



KNOWING GOD

God's Character

Knowing What God Is Like

The short answer

God is holy, loving, good, just, merciful, gracious, patient, faithful, truthful, wise, and sovereign. He possesses perfect knowledge, power, and presence. His attributes never compete with one another. Everything God does is consistent with everything He is.

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loving devotion.”

Psalm 145:8 BSB

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore what Scripture reveals about God's character. Knowing what God is like provides a foundation for trusting Him, understanding His Word, responding to suffering, resisting false ideas about Him, and growing in faithful obedience.

Memory anchor

God is always perfectly consistent with His holy, loving, and faithful character.



PART ONE · BEGINNER GUIDE

God makes His character known

Many questions about faith eventually become questions about God's character: Can God be trusted? Does God care about suffering? How can God be loving and just? Why does God judge sin? Is God different in the Old and New Testaments? Does God ever change? How can God be sovereign while people remain responsible for their choices?

Scripture does not present God's character as a collection of abstract ideas. It reveals who God is through His words, actions, promises, judgments, relationships, and redemptive work.

Keep His attributes together

God's love is holy. His justice is wise. His power is good. His mercy does not ignore evil, and His wrath is never uncontrolled or sinful.

The clearest revelation is Jesus

Human beings may act lovingly in one moment and selfishly in another. God is never divided, unstable, or morally inconsistent. Everything He does flows from His perfect and unchanging nature. The clearest revelation of God's character is found in Jesus Christ.

"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature."

Hebrews 1:3 BSB

A note about translations

Scripture quotations use the Berean Standard Bible unless otherwise noted. The Hebrew word *hesed* may be translated as "loving devotion," "steadfast love," "faithful love," "mercy," or "lovingkindness." Comparing reliable translations can help clarify the full sense of an ancient word.

HOW GOD MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN

Revelation, eternity, and unchanging faithfulness

1. God reveals Himself

Human imagination cannot determine what God is like. God must make Himself known. Scripture teaches that He reveals Himself through creation, His acts in history, His written Word, and ultimately through Jesus Christ.

01

Creation

Creation reveals God's power and wisdom. "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1).

02

History

The covenants, exodus, Israel's history, and the coming of Christ reveal His faithfulness, justice, patience, and saving purposes.

03

Scripture

God's written Word provides the authoritative testimony through which His identity, purposes, and works may be understood.

04

Jesus Christ

Jesus' words, works, compassion, holiness, and authority reveal the character of the unseen God (John 14:9).



2. God is eternal and self-existent

Everything in creation depends on something outside itself. God alone is uncreated and self-existent. Before the universe existed, God was already present (Psalm 90:2). He does not depend on creation for life, strength, wisdom, love, or fulfillment.

3. God is unchanging

God's character, purposes, and promises do not change (Malachi 3:6). This does not mean that He is inactive or emotionally distant. Scripture shows God responding to prayer, grieving over sin, showing compassion, and acting within history.

Reflection

Which source should have final authority when personal experience or culture conflicts with what God has revealed in Scripture?

HOLINESS AND LOVE

God is perfectly pure and perfectly loving

4. God is holy

God's holiness means that He is completely pure, morally perfect, and set apart from everything sinful. Isaiah heard the heavenly declaration, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Hosts" (Isaiah 6:3).

God's holiness explains why sin is serious. Sin is not merely a mistake or weakness. It is rebellion against the holy God and a distortion of His good design. His holiness also explains the need for salvation. Sinful people cannot make themselves acceptable to God through effort alone.

At the cross

God did not overlook sin. Jesus bore sin's judgment so that forgiveness could be offered without denying God's holiness and justice.

5. God is love

Love is not merely something God does. Scripture says that love belongs to His very nature (1 John 4:8). Biblical love is not shallow approval or sentimental affection. God's love seeks what is truly good and remains consistent with His holiness.

God demonstrated His love most clearly by sending Jesus to save sinners: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). A loving God opposes the evil that harms His creation. Love without truth would not be righteous, and love without justice would leave victims without hope.

Memory anchor

God's love always seeks what is truly and eternally good.

Reflection

How is biblical love different from approving every desire or decision?

GOODNESS AND JUSTICE

God remains good and always does what is right

6. God is good

Everything genuinely good has its source in God. "You are good, and You do what is good" (Psalm 119:68). God does not become good by conforming to a standard above Himself. His character is the perfect standard of goodness.

