

**Campus Church of Christ Jail Ministry**  
**Series 2: Lesson #1, "Who Is God?"**  
**teacher's guide**

(all **green** text is for the teacher)

**Preparation:**

1. Review the scripture references in the lesson and related passages in your Bible; read through the teacher's version of the lesson; make notes / changes as desired.
2. Pick up the following from the Jail Ministry Table:
  - attendance/prayer request sheets
  - enough copies of lesson handout for the inmates in your pod (Remember, **don't** staple the pages.)
  - correspondence courses to give out to inmates who desire one
3. Other optional materials to bring:
  - White board marker and eraser
  - Sharpened pencils for inmates to use (be sure to collect all of them before they leave the room)

**Before and as students arrive:**

1. Welcome students and distribute student handouts
2. Make sure that any inmates who don't have a Bible know that they can fill out an inmate request form to get one that is provided to the jail by the church.
3. Pass the attendance roster / prayer request sheets around.
4. Always extend a greeting of encouragement and hope as inmates are arriving.
5. Open the class / lesson with a prayer.

To make the best use of time, as inmates are coming in and receiving the lesson handout, ask them to complete the first page before you start the class if possible.

**Focus points for this Lesson:**

(Write these main points on the white board and emphasize through the lesson; summarize in conclusion)

- **Our "view" of God determines our relationship with Him and with others.**
- **God is not like us; we cannot reduce God to human terms.**
- **God reveals Himself to us in ways we can understand.**

# Lesson #1, "Who Is God?"

## Introduction

Our lesson this evening and for the next few Sundays is about the nature of God and our relationship to Him. We will be comparing what we think we understand about God to what He has revealed and **wants** us to know and understand about Him. We will examine the way our perception of Him affects our relationship with Him which ultimately affects how we live our lives as well as how we relate to each other.

We see their pictures on the covers of magazines and tabloids. We see them on the big screen. We hear all of the latest "gossip" about them on the TV talk shows and sometimes even in the news. We know so much about these Hollywood icons that we may even begin to think we really know them. Even in our everyday lives, sometimes we know so much about someone that we feel like we actually know them. Have you ever thought you knew a person, but then had the opportunity to spend one-on-one time with him/her only to discover that he/she wasn't at all like what you had thought or heard? From these experiences, we have learned that it is possible to know about someone without actually knowing them.

What we think and "know" about God and how we relate to Him is much the same. God created us with the need for relationships, including, and most important, a deep desire and need for meaningful fellowship with Him. Consequently, it is our human nature to think and feel something about Him. "What you think about God shapes your whole relationship with Him. In addition, what you believe **God** thinks about **you** determines how close you will grow toward Him." (p. 20)

Look at your responses on the page you completed before the lesson.

(For the questions below, allow students to share if they wish; if a board is available, list all or some of their perceptions)

**What do you think you know about God?**

**Where do you think you got these ideas about God?**

**What do you think God thinks about you?**

**Where do you think you got these ideas?**

## Is My Vision of God 20/20?

For most of us, our many life experiences as well as the influence of others and our own self-perception all come together to form our personal perceptions of God. In addition, we as humans tend toward the following three "vision errors" in being able to accurately see God as He is.

- "We tend to assume that God is just like us." (p. 30)
- "We tend to reduce God to measurable and controllable terms." (p. 30)

- "We tend to overlook the obvious and significant ways that God has revealed Himself to us." (p. 30)

In other words, most of us do not have a very clear picture of who God truly is because the "glasses" through which we are looking at God are distorted and may even be "rose tinted" or dark. As a result, we don't see God with the clear, 20/20 vision with which He wants us to see Him. Besides affecting our relationship with Him, who and/or what we believe God to be like ultimately defines who we are and why we do what we do. For this reason, it is critical that we get our "God vision" corrected to 20/20.

Our first focus correction: We must clearly understand that God is **NOT** like us. God has made it abundantly clear throughout the Bible that He is not like us. We are made "in His image", but that does not mean that He is made in our image! We are merely a hint of what He is.

### **Isaiah 55:8-9 (New International Version)**

<sup>8</sup> "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,"  
declares the LORD.

