

YOU ARE, Part 1

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(Much of this message is a reflection on prayers I have prayed—questions I have asked God—which you may recognize in the style I have used.)

Who are You, God? Are You a person, or a thing, or just a concept?

What are You like, God? It's clear that You are powerful, but are You kind? Do You understand me? Do You care? Are You consistent?

Where are you, God? Are You far away and out of touch? Or are You intimately near?

If You exist, or if You don't, changes nothing—my circumstance are what they are—but it does affect everything!

Whether or not You are kind and generous, or selfish and mean, makes all the difference in the world!

If You are distant and aloof, or imminently near, shapes my whole world!

You matter!!!

Because, God, who You are, how You are, and where You are... determines what we are.

Who You Are

Is there a God? In the very first verse of the first book of the Bible—the Book of Beginnings (Genesis)—we find these words: *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."* (Genesis 1:1)

In the first section of the New Testament, we find these corresponding comments: *"Everything was created through Him; nothing—not one thing!—came into being without Him."* (John 1:3; MSG)

Remarkably, the Bible does not set out to *prove* God's existence; it simply *presents* it. (There it is. Take it or leave it. Trust it or ignore it.)

Of course, there are many corroborating signs, if we choose *not* to ignore them: *"The heavens proclaim the glory of God; the skies display His craftsmanship."* (Psalm 19:1)

“Through everything God made, [people] can clearly see His invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.” (Romans 1:20)

What is God’s identity? Does He have a name? Does it matter? (Wrote the poet: “What’s in a name?”)

When it comes to the things God created, names are not so important—they may even change over time. (The poet concluded, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”) They are not so important that God Himself gave them their names. In fact, God delegated to Adam the privilege and responsibility for naming each of the animals in the Garden of Eden.

But when it comes to the Creator Himself it is different.

“God” is a generic term, which we distinguish simply by spelling it with a capital “G.” But what God are we speaking about?

Does it matter if we refer to God as Ra or Allah or Jehovah? Indeed, it does! Is there a significant difference? Indeed, there is.

When it comes to God Himself, every name that is recorded was given to us *by Him*. He alone can name Himself, for He alone knows Himself, and His names are most significant. They are part of His self-revelation to us.

In that first verse of the Bible, He is *Elohim*—a name which translates as God, or Strong God, but it expresses (curiously) both singularity and plurality at the same time.

When God chose to enter our world to reveal Himself further and accomplish our salvation, again He told us what to call Him. To Mary, His angel said, *“You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus”* (Luke 1:31). To Joseph, it was confirmed: *“She will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins”* (Matthew 1:21).

Post-resurrection, on the Day of Pentecost, in his first public sermon, Peter proclaimed, *“There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12)

Jesus of Nazareth is God in human form. Jesus Christ alone.

Consider the death of Jesus. Human history is riddled with martyrs, for humans are passionate creatures. But it was *who He was* that made the life and death of Jesus so significant.

Where He died and how He died mean nothing in comparison to *who it was* that died in our place.

As the hymnwriter put it: “Christ the Mighty Maker died for man the creature’s sin” (*Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed*).

Who You are, God—the God who cares so much that He took our place and the judgment that should have been ours—the God who “*so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, so that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life*”—who You are means everything to me. It’s why I trust You. It’s why I love You. It’s why I praise You with all my heart. And why I’ll continue to do so as long as You give me breath.

And *who* You are is more fully revealed in *how* You are. “How You are” is important, God, because, who You are, how You are, and where You are... determines what we are.

How You Are

If there is a God, what is He like? What can we expect from Him?

Will He be available? Will He be attentive? How will He respond to my faults? What difference does it make?

If we imagine negative answers to these queries, we will likely stay away from God as much as we can—we will neither pray nor worship regularly. We will not enjoy the fellowship of the church, if we engage at all.

But what has God said, in the Bible, about how He is toward us? Here’s one powerful sample:

Psalm 145:8 The Lord is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. ⁹ The Lord is good to everyone. He showers compassion on all his creation. ¹⁰ All of your works will thank you, Lord, and your faithful followers will praise you.

Did you know that the identical description occurs six more times in the Scriptures?!? Read it again, and ask yourself, “Is this what I expect when I call upon the Lord in prayer?”

If you do trust these words to be true of Him, how might they change your approach to God in prayer? Would you increase thanksgiving and praise?