Suffering may make God's goodness difficult to see. Scripture does not deny this struggle. Job, the Psalms, Lamentations, and the prophets contain honest grief and difficult questions. Christian faith does not require pretending that pain is painless. It calls for trust in God's character even when His purposes are not yet understood.

Hope in Christ

At the cross, God entered human suffering. The resurrection promises that evil, sorrow, and death will not have the final word.



7. God is just and righteous

God always does what is right. He judges without corruption, ignorance, prejudice, or selfishness. His justice is good news because evil matters. Abuse, oppression, cruelty, exploitation, and violence will not be ignored forever.

At the cross, God's justice and mercy meet. Sin is not dismissed as unimportant, yet forgiveness is offered through Christ. Those who worship a just God should defend the vulnerable, act honestly, reject favoritism, and seek what is right.

Reflection

Why would a God who never judged evil be less loving rather than more loving?

GRACE AND FAITHFULNESS

Merciful, patient, truthful, and dependable

8. God is merciful, gracious, and patient

01

Mercy

God does not give repentant sinners the judgment they deserve.

02

Grace

God gives blessings that cannot be earned.

03

Patience

God delays judgment and provides opportunities for repentance.

Exodus 34:6 describes God as compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving devotion and faithfulness. His patience should never be mistaken for approval of sin. Delayed judgment is mercy intended to lead people toward repentance.

Salvation depends entirely upon grace. Good works cannot purchase forgiveness. Obedience is the fruit of salvation, not its price.

9. God is faithful and true

God always tells the truth and remains faithful to His promises. Human promises may fail because of dishonesty, weakness, changing desires, or circumstances beyond human control. None of these limitations applies to God.

Read promises in context

God's faithfulness does not mean that every personal expectation will be fulfilled. It means that He will fulfill what He has actually promised according to His wisdom and timing.

Memory anchor

God freely gives grace that cannot be earned, and He always remains faithful to His Word.

WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE

God knows all things and always acts wisely

10. God is wise

God possesses perfect knowledge and always applies that knowledge rightly. Knowledge understands what is true. Wisdom understands the best and right way to act. God never makes decisions with incomplete information.

Trusting God's wisdom does not forbid questions. Scripture contains many faithful questions. Trust means bringing those questions to God without assuming that limited human understanding is greater than His.



11. God knows all things

God has complete knowledge of the past, present, and future. He knows every event, thought, motive, word, and possibility. His knowledge is comforting because no pain, prayer, injustice, or act of faithfulness escapes His attention. It is sobering because nothing can be hidden from Him.

Why pray if God already knows?

Prayer does not provide information God lacks. Prayer is an act of relationship, dependence, worship, confession, and trust. God has chosen to accomplish many purposes through the prayers of His people.

“His understanding is beyond searching out.”

Isaiah 40:28 BSB

Reflection

How can prayer express both honest questions and trust in God's wisdom?

PRESENCE AND POWER

No circumstance is beyond God's presence or ability

12. God is present everywhere

God is not confined to a building, nation, object, or location. He is fully present everywhere while remaining distinct from creation. The universe is not God, and God is not merely a force within the universe.

Scripture distinguishes between God's presence to sustain creation, His presence in judgment, and His gracious presence with His people. For the believer, His presence provides comfort, courage, and accountability.

13. God is all-powerful

God possesses all power and can accomplish everything consistent with His character and purposes. His omnipotence does not mean that He can act contrary to His nature. God cannot lie, become evil, cease to be God, or make truth false. These are not limitations of power; they are expressions of perfection.

God's power is never reckless or corrupt. It is always governed by His holiness, goodness, wisdom, and love. The resurrection of Jesus is the central demonstration of God's power over sin and death.

01

Presence

No place and no circumstance are beyond God's presence.

02

Power

God possesses unlimited power and always uses it consistently with His character.

03

Comfort

The God who is able to act is also present with His people while they wait.

SOVEREIGNTY AND EVIL

God rules over history and righteously opposes sin

14. God is sovereign

God is the supreme King over creation. Nothing can overthrow His ultimate purposes. Scripture also teaches that human choices are real and morally significant. People receive commands, make decisions, experience consequences, and remain accountable.

The crucifixion provides an important example. Those who condemned and crucified Jesus acted sinfully and remained responsible. At the same time, the cross occurred according to God's saving purpose.



Hold both truths together

God's sovereignty and human responsibility are both taught in Scripture. The beginner's foundation is to affirm both without using either one to erase the other.

15. God opposes evil

God's wrath is His holy and settled opposition to evil. It is never selfish, uncontrolled, misinformed, or sinful. God's jealousy is also different from envy. His righteous jealousy protects the covenant relationship that rightfully belongs to Him.