<sup>9</sup> "As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

### **Isaiah 40:25-28 (New International Version)**

<sup>25</sup> "To whom will you compare me?  
Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.

<sup>26</sup> Lift your eyes and look to the heavens:  
Who created all these?  
He who brings out the starry host one by one,  
and calls them each by name.  
Because of his great power and mighty strength,  
not one of them is missing.

<sup>27</sup> Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and complain, O Israel,  
"My way is hidden from the LORD;  
my cause is disregarded by my God"?

<sup>28</sup> Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can fathom.

### **2 Samuel 7:22 (New International Version)**

<sup>22</sup> "How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears.

## **Romans 11:33-36 (New International Version)**

<sup>33</sup>Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and<sup>[a]</sup> knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!

<sup>34</sup>"Who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counselor?"<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>35</sup>"Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay him?"<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>36</sup>For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Second focus correction: We must understand that we cannot shrink God and put Him in a box or define Him in terms that we can manage. Mankind has, throughout his history, attempted to create his own gods; gods that could be easily defined and managed. Our tendency has been to want a god who will submit to our wishes and be accountable to us, one that pleases us in every way. The apostle Paul spoke about this tendency nearly 2000 years ago in the book of Romans.

## **Romans 1:21-23 (New International Version)**

<sup>21</sup>For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup>and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

After Job and his friends had discussed their views of God, God described to them just how limitless He is in Job chapters 38-41.

In the book of Exodus, while God was revealing His greatness to Moses on Mt. Sinai, the Israelites were busy in the camp creating a god – the golden calf - that they could see and touch. (Exodus 32)

People today are no different. We want a cafeteria-style god. We want to pick the things we like about God and leave the rest. However, God is not a personal genie ready to grant our every wish or a "good fairy" ready to wave a magic wand and replace all of our problems with peace and prosperity. God is far greater than either our personal desires or our struggles. The one true God has not promised us an easy life, but He has promised us that He will provide the grace to overcome our difficulties. We, the created ones, cannot design our own Creator!

Third focus correction: The only way we can truly know God is through the ways He has revealed Himself to us. He is not playing "hide and seek" with us, but has provided plenty of opportunity to know and understand Him. All we have to do is look using our corrected vision. In Matthew 7:7 Jesus said, "Seek and you will find." So where does God reveal Himself to us?

- **In nature**

One needs to look no further than the wonder of a new born baby. Science has shown us that the complexity of the DNA that created that small wonder is so complex that it could not have just happened by chance; there must have been some intelligent designer in order to have such intelligent design.

### **Romans 1 (New International Version)**

<sup>19</sup>since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup>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 men are without excuse.

### **Psalms 19 (New International Version)**

- <sup>1</sup> The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
- <sup>2</sup> Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they display knowledge.
- <sup>3</sup> There is no speech or language  
where their voice is not heard. <sup>[a]</sup>
- <sup>4</sup> Their voice <sup>[b]</sup> goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.

- **Through His Word, the Holy Bible**

No other book has been written over such a long period of time by so many different writers. In spite of that, the Holy Bible is accurate and consistent. Thousands of years later, we are discovering the accuracies of the science recorded there. The prophecies made in the Old Testament were fulfilled in the New Testament hundreds or thousands of years after they were written.

### **John 1:1-4 (New International Version)**

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

### **2 Timothy 3:16-17 (New Living Translation)**

<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. <sup>17</sup>It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.

- **Through His only begotten Son, Jesus**

God came to Earth in the flesh. All we have to do is look at the Son.

## **John 1:14, 17-18 (New International Version)**

<sup>14</sup>The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, <sup>[a]</sup>who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>17</sup>For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, <sup>[a][b]</sup>who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

<sup>[a][b]</sup> **Footnotes:**

- a. Or the Only Begotten
- b. Some manuscripts but the only (or only begotten) Son

God wants us to see Him and to know Him. He has shown Himself all around us in the physical world. He has given us a book to read about Him, and He has provided us with a living model in the form of Jesus Christ.

## **Is it humanly possible to see God as He really is? (allow for responses and discussion)**

In John chapter 14:6-11 (NIV), Jesus discusses with His disciples how God has revealed Himself in His Son.

