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What Is God Like?

Key Themes

- God reveals His character in the Bible.
- God's Word is always our starting point.

Key Passages

- Exodus 34:4–8; 1 John 4:9–11; Psalm 90:1–4

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Recognize that we must start with the Bible as our starting point to understand what God is like.
- List at least seven attributes of God found in Scripture.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, "What is God like?" to start brainstorming and discussion. Students will place bookmarks in their Bibles at Exodus 34, 1 John 4, and Psalm 90.



Studying God's Word

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God's attributes are demonstrated in direct claims from Scripture and also understood from the way God interacts with His creation. We must use the Bible in order to understand God.

- ☐ Study the Prepare to Share section.
- ☐ Go Before the Throne.



Activity: God Is Chart

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Throughout the lesson, students will fill out the God Is chart with God's attributes and a description.

- ☐ Print one God Is chart from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student. Keep the answer key for your use.



Activity: Attributes of God Picture Charades

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Students will try and guess an attribute of God that a student draws on the board.

- ☐ Prepare 3 X 5 cards with one attribute of God on each card.
- ☐ Watch or timer with seconds display



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

In order to prepare your heart and mind for this lesson, read Exodus 34:4–8; 1 John 4:7–21; Romans 5:8.

What is God like? How can we presume to answer this question? Our God is nothing but incomprehensible—He can never be fully understood. In fact, as believers we anticipate an eternity of discovering new things about Him.

David said of Him, “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable” (Psalm 145:3). And, “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as head over all” (1 Chronicles 29:11). We can’t say it any better than the Apostle Paul, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out” (Romans 11:33)! The glimpses of God we observe from His Word are far, far from complete.

Question 4 of the historic Westminster Catechism, penned in the 1640s asks, “What is God?” The answer? God is Spirit (John 4:24), infinite (Jeremiah 23:24), eternal (Psalm 90:2), and unchangeable (Malachi 3:6), in His being (James 1:17), wisdom (Psalm 147:5), power (Revelation 19:6), holiness (1 Samuel 2:2), justice (Psalm 7:11), goodness (Psalm 107:8), and truth (Deuteronomy 32:4).

When the Lord descended in the cloud to speak with Moses, He gave testimony to His very character—He proclaimed Himself as merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness, always truthful, forgiving, and at the same time, just—not clearing the guilty (Exodus 34:6–7).

Knowing God and knowing that He is perfect in every one of His attributes is imperative to maturing in the Christian faith. That is why we have incorporated teaching these attributes as part of this Bible curriculum. So the next generation will know, love, honor, revere, and fear the God of all creation!

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Because there is no way to comprehend the vast depth of our holy God, we are at risk of conjuring up in our minds what we want Him to be. This is not acceptable. We can only begin to know who God is by the revelation of His Word.

God is all-loving (1 John 4:7–21). But this attribute has been skewed by many Christians and non-Christians alike. The tendency of many is to make God a type of butler—one who waits at our beck and call and exists in order to answer our demands for blessing and comfort. We seldom witness the awe and wonder His very name deserves in our world today.

This attitude reeks of misunderstanding the holiness of God. His holiness demands that He despise each and every sin committed. Knowing His frightful hatred for sin should bring us to a reverent and godly fear of the one who is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:28–29). Only true fear of the Lord will bring knowledge (Proverbs 1:7).

It is not until we fear God for who He is that we will humbly begin to understand the depths of His love—which is beyond all love. It is amazing that He would love us so much to send His only Son to die a horrible death in order to provide forgiveness to all who would believe (John 3:16). Because of the depth of His love, He was willing to offer the life of the one who committed no sin, yet was made sin for us—despicable sinners—so that we could be made the righteousness of God (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

God is love, yes. But His definition of love goes way beyond the scope of ours. His love is demonstrated in the gospel—that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and He rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). It is only through our sincere and reverent fear for the holy, sinless God that His amazing love through the free gift of salvation can finally be appreciated.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

What is God like? We have settled the question that He is beyond explanation—but His Word does give us a hint of the vast dimension of His character.

Historically this is what we know. In the beginning, when God created Adam and Eve in the very good world, they saw God clearly. Scripture tells us that God talked with Adam and Eve, and He walked with them in the garden (Genesis 3:8). It is understood that before their disobedience, Adam and Eve enjoyed sweet fellowship with their Creator. They knew what God was like.