Idolatry turns worship away from the Creator and toward created things. Because false worship harms people and dishonors truth, God rightly calls His people back to Himself.

Memory anchor

God rules over history, human choices remain meaningful, and God's wrath is His holy opposition to evil.

THE TRIUNE GOD

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The Bible teaches that there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

01

One God

Christian faith does not teach three gods. God is one in being and nature.

02

Three persons

The Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father.

03

Fully divine

The Father, Son, and Spirit each fully possess the one divine nature - not one-third of God.

04

Eternally true

The persons are not temporary roles or appearances. God has eternally existed as Father, Son, and Spirit.

At Jesus' baptism, the Son is baptized, the Spirit descends, and the Father speaks from heaven. The three persons are distinguished while the unity of God remains intact.

Avoid inadequate illustrations

Illustrations involving water, eggs, or human roles usually fail because they cannot preserve both God's oneness and the real distinction of the three persons. Nothing in creation is exactly like God.

17. God's character is revealed in Jesus

The Old Testament repeatedly reveals God as compassionate, gracious, patient, forgiving, and faithful, while also recording righteous judgment. The New Testament reveals Jesus' grace and love, but Jesus also teaches clearly about sin, repentance, judgment, and accountability.

Memory anchor

Jesus does not correct a defective picture of God. He perfectly reveals the same God who acted throughout Israel's history.



PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Let truth about God shape daily life

01

When afraid

Remember that God is present and sovereign.

02

When ashamed

Remember that God is merciful and gracious toward those who repent and trust in Christ.

03

When confused

Remember that God is wise and truthful.

04

When waiting

Remember that God is patient and faithful.

05

When facing injustice

Remember that God is righteous and will judge perfectly.

06

When tempted

Remember that God is holy and provides a way to obey.

07

When suffering

Remember that God is good, compassionate, and present even when His purposes are unclear.

08

When blessed

Remember that every good gift comes from God and should produce gratitude.

Suggested prayer-and-journaling practice

Choose one attribute each day. Write one Scripture that reveals it, one truth the passage teaches, one faithful response, and one short prayer. This is a suggested devotional exercise rather than a required or formally named study method.

PRAYER AND REVIEW

Respond to what Scripture reveals

Prayer

Holy and faithful God, thank You for making Your character known through creation, Scripture, and Jesus Christ. Correct every false or incomplete idea about who You are. Teach the heart to trust Your goodness when circumstances are painful, Your wisdom when answers are unclear, and Your faithfulness while waiting. Reveal any sin that needs to be confessed. Deepen gratitude for Your mercy and grace. Form a life that reflects Your holiness, love, truth, justice, patience, and compassion. May every part of this study lead to greater worship, faithful obedience, and deeper confidence in Jesus. Amen.



REVIEW AND REFLECTION

Questions to consider

1. Why must God reveal His character rather than human beings defining Him?
2. What does it mean that God is eternal and self-existent?
3. How can God respond differently to people while remaining unchanging?
4. Why must God's love and holiness be understood together?
5. How do justice and mercy meet at the cross?
6. What is the difference between mercy and grace?
7. How should God's complete knowledge affect prayer?
8. Why must human responsibility be affirmed alongside divine sovereignty?
9. What truths must be preserved when describing the Trinity?
10. Which attribute is most comforting, and which is most difficult to understand?



PART TWO · WANT TO GO DEEPER?

God's attributes and historical Christian reflection

This section is optional

The beginner guide is complete without Part Two. Continue when ready to examine several theological questions at an intermediate level.

1. God's attributes are not separate parts

A list of attributes can unintentionally make God seem assembled from different qualities. Scripture does not present Him as partly loving, partly holy, partly powerful, and partly wise. His attributes describe the one, undivided divine nature.

The theological term divine simplicity expresses this truth. It does not mean that God is easy to understand. It means that God is not composed of independent pieces and does not experience internal conflict among His attributes.

Intermediate memory anchor

Every attribute of God expresses His one, perfect, undivided nature.

2. Historical Christian discussions

01

Classical theism

Emphasizes that God is eternal, self-existent, unchanging, all-knowing, all-powerful, and independent of creation.

02

Divine impassibility

Affirms that God is not involuntarily controlled, manipulated, or destabilized by changing emotions.

03

Relational emphases

Highlight God's genuine interaction with people and responsiveness to prayer without denying His knowledge or sovereignty.

04

Open theism

Teaches that some future free choices are not yet fully knowable. Many evangelicals reject this because Scripture presents God as knowing and declaring the future.

THE TRINITY

One divine nature, three distinct persons, one saving work

Christian theology uses two important words: nature describes what God is; person describes who the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are. God is one in nature and three in person. The persons are not parts of God, separate gods, or three appearances of one person.

How can distinct persons act without division?

Historic Christian theology describes God's external works as inseparable. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not operate as three unrelated agents pursuing separate plans. Because they share the one divine nature, the triune God acts with one will, power, and purpose.

Ephesians 1:3-14

The Father chooses and purposes redemption. Redemption is accomplished through the blood of the Son. Believers are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. These are not three independent salvation projects; they are personally distinct dimensions of the one saving work of the triune God.



Scripture may particularly associate a work with one person without excluding the others. In creation, the Father creates through the Son, and the Spirit is active. In the incarnation, the Son - not the Father or Spirit - became human, yet the incarnation fulfilled the unified saving purpose of the triune God.

The doctrine does not claim that one God is three gods or that one person is three persons. It teaches one divine nature eternally possessed by three distinct persons. The mystery lies beyond complete comprehension, but it is not a formal contradiction.

Intermediate memory anchor

The Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct persons who act inseparably as the one true God.

Reflection

How does Ephesians 1:3-14 distinguish the persons while presenting salvation as one unified work?

SOVEREIGNTY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Biblical truth and several Christian models

Scripture teaches that God accomplishes His purposes and that human beings make meaningful choices and remain accountable. Joseph told his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good" (Genesis 50:20). The same event contained sinful human intention and righteous divine intention.

01

Compatibilism

God's sovereignty and meaningful choices are compatible. People choose according to actual desires even while God remains sovereign over history.

02

Libertarian freedom

Moral freedom ordinarily requires the ability to choose among alternatives. God sovereignly permits many decisions without determining them.

03

Molinism

God knows what every free creature would choose in every possible circumstance and sovereignly orders history without eliminating free decisions.

These models should not become tests of Christian faithfulness. Each attempts to account for biblical truths, but none removes every mystery.

Boundaries every model should preserve

God is sovereign. Human decisions are meaningful. People are responsible for sin. God is not morally evil and does not tempt anyone. Grace is necessary for salvation. God can accomplish good purposes even through actions He rightly condemns.

The proper response is not passivity. Scripture calls people to pray, obey, repent, make wise decisions, share the gospel, and pursue justice. God's sovereignty gives these actions meaning and hope rather than making them unnecessary.

DOES GOD CHANGE HIS MIND?

Reading relational language faithfully

Genesis 6:6 says that God regretted making humanity. Exodus 32:14 says that He relented from announced judgment. Jonah 3:10 records God withholding judgment after Nineveh repented.

01

Warnings are relational

A warning of judgment may be intended to produce repentance.

02

Conduct changes

When people turn from rebellion to repentance, they experience God's consistent character differently.

03

Language is historical

Scripture describes God's genuine grief and response within history without requiring ignorance, error, or instability.

04

Read the whole Bible

These texts should be held alongside Scripture's teaching that God knows the end from the beginning and remains faithful.

These passages should not be dismissed as meaningless figures of speech. They reveal that God is personally and morally engaged with creation. At the same time, they should not be used to overturn the Bible's consistent testimony concerning His knowledge and faithfulness.

A framework for difficult passages

11. Read the entire context: speaker, audience, covenant setting, historical circumstances, genre, and purpose.
12. Distinguish description from command. Scripture may report evil without endorsing it.
13. Distinguish unique divine judgment from general permission. Ancient Israel's role cannot be transferred to modern causes.
14. Consider the whole biblical story, including God's patience, justice, mercy, and revelation in Christ.
15. Do not erase the moral weight. Historical explanation does not require pretending that severe judgment feels easy.

DIFFICULT PASSAGES ABOUT GOD

Conquest narratives and imprecatory psalms

The conquest of Canaan

The conquest narratives describe divine judgment against cultures associated with entrenched violence, idolatry, exploitation, and practices that included child sacrifice. Genesis 15:16 indicates that judgment was delayed for generations. Israel was not chosen because of moral superiority and was warned that the same kinds of rebellion would bring judgment.

Some scholars observe that ancient Near Eastern military accounts used comprehensive victory language even when later passages showed surviving populations. This may affect how some conquest descriptions are understood, although it does not remove every moral difficulty. Other interpreters understand the language more literally and emphasize God's unique authority as Creator and Judge.

