

WHAT'S YOUR NAME

WHAT'S YOUR NAME SERIES - Part 1

Ben Rudolph

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is so good to see you here this morning. Turn in your Bibles to Genesis Chapter 1. We are going to be in Genesis Chapters 1, 2 and 3 this morning as we are starting a new series on the names of God. As you know, our mission statement, our vision statement for our church is 'pursuing at all costs a passionate God centered life.' And that is what we want to see every single week we gather, and every single day as we are living out in the community it is our hope, it is our desire to see every man, woman and child in Lake Norman pursue at all costs a passionate God centered life.

If you are here this morning and you are saying, '*Yeah Ben, that is why I am here, that is why I am a part of Life Fellowship. I love that vision; I love that mission and that is what I pursue with my life.*' Then what I want to say about that is in order to do that when we think about all those little words that make up that statement we need to understand that probably the most important one is to be 'God centered.' Now you and I love to come up with our own ideas of what centered is, but here is the reality that I have as I was thinking about the series we are about to begin and our vision mission statement that we have. And that is this – for many of us we have a skewed view of God. And if we are going to pursue at all costs a passionate God centered life, we better know who God is. We have to understand His nature, His character, what He loves, what He doesn't love, and how to relate to Him.

So as we are doing this series on the names of God our whole desire is that we would be a people who know God more, who love God more, and who know how to relate to Him in better ways. As I was thinking about why this is so important, there were two fundamental realities I believe that all of us need to agree upon before we really get into the Word of God. And those two fundamental realities we need to agree on this morning are these - number one, we are all theologians. Do you believe that you are a theologian? I know I talk to some people and they are like, '*Well, I'm not a theologian, but...*' Listen, if you believe something about God you are a theologian. So how many theologians do we have in our room this morning? I see some of you are still not convinced. But you are a theologian because you believe something about God, His character, His nature, who He is and who He isn't.

I always find it fascinating how the people that are anti-theists or atheists have written books about God, like Richard Dawkins. They say they don't believe in God, but yet they have such strong opinions about a God they don't believe in. Did you ever notice that? They have very strong opinions about someone that they don't even believe exists. But all of us believe something about God.

The second reality I believe we need to confront is that all of us at some level have bad theology. All of us believe something about God that may not be true, that may not be the reality of the way He has expressed Himself in His Word. I think when it comes to our bad theology there are two things that have shaped our bad theology and that is our experiences and our personality. One of the mistakes I think we make is we

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tend to conform God into our own image. You and I love to do this. We believe that God loves what we love, God hates what we hate, and God is ticked off about things that we are ticked off about. And we love to do that, to make God in our own image.

I was reading a book not too long ago written by a guy who is a seminary professor. And one of the things he does with his first year seminary students in his New Testament class is on their first day in his class he gives them a personality test. He just wants to get to know everyone in his class so he gives them a personality test. In his second class he asks them a question about their understanding or their beliefs in who Jesus is and what He is like. So this is his way of getting to know their theology of Jesus. And then in his third class with them he shows them that their personality test and their beliefs about Jesus almost align perfectly.

These are seminary students, people who are training to be pastors or mission leaders. These are people that when it comes to their personality of thinking what Jesus is like they mirror each other. You and I have to confront the reality in our own hearts that we are not to make any graven images which is one of the Ten Commandments, and yet you and I are in danger of violating that almost every day when we look in the mirror. We want to believe that God is like us, that the conforming that needs to happen is God being conformed to our views, our values, our convictions and not the other way around.

The danger of that is when it comes to our own worship of God we can worship, we can sing praises to Him, but all we are doing is worshipping ourselves because we believe that God is just a bigger more powerful version of ourselves. So we have to confront this. Maybe you are sitting here this morning and saying, *'Man, I worship a God that never confronts me. I worship a God that agrees with all of my politics and all of my values. He believes in them.'* And we need to confront ourselves in that.

The second mistake we make is that we tend to allow an event or an experience to define God. We can allow an event or an experience to define God. Have you ever met someone like that? You know they have gone through something tragic or something difficult, they go through suffering or disappointment, and all of a sudden because of that one event they no longer believe in God.