But sin entered the world through one man's disobedience (Romans 5:19). They were no longer welcome to walk with God (Genesis 3:23–24) because God cannot dwell with evil or wickedness (Psalm 5:4). Since then, man has wondered about God but has not been allowed to see Him as Adam and Eve did.

Moses was once bold enough to ask to see more of God (Exodus 33:18). Although God is compassionate and gracious, He would not allow Moses to see His face lest Moses die. God instructed Moses to hide in the cleft of the rock while His glory passed by (Exodus 33:22–23).

In Jesus, we know of God yet have not seen Him, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has

declared Him” (John 1:18). And Paul recorded to Timothy, “[God] who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen” (1 Timothy 6:16). So for now, God keeps Himself in unapproachable light—masked to us until He is ready to be revealed.

But what a day that will be when His children will be like Him for they will see Him as He is (1 John 3:2)! How we long for the day we will once again see God, talk with Him, and enjoy the fellowship that was originally intended—but broken because of sin. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope (1 Peter 1:3).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Father God, holy Creator of the universe, how can I presume to know what you are like? Your perfection, your character, your essence is beyond my understanding. Please humble me and help me, Lord, to give this lesson some justice as I try to impress on these young minds something of what you are like. And, Lord, as they continue to learn more about who you are, open their minds to the truth of your gospel—the salvation that you offer through your perfect, spotless Son. Thank you, Lord, that the light of the world shines in my heart. Please bless these students in the same way. Have mercy on them, Lord, and make them your own.

► **Pace your lesson!** You can use the provided clocks to indicate the time each section should be completed to keep the lesson on schedule. While teaching, you can compare your anticipated times with the actual time and shorten or drop sections as necessary.





Review

Last time we discussed how we know God exists. We talked about the use of evidence and how the Bible deals with the existence of God. Compared to most people's presentations, the Bible has a very different approach to demonstrating God's existence.

? From a biblical perspective, how do we know God exists? *The Bible presupposes the existence of God from the very first verse.*

? Who remembers where in the Bible we found this? *Genesis 1:1, Exodus 3:13–15, and Romans 1:20–21 were used in the lesson, but there are many other examples throughout Scripture.*



► As students arrive, provide slips of paper to mark Exodus 34, 1 John 4, and Psalm 90 in their Bibles.

► Write on the board, "What is God like?"



Studying God's Word

READ THE WORD

Turn to Exodus 34:4–8. You should have a bookmark there. This event occurred between God and Moses in about 1491 BC. Moses went to the top of Mount Sinai. God had told him he must come alone. He was about to get two new stone tablets with the laws of God, after he broke the first ones in anger because the people had turned away from God in sin.

Let's read Exodus 34:4–8 together. This passage gives us amazing insight into who God is as He has revealed Himself to us. *Have someone read the passage aloud as others follow along.*

Exodus 34:4–8

EXAMINE THE WORD

Now that we have read the text, let's take some time to observe what it is saying to us. We are going to continue to apply the principles of hermeneutics that we have been learning.

Observe the Text

- ? Who are the persons in this passage? *God and Moses.*
- ? Where did this take place? *Mt. Sinai, though the exact location is unknown.*
- ? Are there any phrases or words that are repeated? *Proclaimed.*

- ? **What type of literature is this passage?** *History.*
- ? **What does Moses do in this passage?** *Cuts the tablets, rises and goes up the mountain, and bows and worships God.*
- ? **What does God do in this passage?** *Commands Moses, descends in a cloud, stands by Moses, passes before Moses, and proclaims His name.*
- ? **Are there any figures of speech in the text?** *There is some anthropomorphic language (attributing man's characteristics to God) used to describe God standing with Moses.*
- ? **What is the biblical context of the passage? When and where are the events of this passage taking place?** *Moses was previously on Mt. Sinai, receiving from God the original tablets containing the Ten Commandments, when the children of Israel forgot how God had delivered them from their bondage in Egypt. Aaron made them a golden calf and the people fell into idolatry. God's anger was aroused against them, but Moses pleaded with God to have mercy, and God answered his request. Then Moses broke the original tablets upon returning to the camp and seeing the people worshipping the golden calf. In Exodus 34:6–7, God is meeting privately with Moses on Mt. Sinai to renew His covenant with the children of Israel and to replace the set of tablets broken by Moses.*
- ? **What two responses to God do we see from Moses in this passage?** *Verse 4 tells us that Moses obeyed God's command to prepare the tablets and meet Him on the mountain. Verse 8 tells us that Moses was moved to worship as God revealed His character to Moses—a response which we can hope to imitate.*
- ? **What does the passage tell us about God?** *God keeps His promises and is merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abounding in goodness and truth, and forgiving; yet He is a holy God who is just in dealing with sin.*
- ? **What is the main point of the passage?** *God has revealed His character to us through what is recorded in Scripture. Refer to these attributes on the Attributes of God poster.*

