God Is Introduction

**Introduction**

God is….

How do you finish that sentence?

God is remote.

God is unfair.

God is uncaring.

God is irrelevant.

God is indulgent.

God is absurd.

God is unknowable.

God is me.

God is dead.

A.W. Tozer said, “What we believe about God is the most important thing about us.”[1](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n1)

It’s true.

What you believe about God can make you

courageous or fearful

joyful or sad

spiritually energized or drained.

Yet most of us spend very little time really examining what we believe about God.

In fact, we humans often picture God as just a super-sized version of things here on earth. You might think it’s easy to spot this tendency in the handmade idols of ancient peoples because much of their god-imagery looks to us like giant warriors, or giant animals. Those idols obviously reflect their own time, their own fears, their own fashions. But are we any different?

I’ll admit it. At various times in my life I have imagined God as one of these modern idols:

* *God is a Galactic Grandpa.* Worthy of respect, but not really relevant for today.
* *God is a Cosmic Cop.* Aiming His sin radar gun at me just when I’m having fun. Waiting to bust me.
* *God is a Supernatural Slot Machine.* I put in my prayers, pull the lever, and the results… well, they’re unpredictable. Sometimes I hit the jackpot. Mostly I’m disappointed. But I’ll keep trying, because you just never know.
* *God is a Frightening Father.* You might see God as unpredictable, showing flashes of anger followed by torrents of generosity. So you’re always on guard. Uncertain. Untrusting.
* *God is a Big Blur.* Like a massive abstract painting with an obscure meaning. He’s the Force, or a Feeling, or the First Cause. But He’s not personal. And He sure doesn’t care about me.

But I’ve found that the real God is far bigger, and far wilder, and far more exciting and powerful and comforting, than any of my preconceptions.

**How do I think about God?**

One of the most popular series PBS television ever did was called *Searching for God in America.* The producers interviewed people from all walks of life and put together a fascinating pastiche of religion in this country as they asked them one simple question: “What is God like?”

That’s precisely the question I’m asking in this book.

Only I’m not taking public opinion polls, as valuable as they can be as a barometer of religious trends. That’s because mere human opinion doesn’t get me much higher than human imagination. And thoughts about the actual God must by definition stagger the imagination.

So in this book I’ll be looking at a source that challenges and inspires me far beyond than my own preconceived ideas: The Bible.

It’s the best-selling book of all time. It’s the inspired Word of God. Yet it’s not very well known to most people today. Often it’s not really *read* as much as *read into*, used as a gimmick to prove whatever notions people bring to it. But I think you’ll find that what the Bible *really* teaches about *God* is very different than the caricature many people have of Christian theology.

**A Mind Open to God**

If you’re thinking, *“been there, done that”* let me encourage you to keep an open mind.

Are you open to the possibility, however slight you may imagine it to be, that you haven’t learned all there is to learn about God? That maybe — just maybe — some of the preconceived notions you have about the traditional biblical view of God are challenged by the Bible itself?

Then read on.

**Enjoying the Greatest Mystery**

This book is like unraveling a great mystery, the greatest mystery of all time: *Who is God?*

It’s a puzzle no human can ever fully solve of course, but every day you’ll discover another piece to add to the puzzle, see a new dot to connect to the other dots, so that you’ll slowly begin to discern an outline of the Beauty behind all other beauties, the Power behind all powers.

We’re not the first investigators. Each day in this study you and I will consider what ancient God-detectives, the theologians of the past, called *attributes of God* — truths about God’s nature and being. They are puzzle pieces: Pithy, powerful, poetic ways to describe the divine.

And they are awesome. Mind-blowing.

And these clues are being left for us by God Himself.*He wants to be caught.*

**What I Was Made For**

What you discover about God will secure some of your secret hopes, surpass some of your wildest imaginings, and spin some of your own concepts sideways.

And you’ll find something else: *The reason you exist.*

When you discover more about God, you’ll feel something inside stirring, a resonance you may not have felt in a long while.

*That’s what it feels like to be doing what you were made for.*

As J.R.R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings*, said:

*The chief purpose of life, for any one of us, is to increase according to our capacity our knowledge of God by all means we have, and to be moved by it to praise and thanks. To do, as we say in Gloria in Excelsis: “We praise you, we call you holy, we worship you, we proclaim your glory, we thank you for the greatness of your splendor.”*[*2*](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n2)

So enjoy this journey further into the greatness of His splendor! You’ll be surprised and challenged and enlightened each day as you dare to finish this sentence:

God is…

Week 1

**God Is…**

***Self-revelatory
Holy
Beautiful***

One of the most wonderful things about knowing God is that there’s always so much more to know, so much more to discover. Just when we least expect it, He intrudes into our neat and tidy notions about who He is and how He works. *Joni Eareckson Tada*