I remember having a conversation with someone who I was trying to share Jesus with, and the reason why this person was not going to accept Jesus was simply because of the disappointment he had with his dad when he was a kid. And because of that experience there was no way he could ever believe in the God in the Bible. That is what we do. And maybe you are like that, maybe there is something that has happened in your life, some experience you have had where that experience has shaped who God is to you. And if we aren't careful with that, we can end up rejecting a version of God that isn't even true.

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Some people may think, *'Well, I don't like that God.'* And that God that they have created in their own mind because of their experiences isn't even real. So what they need to do is let God speak for Himself about who He is. We get to know God through His Word, not through our experiences. Many times even those of us who go to church a lot have our perspective through an experience we have and then we hit God's Word. And what we need to do is have our own experiences filtered through the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and then to look at our experiences through that.

So we have to let God speak for Himself. If I had never met you before and I had just heard some things about you from someone who didn't really like you, the first time I met you what would you want to say to me? You probably would say something like, *'Listen, I don't know what you have heard about me, but this is who I really am.'* You would want to be able to speak for yourself concerning your character and who you are. And we need to let God define who He is. And one of the ways that God tells us who He is is through His name. God loves to express who He is through His name. Names are so important in the Bible.

What you and I love to do with names is we love to give names based on identifiers. We identify people by their names. If you go to a conference you put your name on a label in order to identify yourself. And names in the Bible carry weight and they carry meaning. Their name was their character, their nature and their essence. When people were given names in the Bible it was not like their name was just to identify them, but it was their character and their nature.

There is a passage of Scripture I want to take you to in Exodus Chapter 3. We are going to be in Genesis Chapters 1 through 3 a lot, but in Exodus Chapter 3 there is this moment when God has approached Moses. Moses had been distant and disconnected from the children of Israel while he was in Egypt for forty years taking care of sheep. And God shows up to Moses in a burning bush and He tells Moses that he is His man to go back to free His people from slavery. God wanted Moses to go do that.

And Moses, after he gets this instruction from God, what does he say? Look at verse 13 of Exodus Chapter 3: ***"Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?"*** Now Moses is not asking God what he should call Him. That is not what he is asking. He is asking God who He is and what He is like. Moses was asking God His name and he wanted to know His character because if He wanted him to go back to those people who have been in bondage for hundreds of years he couldn't just show up without an identifier. He needed to know who God was.

And He gives the name Yahweh – the self-existent one. ***"I AM WHO I AM."*** Look at verse 14 where it says: ***"God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Say this to the people of Israel: I AM has sent me to you." God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'The Lord, (or Yahweh) the God of your fathers, the***

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God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

God wanted them to know His name. It wasn't just Yahweh, *YHWH* are the four letters that make up the name Yahweh. He wanted them to know who He was and His character. He was about to show them who He really was. They knew the name of Yahweh. If we go back to Genesis with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob we see them using the name Yahweh. In Exodus Chapter 6 God said that by Yahweh they didn't really know Him; they knew Him as El-Shaddai or God almighty. God wanted to reveal Himself to them now as more than Yahweh.

It wasn't saying that they didn't know that name, what they didn't know was the fullness of who God was by that name. They knew only a small portion of what that name really meant. And now through God's display of power on Egypt, through His redemption of them as a father or a savior, they will know Him as Yahweh. They will know who He really is and the fullness of that. That is what God was saying here.

Every name carries meaning. When the angel went to Mary he told her, *'Hey, you are to name Him Jesus.'* In the Hebrew it was *Yeshua*. That was significant because it meant 'Yahweh saves.' It is the name that Jesus carries. So names matter and if we want to know God, if we want to know what He is like, we have to know Him through His names.

Here is the main point I want us to leave with this morning, we can know God better. We can know Him better through His names. I hope that at the end of these seven weeks that we study God's names together, that it won't just be information, that it won't be just so we can know something about God and His character, but I want us to go on a journey with God. So that we can see that God is inviting us in, that He is letting us into His heart so that we can see who He really is. *'You say you trust me, you say you know me, you say you love me, but do you know me like this?'* So what we are going to be doing throughout these next six weeks is understanding the nature of God through His names.

We could have done God is loving; God is kind, and so on. There are two ways that theologians explain the attributes of God and that is through His communicable attributes and His incommunicable attributes. What the communicable attributes means is there are attributes that you and I share with God, like God is loving and we can love, God is merciful and we can be merciful, God is gracious and we can show graciousness.

But there are also certain attributes of God that are incommunicable such as His omniscience, meaning He is all-knowing and His omnipotence meaning He is all-powerfulness. There are certain aspects of God that are beyond our comprehension. So when it comes to the nature of God that is what we are going to be looking at this

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morning and really throughout the next six weeks, and that is the transcendence of God and also the intimacy of God.

We are going to look at that through these two names Elohim and Yahweh this morning. Let's begin in Genesis Chapter 1. When it comes to the nature of God what we have to do is understand that God is transcendent as well as intimate. When we make a god in our own image what happens is we love to make a god that we feel comfortable with. We like that kind of god. And I find when I have conversations with most people we tend to be very comfortable with God being intimate, God as Father, God as caring or we feel really comfortable with God as King, and God as powerful.

Those are the things that we tend to feel more comfortable with about God. Maybe you have read 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,' which is a classic children's book by C. S. Lewis who was a Christian author. There are a lot of Christian allegories in his books. And in 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' the Pevensie children are in Narnia for the very first time. They meet up with a couple of beavers who take them around and who teach them about Narnia and its history. They explain to them about this creature named Aslan who really is the true ruler of Narnia and who is going to really make things right. And Aslan has this lion because Narnia is filled with talking animals.

One of the questions that the Pevensie children ask Mr. and Mrs. Beaver is this: '*Is Aslan safe?*' And do you remember what Mr. Beaver replied to them? '*Is he safe? He is not safe, but he is good.*' See, I think a lot of times what we want is we want a safe God that we feel very comfortable with. And we love the God who can push the red button and blow things up. We love that God as judge; we love that God who is strong. We love a God who is transcendent and big. We need a God who is big, but we feel very uncomfortable if we really want to know Him.

Some of us love God who puts His arms around us and loves us and brings us close, but we feel very uncomfortable with a God who is holy and righteous, and who will punish sin. So I think we have to understand what we are comfortable with God. I think another mistake we make when it comes to the transcendence and the intimacy of God is when we like to think of God the Father as the transcendent one, and Jesus, the second person of the Trinity as the intimate one. But listen, when it comes to the idea of the transcendence and the intimacy of God every person of the Trinity is fully those things. It is not like there is this sliding scale of balance where when God is intimate He is not as transcendent.

No, there is this fullness, every person of the Trinity is transcendent and every person of the Trinity is intimate. In John Chapter 8 there is this woman who was caught in adultery and she is brought in front of a crowd of people that want to stone her. Jesus gets down on the ground and He starts writing something in the sand. We don't know what He wrote but whatever He wrote people started dispersing and leaving Him alone

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with the woman. Jesus sees this woman in her brokenness and He asks her where her accusers are. She tells Him He is the only one left and He tells her, “*Go and sin no more.*” He does not condemn her.

So there is this tender moment with Jesus and this woman who is broken and who could have been killed in that moment. And I love that picture of Jesus, I love His kindness, I love that intimacy. And most of us love that Jesus. But then there are other pictures of Jesus like in Revelations where He has a sword coming out of His mouth where He is coming to bring judgment on the earth.

So Jesus is as transcendent and Jesus is as intimate as God the Father is. Let's not make the mistake that we attribute this one nature to God and we limit that nature according to our opinions or our own feelings. God is fully these things, Jesus is fully these things and the Spirit is fully these things. So as we think about the nature and the character of God, let's look at the first three chapters of Genesis.

Genesis Chapters 1 through 3 are beautiful. They are so multilayered, they are so deep, and they are so rich. There are dozens of sermons that you could preach out of the first three chapters of Genesis because there are so many different layers in there. But the layer I want to bring out of the passages this morning in these three chapters is the layer of the name or the term of God. What we are going to see is the word God is used, or the word Elohim is used in Chapter one. And then in Chapter two there is going to be a switch and there is going to be the word Yahweh Elohim. Then we are going to see how this plays out in Chapter three.

Here is the question we need to ask ourselves: why does it seem like there are two stories in Genesis? Some people read the Bible and say, ‘*The Bible wasn't written by Moses. This is not inspired. There are two different creation accounts and they didn't know what to do with them so they just put them together.*’ But that is not what is happening here. There is a theory if you went to a secular university or maybe you have read some books critiquing the Bible there is this theory called, ‘The Documentary Hypothesis,’ where the idea is there were different people that wrote the Old Testament.

There are some people that believe the J stands for the people who referred to God as Yahweh, so any term you see Yahweh in that is from this author, and E is Elohim and that is from another author. So some people think the Bible is just this mishmash of human authors and they just put it all together without any rhyme or reason in it. But let me just tell you that the Bible is so beautiful and so intricate that every single chapter, every single verse is one seamless story through every book in the entire Bible.

What I want us to see is the nature of Genesis Chapter 1 and 2 are two complimenting stories from two different perspectives. One perspective is God as creator king and the other one is Yahweh as father. Okay? So let's look at Genesis Chapter 1 and verses 1 through 5. “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The*

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earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and morning, the first day."

Now I am not going to read the entire Chapter 1, but know that there are thirty-five times the word Elohim is used, that term for God. And what you see is God creating things, God speaking things, and seeing things. There is this transcendent power of God when we see the earth was without form and void and what He does. In days one through three He forms things, He forms the light, He forms the waters and the sky. He forms the dry land. He forms all these things in days one through three. And in days four through six it is a parallel to days one through three by filling the void. He populates with light, the sun, the moon, and the stars which corresponds to day one. He fills the sky and the waters with fish and birds in day five. He fills the void of the dry land with people on day six. So we see these parallels going on.

One of the things that is beautiful about these parallels is this idea of God as creator, king, authority. He is the ruler, He is the one who creates, He speaks it and it is created. Speaking creation requires a level of transcendent power that you and I cannot understand, but He does it. When we see God communicating with man in verse 26 of chapter 1, what does it say? "***And God said, let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.***"

Let me just stop here a minute. This is what is so fascinating about the Bible. The word Elohim, the word God that is used here, says, "***Let us make man in our own image.***" Now Elohim is a Hebrew noun that is plural. It is plural for the name L, that is the singular form of the word God. So we have a plural word for God, but it takes a singular verb. So Elohim says, "***Let us make man,***" who is God talking to? He is talking to Himself. This is the first sign of the Trinitarian doctrine in Scripture. You have a term for God that is Elohim, translated God singular, but it takes a singular verb.

I love this kind of stuff. People are like, '*Well, where is the Trinity in Scripture?*' It begins in Chapter 1. You have the three persons in one Godhead. You have Elohim saying, "***Let us make man in our own image,***" and what does He say for man to do? "***Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the livestock, and over the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created both male and female.***"

What is He saying here? He was giving them His authority to rule, to subdue the earth. It doesn't mean to dominate; it means to nurture, to care for. The transcendence of God He is now sharing with humanity. We see this picture of God in Chapter one. We

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see His transcendent power of judge, creator and king. Now let's see what happens in Chapter 2 and verse 4.

“These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God (Yahweh God) made the earth and the heavens.” Now what does Yahweh God do? Yahweh God does not speak and create in Chapter 2. Look at the verbs that are used in verse 7: *“Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”*

What do we have here? We don't just have a God who is speaking, commanding things to happen; we have a God who is getting His hands dirty, who is forming things, who is breathing his breath into the face of man. We have a God who is planting things. And He goes on in Chapter 2 where He is teaching man, *‘Hey, there is this tree of knowledge of good and evil, and I don't want you to eat of that.’* This is God as Father, this is God of closeness. Yahweh is the God of covenant relationship.

These are the two pictures of God that we see. And He is saying that He wants them to live, and not to die. So we have these amazing pictures of Elohim and Yahweh. Now I want to show you a quick slide because when you are reading your Bible I want you to understand the differences of reading Scripture so you will be able to pick these things out in your English translation. For example: every time you see the word ‘God’ that is the Hebrew word ‘Elohim.’ I talked about that a little bit already. It is almost a title. There are other times in the Old Testament where it says, *‘the Elohim of the Canaanites,’* meaning the gods of the Canaanites.

In other places in the Bible it says that Yahweh is the Elohim of Elohim, He is the God of all gods, and that Yahweh is Elohim. So Elohim is almost this title for God. Then you have these four letters that make up God's name. One of the most beautiful passages in Exodus Chapter 3 expressed that, and we looked at that briefly this morning. And this word comes from the Hebrew root word ‘to be,’ which is why He says, ***“I AM THAT I AM.”*** He is self-existent, He doesn't need anyone, and He doesn't need anything. You and I this morning need air to breathe, we need water and food to survive. We are dependent creatures on light, on heat, on water and on food. We need these to survive.