Discover the Truth

The main idea of this passage is God's revelation of His character to Moses—and to us. Since this lesson is about understanding what God is like, let's make a list of the attributes that God has revealed in this passage. God has so many facets that we often forget about some of them. We tend to focus on particular aspects that are our favorites, but it is important to remember that God is infinite and we should worship Him for all that He is. *Pass out the God Is charts to the students. They will complete parts 1 and 2 now.*





God Is Chart—Parts 1 & 2

MATERIALS

- ☐ God Is chart for each student
- ☐ God is chart answer key
- ☐ Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Students can do this individually, with a partner, in small groups of 3–4, or as a whole class activity.

For Part 1, students will list the attributes of God from Exodus 34:6 in the first box. In the second box, students will explain what the attribute means.

For Part 2, students will list what God does or does not do in Exodus 34:7 in the first box. In the second box, students will list the attribute(s) each action implies.

NOTE: Students may have difficulty with the last part of verse 7. This verse does not mean God punishes children for their parents' sins, but rather that a lifestyle of sin in one generation usually leads to the same lifestyle of sin in the next, often taking several generations to remove. This shows that God is unchanging in His justice over time.

Here is a chart that you'll be filling out. We are going to do parts 1 and 2 now, and the other two parts a little later in the lesson.

For part 1, list the attribute or attributes of God you find in the passage in the first box. In the second box explain briefly what each attribute means. You can use the Attributes of God poster to help you.

For part 2, list what God does or does not do in Exodus 34:7 in the first box. In the second box, list the attribute or attributes each action implies.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

By understanding God's attributes, we can understand Him more completely, and grow in our relationship with Him.



1 John 4:9-11

READ THE WORD

Let's read 1 John 4:9–11 together and look at another revelation of God's character. *Have someone read the verses aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Now that we have read the text, let's take some time to understand what it is telling us about God's character.

Observe the Text

- ? **Who are the persons?** *God the Father and Jesus interacting with believers.*
- ? **Who is the audience?** *The specific body of believers is not identified, but it seems clear that John was familiar with them and that they knew who he was. The use of the term "beloved" in verse 11 along with other clues from the text make this clear.*
- ? **What are the actions that describe believers in this passage?** *Living through Christ (v. 9), loving one another (v. 11).*
- ? **What type of literature is this passage?** *Epistle.*

- ? Are there any figures of speech in the text? *No.*
- ? What is the biblical context of the passage? *1 John 2:18–19 points to the rise of false teachers, which have come from within the church. False teachers are to be tested against God’s standard of love.*
- ? Are there any phrases or words that are repeated? *Love.*
- There are two words in this passage that might be unfamiliar. In verse 9, what does the word “manifested” mean? To manifest means to show in an understandable way.
- ? What does it mean that God manifested His love toward us? *It means that God showed His love to us in a way that we can see and understand.*
- ? Does anyone know what the word “propitiation” means in verse 10? *Allow students to respond.*
- Propitiation* means the turning away of wrath through an offering.
- ? What does it mean that Jesus was the propitiation for our sin? *Jesus was the sacrifice for our sins, to turn away God’s wrath.*
- ? What is the main point of the passage? *God is the ultimate standard of love. We define love based on God and His actions, not on our own ideas of love.*
- ? How does this passage point to Christ and the gospel? *John 3:16 summarizes God’s selfless and sacrificial love for lost mankind. This is the propitiation spoken of in verse 10.*

Discover the Truth

- ? What attribute of God’s character can we clearly identify from this passage? *Love.*

Now take your God Is charts and complete part 3. Identify the attribute from 1 John 4:9–11, and write it in the first box. In the second box, write how God demonstrated that attribute. Give them some time to complete part 3 of the chart.