* [Day 1: God Thirst](http://godis.tlc.org/day1)
* [Day 2: The Launch](http://godis.tlc.org/day2)
* [Day 3: Chatting with Einstein](http://godis.tlc.org/day3)
* [Day 4: Meeting The Other](http://godis.tlc.org/day4)
* [Day 5: Making Idols](http://godis.tlc.org/day5)
* [Day 6: Child-Like Wonder](http://godis.tlc.org/day6)
* [Day 7: Perspective Shift](http://godis.tlc.org/day7)

Day 1

**God Thirst**

Read your Bible: [Psalm 63:1–5](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+63%3A1-5&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*God, you are my God. I search for you. I thirst for you like someone in a dry, empty land where there is no water.* [Psalm 63:1 NCV](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+63%3A1&version=NCV)

We thirst for God. Across time, across cultures:

Israel, 1000 B.C.

The Hebrew King David sings, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” (Psalm 42:1–2a)

North Africa, 400 A.D.

The Roman author Augustine writes: “God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.”[3](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n3)

Paris, France, 1600 A.D.

French mathematician Blaise Pascal observes: “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.”[4](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n4)

Vancouver, British Columbia, 1994 A.D.

Post-modern Canadian novelist Douglas Coupland concludes his book *Life After God*:

My secret is that I need God — that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give, because I no longer seem to be capable of giving; to help me be kind, as I no longer seem capable of kindness; to help me love, as I seem beyond being able to love.[5](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n5)

Four continents. Three millennia. Same longing. It’s a universal desire, crossing all boundaries of time and geography: *We thirst for God.* You’re dry without Him, soul-parched.

But God doesn’t just want to give you a *drink*. God wants to get you *drenched*.

**Run Through The Sprinklers**

Remember how great it felt when you were a kid, and on a hot summer day you’d run through the sprinklers? It was fun to get totally soaked.

The Apostle Paul has an intriguingly liquid description of what it’s like to know God. He tells the Ephesians that he prays for them to “know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:19)

The phrase he uses, *“filled to the measure of all the fullness,”* conjures pictures of a cup overflowing with cool drink, or a piece of dirty cloth saturated with cleansing water. Or a kid racing through sprinklers. It means to be soaked in God.

Doesn’t that sound good to you?

I’ve been soaked in anger.

I’ve been soaked in lust.

I’ve been soaked in sorrow and soaked in worries.

Now I long to be *soaked* in God, to be immersed in thoughts of His love and power and presence. I want to be dripping wet.

It’s interesting that Paul prays this specifically for the Ephesian Christians, of all people. The Bible says they were a church known for their hard work, their good deeds — but they had fallen away from their first love (see Revelation 2). They had apparently lost their child-like delight in their Father’s affection. Their faith was parched and dry.

But Paul doesn’t lecture or scold them. Instead he prays for them to get filled to the brim. To be saturated with wonder. Immersed in love.

They needed a good *soaking*.

**Get Drenched**

If you’ve ever longed to be closer to your Creator…

If you’ve ever wondered if God loves you (or *still* loves you, after what you’ve done)…

If you’ve felt lately like there is something vital missing from your spiritual life…

It’s time to get drenched.

As you continue in this study, spend some quality time running through the sprinklers each day.

**How to Make It Immersive**

1. *Use This Book with****The****Book:* I *strongly* encourage you to keep a Bible right next to this book, and *read those passages daily*. That will change a quick devotional time into a real refreshing *soaking*. If you don’t have a Bible, you can get one free at a local church, download free Bible apps, or use the free on-line Bibles at sites like www.biblegateway.com.
2. *Use This Book with Music:* There is just something about good music that turns *theology* into *experience*. I put a suggested soundtrack to this study in the back of this book. Make some of these songs into a playlist on your iPod or CD player. Soak in it throughout these 50 days.
3. *Use This Book with Others:* After each day’s readings there are questions to help you interact with the material. Keep a notebook nearby to record your answers. If you can, share your responses with others: Friends, family, small group members. You can use the discussion starter videos on our web site (www.tlc.org/GodIs). To help, there are small group guides at the back of the book.

The point is, *immerse yourself*in God-thoughts. And mull those thoughts over throughout the day.

The really great news is this: *You have a God-thirst precisely because there is a God who wants to pour Himself into your life.* If you open yourself to Him, it will happen! Expect to be filled to the brim with all the fullness of God!

God is… ready to get you soaked!

**Questions For Reflection**

Does getting “God-soaked” sound good to you? Why or why not?

How does your soul feel?

* Dry and parched
* Enduring a drought but rain clouds are on the horizon
* It’s a dry season but there are still waterholes here and there
* The rivers are flowing but the land needs irrigating
* Luxuriant, verdant, soaked with a sense of God’s love

How do you see people trying to quench their “God-thirst” apart from God? How have you tried to do that?