God does not need those to survive. So Yahweh is the existent one, He is who He will be. There is this moment in John where people ask Jesus where He comes from, and Jesus responds, ***“Before Abraham was, I am.”*** And the people wanted to stone Him because at that moment He is equating Himself with Yahweh. He was saying that He was Yahweh. That is one of the most profound statements of deity in the entire New

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Testament. Yahweh is this name, this covenant name of God, to say that He is the God who wants to be known, who wants to be close, who is God as Father.

Now I have a third term and it is the word 'Adonai.' Now whenever you see Yahweh translated in our English Bibles, it is capital LORD. Then we have a third word that is Adonai, which is translated Lord, kind of like the term for master we have. Maybe you are sitting here this morning thinking, '*You know Ben, I have heard of the names of God and I know one of those names is Jehovah. What do you do with Jehovah?*' Let me just say this, we are not sure how that the name Yahweh is pronounced. In fact most Jewish people probably right around the time of Jesus would not even pronounce that name because one of the things they were so afraid of was taking that name in vain and violating the Third Commandment which is don't take the Lord's name in vain. They didn't want to use that word in a flippant way.

So what they did was substitute Yahweh with the Hebrew word *Shem* which means 'the name.' So you might be talking with a Jewish person or someone who is orthodox and they will say *Shem* Yahweh Elohim which is their way of saying Yahweh Elohim. They will not pronounce it because they are so fearful of not treating it with reverence and holiness.

But we get this word Jehovah from the Hebrew and they do not have vowels like we do. The best guess that we can figure out is the vowels is what came later on around the tenth century. So they added vowels later. What most people did with Jehovah was they took the letters, the vowels in Adonai and they applied it to Yahweh. And because there was no J, Y was translated into Latin as I, and I's became J's in English, so Jehovah is kind of a transliteration of the word Yahweh. I want to explain that because sometimes you might hear the word Jehovah. I don't use the word Jehovah because there are so many nuances to it. We are not sure where that came from. But I just want you to know that we use the word Yahweh because it is the best guess of what we know His name really is.

So those are the names of God. God is Elohim and God is Yahweh. And I love when we go through a passage of Scripture that we look for these terms. See how they are used. We don't have the time to look at this today, but in Psalm 19, (write that Psalm down), the first part of the Psalm is talking about God - Elohim. He speaks to us day after day through His creation. So there is this section of God as Elohim speaking to us through His creation as creator God and authority God.

Then skip down to verse 7 and it says "***The law of the Lord is perfect.***" The law of Yahweh is perfect, and then there are all these terms about how He revives the heart, He nurtures the soul. So there is the transcendence of God and the intimacy of God in one Psalm. Psalm 19 mirrors Genesis Chapters 1 and 2.

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So when you are going through narratives, look for how these terms are used because the author is using them specifically to say something. Now here is where we are going to see this. We have this beautiful story laid out for us. God, as transcendent authority, king, creator who shares with us His domain and exercising dominion over them. Then we have God – Yahweh, as Father, Yahweh Elohim, who is saying He wants them to have this garden, He is there to nurture them, to teach them, to help them along. He creates woman out of Adam's side as helper. So there is this God of intimacy and closeness in covenant. It is all there, it is just different perspectives of the same events that happened in the first week of creation.

Then we have Genesis Chapter 3 and when we look at this something very profound happens. Because in Genesis Chapter 3 and verse 1 it says this: ***“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that Yahweh Elohim had made. He said to the woman, “Did Elohim actually say, “You may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden?”***

Now let's just take a time out, because this is really important. The serpent uses what term for God? He uses Elohim. Did Elohim say He didn't want them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? No, who said that? Look back at Chapter 2 and verse 16 and Yahweh God commanded the man saying, ***“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in that day you eat of it you shall surely die.”***

Look at what the enemy is doing. Look at how Satan is deceiving the woman. Instead of seeing God as Father, God who cares for them and who says He doesn't want them to do that because He loves them so much and He doesn't want their relationship to be broken. And what Satan does is taint a picture of God that is one dimensional. *‘God is not close. God doesn't care about you. God only cares about His authority. I want you to see God as only Elohim in this moment, because if you see Him as Father you will start thinking about this command differently. I want you to think of God only as judge, only as a king, only as a creator who doesn't care about you. He only cares about His position of authority.’*

Do you see what the enemy did? He distorts the name of God in a context that was all off. *‘Did Elohim really say that?’* What Eve should have said was, *‘No, Yahweh Elohim said that. My daddy said that. The God who cares about me and wants to be close to us said that.’* And look what happened. ***“And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden.”*** She plays along with him that Elohim says, ***“You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.”***

“But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For Elohim knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like Elohim.”

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You will now be in charge. You will have the authority. You will have the power. He was appealing to something inside of humanity that wants the position of God. So what happens is the man and the woman take the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and they break the covenant relationship with God. They rebel against not just Elohim, but Elohim and Yahweh Elohim. They don't just rebel against His transcendent authority, they rebel against the intimate covenant relationship they have with Him as God the Father.

Who do you expect to show up in verse 8? When God shows up what does He show up as? "***And they heard the sound of Yahweh Elohim.***" See this is where the names of God become so powerful. You know who I would expect to show up in that moment? Just Elohim, the God who is judge, the God who says, '*How dare you?*' But instead it is Yahweh Elohim shows up. God as Father wants to know why His children rebelled.

And I think it is in this moment that you and I have to say, '*You know what, I don't really understand why God does what He does. There are parts of God that I have a hard time comprehending.*' But I believe in this picture of God that He wants us to see that He doesn't withhold judgment in this moment; He does bring judgment on creation and on man and woman for what they have done. But He also does something else because for the first time we have a promise of salvation.

The Protoevangelium is in Genesis Chapter 3 and verse 15 where He says to the serpent, "***I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.***" This is the first declaration of the coming gospel, Savior Jesus, and what He would do to the work of Satan. I think this is so important because I believe the enemy wants us to have an incomplete or distorted view of God. He wants us to see God in a very limited way as opposed to showing us the fullness of who He is. He wants us to have a distorted view of God only as judge, only as king, only as creator. To see God as not being close to us, who doesn't care about us, or to see God only as Father, not really in control, who doesn't really have the power, or the authority, and doesn't really care about judging sin and evil.

See what we need to do is to confront our one dimensional pictures and bring them together and to realize that God is fully all of those and He doesn't diminish any of them at any time. How God leads with them is something that we have to take notice of. I think even when we think about our salvation, when it comes to the person of Jesus. Here is something I was thinking about, I grew up going to church every single week and I think the majority of the reason why most people want to follow Jesus is because they want to avoid the wrath of God and to avoid hell.

Now listen, that is a real thing and I don't want to diminish the wrath of God against sin. And I think our repentance was purely that dimension of Jesus being the way

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to escape the wrath of God. And recently there is more of God's kindness that leads us to repentance. God loves us, and He wants us to be in His family. Sometimes I think if we only talk about God as longing for us as His creation, His children to be in His family and to have a loving relationship with us, but we never talk about sin and we never talk about judgment or about God's anger and wrath against sin, what happens is we come to Jesus in a way that is either wanting to avoid wrath or just wanting to make our lives better.

But we don't have the full picture of the gospel. And the full picture of the gospel is that Jesus came to absorb the wrath of God. He came to pay the penalty for our sins because the wrath of God against sin, the judgment of God against sin is real and it had to be taken care of. And it happened on the cross. Jesus did that because He loves us and He cares for us. We have a Father that desires us to be close to Him, He invites us into the Trinitarian relationship to share the love that He has with Himself with you and I. It is both of those things. And we have to be confronted in our own minds of even why we want to be saved, why we want to follow Jesus. And if we don't have the full picture of the fullness of who He is, we will follow Jesus in a very skewed way.

We will go over these names of God in the next six weeks and I am excited about these names. Next week we are going to be talking about El Roi, the God who sees. I am excited about taking us through that passage. And here is what is so unique about every single one of these names. Every single one of these names is a name that is imbedded in a narrative. There is a story going on, there is something going on in the people of God, or in a person's life, and God shows up in a way where He receives a name, or He gives a name.