A necessary guardrail

These narratives must never be used to justify racism, forced conversion, religious violence, or territorial conquest today. No present group possesses Israel's unique covenant commission.

The imprecatory psalms

Psalms 35, 69, 109, and 137 include prayers asking God to judge enemies. They arise from oppression, violence, betrayal, exile, and persecution. They give victims language for bringing anger and a desire for justice before God rather than taking personal vengeance.

Christians read these prayers through Jesus, who commands love for enemies while also affirming final judgment. The New Testament holds together prayer for repentance, refusal of personal vengeance, protection of victims, and confidence in God's justice.

Honest faith

A difficult passage should be allowed to remain difficult. Faith does not require pretending that every moral or emotional question has an easy answer.



Trust without shallow answers

7. The problem of evil and suffering

- God created the world good.
- Human rebellion brought corruption and death.
- People commit genuine evil and remain responsible.
- God may permit what He does not morally approve.
- God can bring good from evil without calling evil good.
- God entered suffering through Jesus.
- The cross demonstrates that apparent defeat can serve a redemptive purpose.
- The resurrection promises final victory over evil and death.
- God will judge evil and renew creation.

These truths do not explain why each tragedy occurs. The book of Job warns against simplistic explanations. Lament is therefore a faithful response: it brings grief, confusion, and protest directly to God while continuing to seek Him.

Christian hope

Hope does not claim that suffering is unreal. It rests upon the crucified and risen Christ and the promise that God will ultimately remove death, mourning, crying, and pain.

8. God's character and human language

God is infinite, while human language is finite. When Scripture calls God a rock, shield, shepherd, or consuming fire, it uses imagery. Other statements directly describe Him as holy, truthful, loving, and just. Human beings can know God truly without knowing Him completely.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Brief answers to frequent objections

Is God more loving in the New Testament?

No. Both Testaments reveal love, patience, mercy, holiness, and judgment. Jesus is not opposed to the God of the Old Testament; He perfectly reveals Him.

If God knows everything, why pray?

Prayer is a God-appointed means of relationship and participation in His purposes. It expresses dependence and forms the person praying.

If God is good, why does He allow suffering?

Scripture gives a framework involving sin, a fallen creation, divine patience, redemption, and restoration, but not the reason for every tragedy.

Does God's wrath contradict His love?

No. God's wrath is His holy opposition to evil. Love that never opposed abuse or destruction would not be morally good.

Can God forgive any sin?

Christ's saving work is sufficient for every repentant sinner who trusts in Him. No one seeking mercy should conclude that repentance is impossible.



Why does God seem hidden?

God has revealed Himself, yet His presence is not always felt equally. Such seasons call for honest prayer and reliance on what God has revealed.

Must Christians agree on every sovereignty model?

No. Christians should affirm truths clearly taught in Scripture while showing humility about philosophical explanations.

Why can the Trinity not be fully explained?

God is unique and infinite. The doctrine can be stated without contradiction, but no created analogy reproduces God's mode of existence.

ONE FAITHFUL SUMMARY

Know His character, trust His heart, and look to Jesus

God is the eternal, self-existent Creator who has revealed Himself through creation, Scripture, history, and Jesus Christ. He is holy, loving, good, just, merciful, gracious, patient, faithful, truthful, and wise. He knows all things, is present everywhere, possesses unlimited power, and rules sovereignly over creation.

His attributes never conflict. Every action of God expresses His one perfect and undivided character. The one true God eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three persons are distinct, fully possess the one divine nature, and act inseparably in creation and redemption.

Scripture affirms both God's sovereignty and meaningful human responsibility. Difficult passages should be studied honestly, carefully, and within the whole biblical story. Faith should not pretend that every moral or emotional difficulty has an easy answer.

The most important invitation

Sin separates humanity from God. Jesus lived without sin, died for sinners, and rose from the dead. Through Him, forgiveness and reconciliation with God are offered as gifts of grace. The proper response is repentance and faith: turning from sin and trusting Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Continue studying

Exodus 3:1-15; Exodus 34:5-9; Psalm 90; Psalm 103; Psalm 139; Isaiah 6:1-8; Isaiah 40:12-31; Jonah 3-4; John 1:1-18; John 14-16; Romans 3:21-26; Romans 8:18-39; Ephesians 1:3-14; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-4; 1 John 4:7-19; Revelation 21:1-5.

Final memory anchor

God is always perfectly consistent with His holy, loving, and faithful character - and Jesus is the clearest revelation of who He is.

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