And these are Old Testament words. When we turn to the New Testament it gets even better! Let me share a few verses that describe how God is toward us.

Romans 5:8 God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

John 3:16 "God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

Ephesians 1:7 [God] is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins. ⁸ He has showered His kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

Ephesians 2:4 But God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)

1 John 4:10 This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

Jesus Christ puts God in human skin and shows us, up close and personal, how God is with us. He is merciful. He is faithful. He is redemptive.

Jesus said, *"If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father"* (John 14:9). That's how close they are! And that's how close we may be with God now.

When they brought to Jesus a woman caught in the act of adultery, and asked Him if it was right for them to stone her to death, He challenged their self-righteousness and said to the woman, *"I do not condemn you either. Go, and from now on do not sin any more."* (John 8:11)

For those who condemned and executed Him, Jesus prayed, *"Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing."* (Luke 23:34)

What do you think you can expect from Him now? How will He be with you? Will He show you compassion? Will He treat you kindly? Will He love you faithfully?

O Father, this is good news to us!

One question remains, though: *Where* is God?

There are times in all of our lives when we wonder, "Where is God now?" or, "Where was God then?" Because, God, who You are, how You are, and where You are... determines what we are.

Where You Are

When you think about where God is, several things may come to mind, like: Up there. Or, down here.

We look up into the vast expanse of outer space and we may ask, as the psalmist did, *“What are mere mortals, that you concern yourself with them; humans, that you watch over them with such care?”* (Psalm 8:4)

Is God so far up there that what is happening down here is irrelevant to Him?

Apparently not, for last week when we read from the Book of Job, we heard God say, *“Have you noticed my servant, Job? There’s no one quite like him—honest and true to his word, totally devoted to God and hating evil.”* (Job 1:8)

What was happening there? God was taken with what He saw on the earth. He noticed His servant, Job, who was rocking it spiritually!

Yes, God is aware of your heart and behavior—not to judge you, but to *help* you. *“The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”* (2 Chronicles 16:9)

“Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who lives from everlasting to everlasting.” (Psalm 41:13)
Our God is beyond (outside of) time AND space. He never feels trapped, and He’s never out of time!

He was before all things. And He is above all things. Yet He is also aware of all things. Not even one small bird falls to the ground that He does not notice; how much more the ups and downs of your precious soul?!?

So, God has the highest and broadest perspective of the events of our lives—including the past and the present. He knows the end from the beginning, and His counsel and direction are rooted in that breadth of wisdom. When He speaks, listen to Him.

No doubt, God is in Heaven, where He sits on a throne with authority and power over all the universe. No doubt, He is King of kings and Lord of lords. The kingdom, the power, and the glory are His alone, forever.

Yet it is not only the big, big picture that informs His knowledge of us and His counsel to us; it is also His intimate acquaintance with the most intricate details of our anatomy, our psychology, and our society.

He became one of us and lived among us, both as a child and as an adult. He knows how we think. He knows how we feel. He was, in all points, tempted as we are, so He sympathizes with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15).

He is Immanuel—the name that means “God with us.”

More than anything else, *this* is what defines where He is: He is *with us*. Even while He rules from Heaven’s throne, He is also with us, for He has given us the Holy Spirit.

Are you cultivating this awareness in yourself? Too often, we are very aware of our circumstances and our feelings, but not of God’s presence and His authority.

Do you speak with Him as someone who is present and aware, or as someone who is distant and uninformed, requiring your counsel? How much of your prayer time is spent informing God of details (that He already knows), rather than simply asking for His help and listening/watching for His response?

Remember, Jesus said, “*Your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask Him.*” (Matthew 6:8)

Speak to Him, then, as someone who knows you well and thoroughly, as you would speak with a best friend. You may expect Him to understand you and support you. And you may expect Him to tell you the truth. Because He is Immanuel, your Very Best Friend Forever.

When you don’t intentionally cultivate your relationship with Him, God does not move away from you, but your sense of His presence and your recognition of His voice diminish. Uncertainty grows. Hesitation increases. Disobedience results.

Do you see now? This is why I say, God, who You are, how You are, and where You are... determines what we are. It determines our level of insight and understanding. It determines whether we are confident or fearful. It determines whether we are decisive or hesitant. It determines whether we are faithful or selfish.

It’s who You are. It’s who You are. It’s who You are.