## Music Playlist

[See this playlist on iTunes](http://c.itunes.apple.com/us/imix/god-is/id464170202).

Note: If the song title is not followed by an artist name in parentheses, then it’s a hymn, available from all sorts of different artists.

**God is holy and self-revelatory**

* *Holy, Holy, Holy*
* *Holy Is The Lord* Chris Tomlin
* *How Great Is Our God* Chris Tomlin
* *Immortal, Invisible*
* *Indescribable* Chris Tomlin
* *Made To Worship* Chris Tomlin
* *Revelation Song* Phillips, Craig, Dean

**God is majestic and omnipotent**

* *Everlasting God* Lincoln Brewster
* *God of Wonders* (multiple artists)
* *How Great Thou Art*
* *Indescribable* Chris Tomlin
* *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty* Fernando Ortega and others
* *Light Up The Sky* The Afters
* *Sing to the Lord (God of Creation)* Passion
* *This Is My Father’s World*
* *You’re Beautiful* Phil Wickham

**God is omniscient and omnipresent**

* *By Your Side* Tenth Avenue North
* *Mystery* Phil Wickham
* *You Never Let Go* Jeremy Camp
* *Hold Me Together* Royal Tailor

**God is sovereign**

* *A Mighty Fortress is our God*
* *Blessed Be Your Name* Matt Redman
* *God Is Able* Hillsong
* *Our God* Chris Tomlin
* *O Worship The King*

**God is love**

* *The Love of God*
* *Beautiful One* Jeremy Camp
* *Came To My Rescue* Hillsong
* *Hosanna* Hillsong
* *Jesus Messiah* Chris Tomlin
* *I Stand Amazed (How Marvelous)* Chris Tomlin
* *Mighty to Save* Hillsong
* *No Greater Love* Matt Maher
* *Stronger* Hillsong

**God is immutable and faithful**

* *Be Still, My Soul*
* *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*
* *Enough* Chris Tomlin
* *Faithful* Chris Tomlin
* *Forever Reign* Hillsong
* *O God, Our Help in Ages Past*
* *Unchanging* Chris Tomlin

**God is worthy of worship**

* *All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name*
* *Awesome God*
* *Beautiful One* Jeremy Camp
* *Cannons* Phil Wickham
* *Crown Him with Many Crowns*
* *Gloria* Matt Redman
* *Higher* Gungor
* *How Can I Keep From Singing?* Chris Tomlin
* *O For a Thousand Tongues*
* *Who Am I?* Casting Crowns

**Literary Resources**

I’ve enjoyed devouring piles of books and sermons on this subject while writing this study. Many of the books I found helpful are listed here.

But! I’m afraid that I’ve read and internalized so much that some thoughts I now believe are my own first came from some other, wiser thinker. So I want to apologize if I have neglected to list any resources that inspired my own reflections!

[See the list at Amazon.com](http://astore.amazon.com/tlcorg-20?_encoding=UTF8&node=4)

* Mark Buchanan, *Your God Is Too Safe*
* Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*
* Margaret Feinberg, *Hungry for God* and *The Organic God*
* Bill Hybels, *The God You’re Looking For*
* Chip Ingram, *God: As He Longs for You To See Him*
* Max Lucado, *It’s Not About Me*
* Donald McCullough, *The Trivialization of God*
* Steven R. Mosley, *God: A Biography*
* Warren and Ruth Myers, *Experiencing the Attributes of God* (Our discussion questions were inspired by the way this book approaches a study of God)
* John Ortberg, *God Is Closer Than You Think*
* J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*
* J. B. Phillips, *Your God Is Too Small*
* Jarrett Stevens, *The Deity Formerly Known As God*
* Lee Strobel, *God’s Outrageous Claims*
* A.W. Tozer, *The Attributes of God*, volumes 1 and 2, *The Pursuit of God*, and *The Knowledge of the Holy*
* Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*

Day 2

**The Launch**

Read your Bible: [Isaiah 40:1–9](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+40%3A1-9&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low… The glory of the lord shall be revealed.* [Isaiah 40:3b–5a NKJV](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+40%3A3b-5a&version=NKJV)

In Bill Moyers’ book *A World of Ideas: Part Two*, a man named Joseph Needleman remembers:

I was an observer at the launch of Apollo 17. It was a night launch, and there were hundreds of cynical reporters all over the lawn, drinking beer, wisecracking, waiting for the 35-story rocket.

The countdown came. Then the launch.

The first thing you see is this extraordinary light, which is just at the limit of what you can bear to look at. Everything is illuminated with this light. Then comes this thing slowly rising up in total silence, because it takes a few seconds for the sound to come across. You hear a *‘WHOOOOOSH! HHHHMMMM!’* It enters right into you.

