instances should be understood as true expressions of God's intention related to the specific situation. As the situation changes, God's intention will change as well.

God's unchangeableness does not mean he will not act nor feel differently in response to different situations (for he would hardly be good or just if he did not respond differently to sin than to repentance and righteousness). Nor does unchangeableness mean God doesn't act or feel emotions. In fact, one of the ways God demonstrates he is "God and not a man" is by not executing his "burning anger" and destroying a people; instead, as his "heart recoils within" him and his "compassion grows warm and tender," God withholds his judgment and says "I will not come in wrath" (Hos. 11:8-9).

God is Eternal

God, being eternal, has no beginning or end or succession of events in his own being. This is affirmed in Psalm 90:2: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." He was working "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). He has always existed. He is the first and last, the beginning and the end, "the Alpha and the

BELIEVE SERIES Lesson Two

Omega...who is and who was and who is to come" (Rev. 1:8). Jude tells us that "glory, majesty, dominion, and authority" were God's "before all time" as well as "now and forever" (Jude 25).

Because God is eternal, his view of time is radically different from ours. For example, "a thousand years are in his sight "but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night" (Ps. 90:4). Therefore, all of past history is, to God, as if it just happened. Peter affirms this when he writes "with the Lord...a thousand years is "as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). But Peter also tells us one day seems to last forever to God: "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years" (2 Peter 3:8).

God is Omnipresent

Just as God is unlimited with regard to time, he is also unlimited with regard to space. He is omnipresent. He does not have size or spatial dimensions; he is present in every point of space with his whole being. He cannot be limited by material space because he created it (Gen. 1:1).

God is also present in every part of space; he is everywhere; he fills heaven and earth (Jer. 23:23-24). As David writes, "Where shall I go from your spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me" (Ps. 139:7-10). God is present in every part of space, but his being is such that even "heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain" him (1 Kgs 8:27).

God is Spirit

Jesus affirmed that God is in no way limited to a spatial location when he said, "God is spirit" (Jn 4:24). God exists in such a way that his being is not made of any matter. He has no parts, no size and no dimensions. He is unable to be perceived by our bodily senses. To think of his being in terms of anything else in the created universe would be a misrepresentation, for he is more excellent than any other kind of existence.

Yet God has chosen to make us, in our spiritual nature, somewhat like him in his spiritual nature. He has gifted us with spirits in which we are to worship him (Jn 4:24). Paul tells us those who are "joined to the Lord" become "one spirit with him" (1 Cor. 6:17). As one spirit with God his Holy Spirit within us bears witness to our status as his adopted children (Rom. 8:16). When we die, if we are joined with him, our spirit will return "to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7).

God is Invisible

Because God is spirit, God is also invisible. "No one has even seen God" (Jn 1:18). Nor will anyone ever be able to see God's total essence or all of his spiritual being.

The Bible does, however, record instances when people have seen manifestations of God. Isaiah tells us he "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" (Is. 6:1). "The LORD appeared" to Abraham "by the oaks of Mamre" (Gen. 18:1). And Jacob said he saw "God face to face" (Gen. 32:30). In these and other similar instances, God took on a visible form to show himself to people. A much greater visible manifestation of God is found in the person of Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9).

God is Omniscient

God "knows everything" (1 Jn 3:20). In one simple and eternal act, he fully knows himself and all actual and possible things. He knows all things that exist and all that happens. "No creature is hidden" from God's sight, "but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him of whom we must give account" (Heb.

BELIEVE SERIES Lesson Two

4:13). Since he fully knows himself (1 Cor. 2:10-11), he fully knows all things that he could have done but did not do and all things that he might have created but did not create. He also knows all possible events that will not actually happen, and events that would have resulted if some other events had turned out differently in history (see, for example, Matt. 11:21).

God is Wise

God is not only all-knowing but also all-wise. This means he always chooses the best possible goals and the best possible means to meet those goals. He is "the only wise God" (Rom. 16:27). He is "wise in heart" (Jon 9:4). And with him "are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding" (Job 12:13).

God gives this wisdom to his children. With this in mind, James encourages his readers, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5). Godly wisdom – the character quality found in living a life pleasing to him – is discovered through reading and obeying God's Word. "The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (Ps. 19:7).