<sup>6</sup>Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup>If you had known who I am, then you would have known who my Father is. From now on you know him and have seen him!"

<sup>8</sup>Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied."

<sup>9</sup>Jesus replied, "Philip, don't you even yet know who I am, even after all the time I have been with you? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking to see him? <sup>10</sup>Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. <sup>11</sup>Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of what you have seen me do.

Yes, it is humanly possible for us to see God clearly, IF we know Jesus! "Because of who God is, you can never know all of Him – but all you need to know of Him is in the person of Christ." (p. 47)

Also, it is impossible to know Him clearly unless the Spirit of God is living within us. We must believe in and accept Christ (become a Christian), before we have all we need to fully understand – the gift of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit gives you the ability to understand what you already possess in Christ." (p. 47)

## **1 Corinthians 2:12-14 (New Living Translation)**

<sup>12</sup>And God has actually given us his Spirit (not the world's spirit) so we can know the wonderful things God has freely given us. <sup>13</sup>When we tell you this, we do not use words of human wisdom. We speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain spiritual truths. <sup>[a]</sup> <sup>14</sup>But people who aren't Christians can't understand these

truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them because only those who have the Spirit can understand what the Spirit means.

### **Acts 2:38 (New Living Translation)**

<sup>38</sup>Peter replied, "Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

### **Ephesians 1:18-19 (New American Standard Bible)**

<sup>18</sup>I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,  
<sup>19</sup>and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.

### **What must I do to see God as He really is? (allow for responses and discussion)**

The best answer to this question comes directly from God in [Jeremiah 29: 13](#), "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." We must actively do something, not just lie back on the couch and wait for God to show up in our hearts. Seeking implies action. We must involve our mind, heart, and soul in searching to know God. [Proverbs 2:1-5 \(NIV\)](#) provides us with some guidelines on how to seek Him.

<sup>1</sup> My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,  
(“The first step to seeking God is to accept, learn, treasure, and store up his Word” \* in our minds and hearts.)

<sup>2</sup> turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding,  
(“Step two involves submission and your willingness be taught by God.” \*)

<sup>3</sup> and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,  
(Step three requires developing a passionate prayer life. Plead with God for understanding. Spend time alone with Him.) \*

<sup>4</sup> and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,  
(Step four means that your quest for God is high priority, carried out with the kind of passion that you would have if you knew that a million dollars in gold was buried in your backyard!)\*

<sup>5</sup> then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.  
(“Step five provides us with motivation for a lifetime. If we seek Him with all our heart, we will experience the knowledge of the Holy One.”\*)

\*(p. 50)

In these verses, it is clear that “you” - not your mother, your teacher, your preacher, or anyone else - can and must seek God for yourself.

**How can I know for sure if I am seeking God with 20/20 vision?** (allow for responses and discussion)

You have some questions on your handout that will help you determine the answer to this question as you contemplate and respond to them.

(FYI: the questions below are on the student handout)

Examine yourself in light of the following questions:

How much energy am I giving to seeking Him?

How much enthusiasm do I have for Him?

How well do I know Jesus?

Have I given myself completely to Him?

What are my thoughts about Him like?

How bold am I for Him?

How content am I in my relationship with Him?

**Closing the lesson / class:**

Close the lesson with a prayer. If time permits, take prayer requests.

Some like to include a song. Suggestion and lyrics are provided at the end of this lesson and on the student handout.

Offer **correspondence course packets** to those who desire them.

Let inmates know that **if they desire to be baptized**, they should fill out an inmate request form on which they should indicate that they wish to be baptized by someone from Snellville Church of Christ. Invite them if there is time to stay and talk with you about this after the others leave.

Collect the attendance / prayer request sheets. Collect pencils if any were passed out.

After dismissing, talk/pray with individual inmates as needed and as time permits.

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**Sources:**

<sup>1</sup> Ingram, Chip. ***God As He Longs For You To See Him***, Chapters 1-3. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004.

All scripture references are from <http://www.biblegateway.com/>

If singing the song and time permits, read and discuss the meaning of each verse before singing it.

Song lyrics:                   **“God Moves in a Mysterious Way”**

God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.  
He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds ye so much dread,  
Are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face.

Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain.