

NOTE: Next week you'll have a couple artistic students bring in something they've created which helps them describe God. Look at the lesson and go ahead and get them working on it.

Theme: Who's ALMIGHTY?

Topic: Intro - Seeing God Clearly

Date:

Opening: We'll show a clip from "Finding Nemo" where Marlin and Dory are in the belly of the whale (chap. 21 from about 1:08:?? to 1:12:??), stopping at the point where Marlin asks, "How do you know something won't go wrong.?" Dory responds, "I don't."

As we use video clips quite regularly, they should be used to seeing "tie-ins" between what we see and our lesson. Ask them before you show the clip to look for a tie-in, then see what they think. Here is our tie-in from the clip: What is the difference in Dory and Marlin here? They viewed the whale differently, and because of that they acted totally differently. THE WAY WE VIEW THE BIG THINGS IN LIFE (not the whale) DETERMINES THE WAY WE LIVE. The point is this:

the way we VIEW God is HUGELY important to how we relate to Him.

Small Groups: Split up into small groups and answer these questions:

1. Share your name and answer this question: If you could sit down with God at a meal and ask Him one question which He would answer right now, OR you were allowed to ask 10 questions but they would only be answered one every 3 years, which would you pick? Why?
2. If you had to pick one actor to portray God in a movie, who would you pick? Why?
3. What do you think is the single most important attribute about God? Why?

Get some feedback on these questions, particularly the last several.

Today we begin a series looking at some of the character traits of God. We'll start this by looking at WHERE we get our ideas for what God is like (and whether those sources are accurate). We'll also see WHY it's so important to see God for who He really is.

What has gone into shaping your picture of who God is?

1. Your image of God is likely to be influenced by the way others close to you think about Him.

It's true about the way you think about sports teams, government leaders, people at school - you are likely, though not definite, to feel about them in a way that's like your friends. You may want to talk about how this has happened in your own life, like when you move into a new area and decide which college team to cheer on. Or ask them

WHY they pull for certain sports teams, but have absolutely NO INTEREST in others. It is likely because of where they are and what people around them are interested in.

That's also true about God: other people shape our opinions. Some people feel that nature around them is god (New Age); some people feel that there are hundreds of gods (Hindu); yet you may scoff at that. That's partly because people close to you likely don't feel that. You tend to picture God in a way similar to the way people close to you picture God.

2. Your image of God is likely influenced by the media and culture around you.

Don't believe it? A hundred years ago people pictured God as wrathful, vengeful, angry, a God who punishes. Now, God is typically viewed as Fatherly, kind, sometimes lacking power, generous to all. Has God changed? Certainly not, but the media and our culture have no small influences on how we picture God.

Ask them, "How does the media portray God, in general? Is there truth in it? Is there untruth?" Take a little time to talk through this and to caution them about being swayed by culture, which is very inaccurate in their view of God.

3. Your image of God is likely influenced by your image of your parents.

We usually deny this, but the way we view our parents (particularly our father) is tied deeply to the way we picture God. After all, God is our ultimate Father, so what better way to figure out what God is like than to look at our own fathers?!

Consider this truth. Our TENDENCY is to relate to God in the same fashion as we relate to our father. If we fear our earthly father, we will more than likely fear our heavenly Father. If we ignore our father, we probably will ignore God. If we love and enjoy time with our father here, chances are more likely we will also enjoy our eternal Father. If I see my father as overbearing, I'm likely to look at God in the same way. If I see him as passive, God seems passive; if my father is disinterested, God will likely seem that way to me as well.

This isn't a "blanket statement", just an observation of tendencies. We SEE God through our parents.

4. Your image of God is likely influenced by circumstances you've been in.

Ask a grieving parent who's just lost a child what they think of God, and you're likely to get a different answer than if you ask a person who just had a newborn or won the lottery. Our circumstances change what we feel about God, though they don't change God.

Clearly, none of these sources for where we get our image of God is 100% accurate. In fact, they are quite flawed in painting a picture of God that is true. **So how can we know what God is like?**

God is a God who REVEALS Himself to us, and this is done through His story in the Bible. THAT will be our source for finding out what God is really like.

GOD IS A REVEALING GOD, therefore He does things to show Himself to us.

Why should we try to know the traits of God?

1. Because we can't KNOW God without KNOWING ABOUT God.

If someone mistook you for someone else (or misunderstood something about you), and because of that built a certain kind of relationship with you, that relationship would be built on faulty ground. Tell of a time in your life when you developed a relationship with someone based on something which was not true, and how finding out the truth changed your relationship.

Likewise, if we conceive in our hearts and minds that God is a certain way, and if in fact He is not, then our relationship with Him is built on faulty grounds. We MUST discover what God is truly like.

2. Because knowing who God is (and more importantly, knowing Him) changes us.

“...we will be like Him BECAUSE we shall see Him just as He is.” 1 John 3:2

This verse in 1 John 3:2 shows us just by seeing Him “just as He is”, we become like Him. So perhaps it is in seeing Jesus, and God, for who He really is, that we really do change. Could it be that even in just KNOWING God more accurately, I will change as a child of His? Look at these instances where that is EXACTLY what happened - knowing accurately who God is changed people:

Nebuchadnezzar put Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fiery furnace out of anger and self-worship, but ONCE HE SAW how God delivered them, he made a decree for all to worship their God - see Dan. 3:19-29 and 4:1-3. In particular, 4:1-3 is amazing! Seeing God accurately changes us.

The Romans, chief priest and officers went to arrest Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. In John 18:1-8 we get a unique picture of what happened to these soldiers. In some mysterious way, they SAW Jesus in a deeper way, who He really was, for that slight instant. Their response? They, the ones who came to arrest Him, fell down on their faces before Him. Seeing God accurately changes us.

Saul, while heavily persecuting the early Christians, SAW something on his way to Damascus. This bright light was a vision of God, for he actually hears Jesus speaking to him. Obviously, after the three days of his blindness, Paul was a changed man! (See Acts 9:1-17) Seeing God accurately changes us.

Just knowing God accurately changes my heart, my will, my lifestyle, my actions, what I feel and what I say.

3. Because the God of most people's minds is not big enough.

Here is another quote from J.B. Phillips:

The trouble with many people today is that they have not found a God big enough for

modern needs. While their experience of life has grown in a score of directions, and their mental horizons have been expanded to the point of bewilderment by world events and by scientific discoveries, their ideas of God have remained largely static. It is obviously impossible for an adult to worship the conception of God that exists in the mind of a child of Sunday-school age, unless he is prepared to deny his own experience of life. If, by a great effort of will, he does do this he will always be secretly afraid lest some new truth may expose the juvenility of his faith. And it will always be by such an effort that he either worships or serves a God who is really too small to command his adult loyalty and cooperation.

- J.B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small*, p. 7.

Because we limit who God is, we limit what we think He can do in our lives. And this, in turn, actually limits what He WILL do.

Look at Mark 6:1-6. Jesus could not do miracles in His home town because people took offense at Him. In some scheme of things, His ability to work in the lives of people was limited because of what they believed about Him. Still true today! Our God is not big enough in our own minds.

4. Because knowing God accurately gives me strength and courage to act.

Imagine as a teenage guy you're interested in a girl who's in one of your classes. Having a fragile self-image, you muster up the courage to talk with her. She seems a little interested, but you're not sure whether she is interested in anything more than just friendship. You muster up the courage again, and this time ask her out, to which she politely says, "Yes." You go out, have a great time, and you're hoping she'll want to go out again. When you ask if she'd like to go out again, she does. After several weeks, you're a little more secure in your relationship with her; but then one night at a house with a lot of people there, you notice her talking with several friends, and when you look the next time, she's talking with a guy, one on one. You're hurt, and try as you may, you can't keep it from her. You know it's ridiculous and you shouldn't feel this way, but you do. She knows you're upset on the way home; and she sees in your demeanor that it upset you. She tells you she's not interested in anyone else, and not to worry about it. A couple weeks later, in a setting just like that, you end up talking with another girl about a test you had that day. Now SHE is the one who is a little upset. You don't like her being jealous, but it DOES let you know she really cares about you. The point is this: Just knowing this girl better makes you feel secure and gives you confidence in the relationship.

"...but the people who know their God will display strength and take action."

Daniel 11:32b

Look at Daniel 11:32. In this same way, Dan. 11 tells us that if we know God, we will show strength and take action. While this is written to prophecy about a time when God's people will be persecuted and many offensive things will happen, we see that the people who know God will stand out. Dan. 12:3 also highlights this: "And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."

When it comes down to it, we all fit into one of four types of people when it comes to our

knowledge of God. They are in this Ancient Arabian proverb:

Men are four:

*He who knows, and knows he knows - He is wise - follow him
He who knows, and knows not he knows - He is asleep - wake him
He who knows not, and knows not he knows not - He is a fool - shun him
He who knows not, and knows he knows not - He is a child - teach him*

Where do you fit? *Oh God, give us the faith like a child! Help us learn!*

ONE LAST THOUGHT (a very important one):

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Matt 5:8

If I really want to see who God is, to accurately know about Him and know Him, purity in heart is essential. Even the impure can see some things about God, but only the pure in heart really get to see Him deeply, intimately, as He really is. Though this lesson is not about purity, this might be a great time to challenge them to let God speak to them about what "pure in heart" means in their life. Seeing God for who He is requires more than studying or gaining information - it requires purity of heart. THEN I see God for who He is.