Even so, we will never fully share God's wisdom. Because of the great "depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God," his judgments are "unsearchable," and his ways are "inscrutable" (Rom. 11:33). At times he will allow us to understand the reasons things happen at other times, we will not be able to fully understand why things are the way they are or happened the way they did. During those difficult times, we must eventually "trust in the LORD" with "all" our heart and not lean on our "own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

God is Truthful

"The Lord is the true God" (Jer. 10:10). All his knowledge and all his words are both true and the final standard of truth. Once he says something, we can count on his doing it; we can count on him to be forever faithful to his promises (Num. 23:19). In fact, the essence of true faith is taking God at his word and relying on him to do as he promised.

We can imitate God's truthfulness, in part, by striving to have true knowledge of him and his Word. We can also imitate it by being truthful in what we say and do (Col. 3:9-10).

God is Good

Jesus said, "No one is good except God alone" (Lk 18:19). Therefore, God is the final standard of good; all he is and does is good and worthy of approval. There is no higher standard of goodness than God's own character and his approval of whatever is consistent with that character. For example, his goodness and approval of goodness is seen through his creation: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Because God is the ultimate standard of goodness he is also the ultimate source of all goodness. James tells us, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). God is the one who bestows good gifts on his children. God promises not to withhold any good thing from "those who walk uprightly" (Ps. 84:11). Jesus confirms this when he says that God will "give good things to those who ask him" (Matt. 7:11). Even his discipline is a manifestation of his goodness and love (Heb. 12:10). Therefore, all the goodness that we seek is ultimately found in God himself. The psalmist realized this when he wrote, "There is nothing on earth that I desire besides you" (Ps. 73:25).

BELIEVE SERIES Lesson Two

God is Love

As mentioned earlier, "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). God eternally gives of himself for the good of others. Jesus tells us this self-giving attribute, God's love, was active "before the foundation of the world" (Jn 17:24). It was evident in the love that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit all had for each other (Jn 17:24; 14:31).

This eternal love finds its expression in God's self-giving love toward his children. John tells us, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10). And Paul writes, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

God is Holy"The LORD our God is holy" (Ps. 99:9). That means he is separated from sin and devoted to seeking his own honor. God is often called the "Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 71:22, for example). The seraphim (winged creatures) around his throne continually cry out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts" (Isa. 6:3).

God's holiness provides the pattern his children are to imitate. As he says in Leviticus 19:2, "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to "strive...for holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). The author of Hebrews tells us that God disciplines his children so that they "may share his holiness" (Heb. 12:10). As we are being made holy, individually and as members of the church (Eph. 5:26-27), we anticipate the day when all things in heaven and on earth will be separated from evil, purified from sin, and devoted solely to seeking God's honor with true moral purity (Zech. 1:20-21).

God is Righteous and Just

Of God, Moses said, "All his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity just and upright is he" (Deut. 32:4). As Moses said, God always acts in accordance with what is right, for he himself is the final standard of what is right. As judge of the world, he will do what is right (Gen. 18:25). He speaks the truth and declares "what is right" (Isa. 45:19). So, as we seek to do what is just and what is right – as we seek to bring about what ought to be – we must seek to do that which is in line with God's moral character, for that is the ultimate standard of righteousness.

Because God is righteous and just, he must treat people as they deserve. Therefore, he must punish that which is against him, that is, sin. However, sometimes God forgives people and does not punish them for their sin. How can he do that if he is just? God is able to forgive people because Christ died to take God's punishment for sin upon himself. In this way, Jesus demonstrated "God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25-26).

God is Jealous

While explaining the first of the Ten Commandments, God says, "I the LORD your God am a jealous God" (Ex. 20:5). In his jealousy, God continually seeks to protect his own honor. He desires that worship be given only to himself and not to anyone or anything else. It is not wrong for God to continually seek his own honor, for it is an honor that only he, as God, deserves. That is why he can rightly say, "My glory I will not give to another" (Isa. 48:11).

God is Wrathful toward Sin

BELIEVE SERIES Lesson Two

God intensely hates all sin. God's wrath burns hot against sin, and it is this wrath that will eventually consume those who reject Jesus and continue in their sin. As Jesus said, "Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (Jn 3:36). It is the "wrath of God," Paul says, that "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18).