By understanding that God loves us enough to send Jesus to die in our place, we can have confidence as believers that, in our relationship with God, He always acts toward us in total love.



READ THE WORD

Let’s read Psalm 90:1–4 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Psalm 90:1–4

EXAMINE THE WORD

In this psalm from Moses, an attribute of God that we talked about in the last lesson is repeated.

Observe the Text

- ? Who is the author of this psalm? *Moses.*
- ? Who is the audience? *The children of Israel.*
- ? What is the context (biblical, historical, geographical, chronological) of the passage? *The generation of the children of Israel that left Egypt has been forbidden from entering the Promised Land due to their repeated rebellion. They are in the wilderness wanderings at this time.*
- ? What type of literature is this passage? *Poetry. This is evident in the pattern of repeated ideas. This is different from what we would typically think of as poetry, but it is a very common form in Hebrew poetry.*
- ? Are there any words that are repeated? *The word “like” is used for two similes, an identifier of the poetic nature of this passage.*

A simile is a comparison using the words “like” or “as.”
- ? What are the similes used in verse 4, and what do they refer to? *The similes express the short lifetime of man and the eternity of God. Each is compared to the “thousand years” from verse 4. We are not to think that 1,000 years is exactly like yesterday (24 hours) or a watch in the night (three hours), but to realize that God is outside of time.*
- ? What does the phrase “everlasting to everlasting” communicate? *This phrase brings us to think of the past and future eternity of God. Unlike us, God had no beginning.*
- ? What is the main point of the passage? *The short lifetime of humans as compared to the eternity of God.*
- ? What does the passage tell us about God? *God is eternal and in sovereign control over the brief lives of humans.*
- ? Are there other passages in Scripture that relate to this passage? *Isaiah 40:8; 2 Peter 3:8.*
- ? How does this passage point to Christ and the gospel? *The certainty of our physical death and the shortness of our time here on earth point us to this truth: “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).*

Discover the Truth

- ? What key truth about God can we understand based on this passage? *God is eternal.*

Now take your God Is charts and complete part 4. Identify the attribute of God from this passage and write it in the first box. In the second box write what that attribute means. Give them some time to complete part 4 of the chart.

By understanding God’s eternal nature, we can have confidence that He knows everything past, present, and future. God never has to guess. He always knows what’s best.





Attributes of God Picture Charades

MATERIALS

- ☐ 3 X 5 cards with one attribute of God listed on each
- ☐ Watch or timer with seconds display

INSTRUCTIONS

Divide students into two teams. One person from the first team selects a card and then has 60 seconds to draw the attribute on the board. They may not speak or write letters or words. Team members must guess the attribute within 60 seconds in order to win a point. At the end of 60 seconds, if the first team has not guessed the attribute, the second team has one

opportunity to “steal” the point by guessing correctly. If neither team answers correctly, neither team gets a point. Teams switch places and continue back and forth until there are no more cards, or until there is no more class time available. The team with the most points wins.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

? How has this activity made you think differently about God's attributes? Allow students to answer.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

As we have looked at these three passages of Scripture, we have only scratched the surface of the attributes of God. He has revealed a portion of Himself to us, but we must keep in mind that He alone is the eternal Creator whose attributes are infinite.

Let's read the attributes of God together as they are listed on the Attributes of God poster. Point to and read together each of the attributes of God as they are listed on the poster.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

Like holding a precious gem up to the sun and watching the light dance across each facet in a different way, so we can examine God's attributes revealed to us. Let us all take time to read God's Word and meditate on His many glorious attributes. Encourage students to meditate on the lists created in the activity and grow deeper in their relationship with the Lord.





MEMORY VERSE

Psalm 119:89–90 Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You established the earth, and it abides.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Praise God for who He is—our almighty, holy God.
- Thank God for His holy Word—where we can learn of Him and Jesus.
- Pray that the students will come to a saving knowledge of God through Jesus Christ and His Word.