And I find that so fascinating because here is what you and I have to understand; we are living stories as well. You and I are going through something, and I don't know the chapters of your story but there are moments in our lives where we read Scripture, we learn it and understand it in our heads, but then there is an episode in life that happens and all of the things that the Word of God teaches us can become a question of will we trust in that or not. *'Is God really who He says He is?'*

Last year right around this time our family went through some challenges. We went through a three month period that was very challenging for us. My daughter faced some health issues and was in the hospital two different times. There is nothing like seeing your child suffer and wondering what the end result of all these tests and all this uncertainty is going to be. We didn't share a lot of that, but there is nothing worse than seeing your child suffer and you feel there is very little you can do to help them. It was hard. We had conversations with God in those moments.

In the midst of that my son got Covid, and then I got Covid. Then I got pneumonia for two weeks and I was in bed for ten straight weeks. I could barely walk around my house. And there is something about lying in bed when you can't do anything that you do a lot of thinking. And you start doing a lot of wondering. All of a sudden

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the God that I believe in, the God that I know, the God that I preach about, the God that I call on, in those human moments, in those stories that we are living, that I had to trust that the God of the universe is this person, that He is the reality of what I believe. I am not just going to acknowledge Him because He has this name. No, I want to know Him as that. I want to know Him as the intimate one. I want to know Him as the transcendent one.

There are parts of who God is that we have to seek out for ourselves and God is testing that in our lives. God is bringing something into our lives that is testing the reality of our faith, seeing if we will believe that He is transcendent right now, to see if we believe that He is close to us right now. That is what we have to come to grips with that God is inviting us into these moments to learn from Him, to walk with Him and to know Him.

Have you ever had one of these moments that just seem etched in your brain? I remember a number of years ago when I was sitting at this greasy spoon diner and I looked across the room and I noticed this older couple. Now I gave the approximate age of this couple during the first service and I got attacked by some people because older people are not 'old.' So I will just say that there was this older couple sitting at a table and you can come up with whatever age you want to, okay? I could tell that this couple had been married for decades. They were not really talking to each other, and they just barely made eye contact with each other while eating their meal. Then they paid their bill and left. And I remember having this moment thinking that I hope that when I am that age with Liz that we still look each other in the eyes, that we still have fun together, that we still learn about each other. I hope that there will be a joy, an excitement and life to our relationship. When I am old I don't want to just sit there and get used to that other person just being there.

And honestly when I think about that illustration I think there are times when you and I may have gotten comfortable with God. That we are there at the table and it is not like God is looking off in the distance wondering when dinner is going to be over. And I think for some of us we are sitting there with Jesus across the table trying to make eye contact with us. Because you know what, He wants us to be close. He wants us to trust Him. He wants us to know Him. All He wants is this moment where we will say we want that too. We need to have some hard conversations with Him because we have gotten too comfortable with Him, we have gotten too casual with Him, and it has flawed our relationship with Him.

Maybe you remember a time when Jesus and you were close and you had this relationship that was on fire, but you don't feel it anymore. Not that it is all about feelings but maybe you just want to know Him more. I think that is the kind of conversation that God wants to have with every single one of us this morning. God is always inviting us to go on an adventure with Him, He wants to show us who He really is. Our love, our joy, our relationship with Him can become a journey and adventure that

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is beyond our imagination. That is what God invites us too, that is the God of Elohim and Yahweh, a God who is transcendent, a God who is in control, a God who is bigger than we can imagine, but also a God who is close and intimate. He wants not only for us to open up our hearts to Him but for us to understand His heart for us.

A few questions and then we are done. Number one – do you have any bad theology? Maybe the better question would be – where does your bad theology show up? Does your bad theology show up in the ‘I think I project my own personality on God?’ Or ‘I have allowed experiences to shape who I believe God is?’ Where do you have bad theology and what do you need to confront in your own heart?

Number two – are you most comfortable with God’s transcendence or His intimacy? What part of God’s nature do you love? Is it the God who is close, the God who wants to be your friend, the God who wraps His arms around you? But you feel really uncomfortable with the God who is big, the God who is judge. What part of God makes you uncomfortable? Maybe that is the part that God is asking you to trust in, to know more, to love more.

Number three – how will you seek to know God today? What is it that you are going to be doing if God is sitting there at the other side of the table with you? Maybe you just need to look at Him. Maybe you just need to sit there and listen to what He has to say to you today. Maybe it is deciding to show up for the next six weeks to learn how to know God more so that you can love Him more.

This is who our God is and He is inviting us to know Him, to know the fullness of who He is.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.