God Wills What He Will

God continually "works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11). God's will is the ultimate reason for everything that happens. It is the way God approves and determines to bring about every action necessary for all his creation. God's will is how he chooses to do what he does and doesn't do.

For example, all things were created by God's will (Rev. 4:11), human governments have their power according to God's will (Rom. 13:1), and sometimes it is God's will that his children suffer (1 Peter 3:17). All the events of our life are subject to God's will. That is why James encourages us not to say we will do this or that, but instead say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that" (James 4:15).

Even the death of Christ and all the events surrounding it took place according to God's will. Luke tells us in Acts 4:27-28, those who were involved in Christ's death did whatever God's hand and plan "had predestined to take place."

Sometimes God's will is clearly revealed, such as when, from Scripture, we clearly know what we should do or what God has specifically commanded us to do. This is what is referred to when Jesus told us to pray "your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

At other times, Scripture does not give us clear direction as to what we are to do or how we are to act. It's at times like these that our attitude should be one of humble reliance upon God and his sovereign control over the events in our life. We should plan our steps, as James encouraged us to, by saying "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that" (James 4:15)

God is not responsible for, sinful or evil things. The exact relationship between his will and evil is not something he has chosen to completely reveal to us.

God Has Freedom

Psalm 115:3 says, "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases." Nothing can hinder God from doing his will. He is not constrained by anything outside of himself; he is completely free to do whatever he wants to do. He is not under any authority or restraint; there is no person or force that can ever dictate what he should or will do.

God is Omnipotent

"Is anything too hard for the LORD?" asks Genesis 18:14. Although the questions answered many times throughout the Bible, one clear answer is found when Jeremiah says to God, "Nothing is too hard for you" (Jer. 32:17).

God is omnipotent. He is all powerful. He is able to do all his holy will. There are no limits on what he decides to do. He "is able," Paul tells us, "to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). As Jesus says, "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). God's power is infinite.

God is Perfect

Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:48, "Your heavenly Father is perfect." This means God fully possesses all excellent qualities and lacks no part of any qualities that would be desirable for him.

BELIEVE SERIES Lesson Two

God is Unity

Although some of God's attributes may seem to be emphasized more than others, it is important to realize that God is unified in all his attributes. He is not more of one attribute than another. He is not divided into parts, and he is not one attribute at one point in history and another attribute at another time. He is fully and completely every attribute (even those not mentioned here) at every time.

Scripture never singles out one of God's attributes as more important than the rest. For example, "God is light" (1 Jn 1:5) and "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). He is not part light and part love; his not love during the day and light at night. He is, at all times and in all ways, both light and love. Each one of God's attributes qualifies each other attribute.

Each of God's attributes represents one aspect of his character; they each provide us with a perspective on who he is.

Trinity -The Bible's View

The word "trinity" is never found in the Bible, but the idea represented by the word is affirmed in many places. For instance, in Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." His use of "us" and "our" implies that more than one person was involved in creation. The only other beings that God could possibly be referring to are angels, but we are not made in the image of angels but "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27), so this verse must imply that there is more than one person in God.

When Jesus was baptized, "the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and ...a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" (Matt. 3:16-17). At this moment, all three members of the Trinity were performing three distinct activities: God the Father was speaking, God the Son was being baptized, and God the Holy Spirit was resting on the Son.

Similarly, when Jesus sent his disciples out to do their work, he commended them to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). In saying this, Jesus is affirming that all three members of the Trinity are distinct in their personhood (the Father can't be the Son, for example). Jude 20-21 also affirms the three distinct persons in the Trinity: "Pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Because God is three distinct persons, the Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit, the Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son. Each of the persons of the Trinity is fully God.

All three members of the Trinity have different roles. For example, in creation we know that God spoke the earth into being (Gen. 1:9-10). But John 1:3 tells us that God the Son carried out those words: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." And, as Genesis 1:2 tells us, while God was creating, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters," that is, sustaining and manifesting God's presence in creation.

Different roles within the Trinity can also be seen in our salvation. God the Father "so loved the world, that he gave his only Son," whom he sent "into the world...in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17). Of his role, Jesus said, "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). And that will was that Jesus die for our sins so that we didn't have to (Heb. 10:10). When Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, he and the Father sent the Holy Spirit to bring completion to the work the Father and the Son had started (John 14:26 and John 16:7).

BELIEVE SERIES Lesson Two

Personal Questions

1. What are some attributes that God most clearly shares with us? What are some attributes He doesn't share very much with us? Name one attribute of God that you would like to imitate more fully in your daily life and tell why.
2. Can you tell what some of the dangers would be in considering one of God's attributes more important than all the others?
3. Which of God's attributes seem most amazing to you? What have you learned about God through this attribute?
4. Can you name three or four key passages of Scripture that tell us about the Trinity? What exactly do these passages tell us about the Trinity?
5. Why do all analogies fail in their ability to fully explain the Trinity? Does this mean we should try to come up with an analogy that works? Why or why not?
6. How do the different ways the Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to each other provide us with a model for the ways we are to relate to each other?

Group Study

OPEN

What ideas about God are floating around in our culture?

VIDEO TEACHING NOTES

As you watch the video segment, use the following outline to record some of the main points. (The answer key is found at the end of the session.)

A. W. Tozer wrote, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Why? Because this mindset – or absence of it – will drive all we _____ and all we _____.

Key Question: Who is _____?

Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are _____.

Key Idea: I believe the God of the Bible is the one _____ -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God is three persons who _____ a being.

Genesis 1:26-27: "Then God said, _____ make mankind in our image, in our likeness...So God created mankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

One of the biggest failures for humanity, beginning with the fall of Adam and Eve, is when we try to take over the role of _____ in our lives.

(Key Application) Because God is God...I am _____...He is in _____ and in control...I want to know and follow his _____ for my life.

(Key Application) Because I was created in the image of God and for community...I recognize others' full _____ and respect boundaries...I look out for the rights, preferences and _____ of others... _____ and enjoy others.

GROUP DISCUSSION

KEY APPLICATION: Since God exists and made Himself known, I ought to know and worship Him.

Key Idea: I believe the God of the Bible is the one true God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As a group, discuss your thoughts and feelings about the following declarations. Which statements are easy to declare with certainty? Which are more challenging, and why?

BELIEVE SERIES Lesson Two

- I believe the God of the Bible is the one true God.
- I believe the God of the Bible is one in essence but distinct in person – Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- I believe Jesus is God in flesh – who dies and rose bodily from the dead.
- I believe the Holy Spirit is God and dwells in Christians to empower them to live the Christian life.

Based on your group's dynamics and makeup, choose the 2-3 questions that will lead to the best discussion about this week's Key Idea.

1. If you only had two minutes to answer the question, "Who is God?" how would you respond?
2. How does your understanding of God impact your day-to-day decisions?
3. What are the most common reasons people struggle to believe that the God of the Bible is the one true God? What helped you get past these obstacles? Or, what obstacles are you still facing?
4. In what ways do you see the invisible qualities of God revealed in nature?
5. What are some of the main points of God's requirements for his people?
6. Why did God have to prove over and over that he is the One true God?
7. In what ways have you experienced God as Father? As Jesus the Son: As the Holy Spirit?
8. What do you think is meant by the phrase Paul quoted: "For in him we live and move and have our being"?

Read Luke 3 together and choose 1-2 questions that will lead to the greatest discussion in your group.

1. In what ways is the Trinity a challenging concept to comprehend?
2. If God (the Trinity) is a community within himself, and we are made in his image, what does that tell us about ourselves?
3. How does today's culture help or hinder us from experiencing the community we were created for?
4. What specific actions can this group undertake to create healthy community?

CLOSING PRAYER - As you close in prayer, give each person a chance to pray referencing one of God's attributes or names.

NEXT WEEK

Key Verse: Hebrews 1:14

Key Idea: I believe in angels and spiritual reality

Key Question: What are angels and how do they remind us of spiritual reality?

BELIEVE SERIES Lesson Two

Study Passages

Nehemiah 9:6

Hebrews 12:22

Colossians 1:16

Luke 24:39

2 Peter 2:4

James 4:7

Psalms 91:11

John 8:44

Revelation 4:11; 12:9; 20:2; 22:8-9

Personal Study Questions

1. How are angels like us and how are they different?
2. What is the role of angels in the world today?
3. What does the Bible tell us about the devil and other fallen angels?
4. How do we remove fears about demonic activities?