You can practically hear jaws dropping. The sense of wonder fills everyone in the place as this thing goes up and up. It becomes like a star, but you realize there are

humans on it.

And then there’s total silence.

People just get up quietly, helping each other. They’re kind, they open doors. They look at one another, speaking quietly and interestedly. These were suddenly moral people because the sense of wonder, the experience of wonder, had made them moral.[6](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n6)

Something like that happens when you study God; the wonder changes you.

In the bright light of God you see your own fragility — and that perspective produces in you a good kind of fear, something like the awe of the reporters witnessing the Saturn rocket launch.

Did you check out today’s reading? Isaiah paints a picture of the glory of God leveling mountains. He says that before the glory of God, “all people are like grass.”

You feel so small. You know He is so big. Behold your God.

**Blown Away by God**

In a verse I quoted yesterday, the Apostle Paul prays for the Christians in Ephesus to know God. But Paul uses a fascinating expression. He prays that they would “know this love that surpasses knowledge.” (Ephesians 3:19)

But how can you *know* something that *surpasses knowledge?*

It happened with the reporters and the rocket, didn’t it? They might have known the technical details of rocket *science*. But whatever knowledge level they had was swamped by the experience of the rocket *launch*.

That’s exactly my prayer for you during this study — not just that you learn stuff you didn’t know before, but that the bone-shaking rumble and roar of the God-rocket fills your chest, your heart, and your soul… and that this experience has results far beyond awe.

**Knowledge That Transforms**

Like the reporters who were moved by their sense of wonder to help each other, you and I too become changed when in awe of God.

You’ll see.

So get ready for something that will rock your world.

Something that will illuminate everything with light, that will enter right into you, that will create a new sense of healthy fear where perhaps none existed before. And a new sense of being loved where perhaps none existed either.

**Let Yourself Be Vulnerable**

All you have to do? Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still and know that I am God.” The phrase “Be still” means *relax*. In Hebrew it literally means to “let your arms down to your side” — to be vulnerable to God.

During this study, can you calm down long enough to *know God?* Can you “be still” and let your guard down — and without defensiveness, be open and vulnerable to what God wants to show you?

Because this study will be less about you examining God than about God examining *you*.

Learning about the attributes of God is not about putting God in a box…

it’s about realizing God does not fit in the box you have Him in.

it’s about encountering God as wild and free and full of fierce love.

it’s about the roar of the rocket and the whisper of His love.

Are you ready?

**Questions For Reflection**

What are you looking forward to most as you enter this study?

In what way are you struggling with being still?

What is it that you are most defensive about — where do you know you should change, yet least want to change?

Day 3

**Chatting with Einstein**

Read your Bible: [Isaiah 40:10–31](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+40%3A10-31&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*“To whom will you compare me? Who is my equal?” says the Holy One.* [Isaiah 40:25](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+40%3A25&version=NIV)

In his famous essay *“Thinking as a Hobby,*” William Golding writes about his surprise when, as an 18-year-old student at Oxford, he ran into Albert Einstein.

I was looking over a small bridge in Magdalen Deer Park, and a tiny mustached and hatted figure came and stood by my side… Einstein.

But Professor Einstein knew no English at that time and I knew only two words of German. I beamed at him, trying wordlessly to convey by my bearing all the affection and respect that the English felt for him… yet I doubt if my face conveyed more than a formless awe. I would have given my Greek and Latin and French and a good slice of my English for enough German to communicate. But we were divided; he was …inscrutable. For perhaps five minutes we stood together on the bridge, undeniable grade-one thinker and breathless aspirant. With true greatness, Professor Einstein realized that any contact was better than none. He pointed to a trout wavering in midstream.

He spoke: “Fisch.”

My brain reeled. Here I was, mingling with the great, and yet helpless… Desperately I sought for some sign by which I might convey that I, too, revered pure reason. I nodded vehemently. In a brilliant flash I used up half of my German vocabulary.

“Fisch.

Ja. Ja.”

Then Professor Einstein, his whole figure still conveying good will and amiability, drifted away out of sight.[7](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n7)

Is that what it’s like to encounter God?

You long to convey affection and respect, and you want so badly to hear from Him, but is there just too great a gap between your brain and His greatness? You revere Him. But He drifts away, out of sight.

The Bible does say that God is unfathomable:

*Who can fathom the Spirit of the lord,
or instruct the lord as his counselor?
…Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket;
they are regarded as dust on the scales;
he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.
…He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.* Isaiah 40:13, 15, 22a

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the lord.* Isaiah 55:8

**Knowing the Unknowable God**

Science fiction writer H.G. Wells wrote a story about a pastor and an angel in conversation.

The angel tells the pastor the obvious: “You don’t fully understand the truth about God.”

The pastor desperately responds, “But the truth — you can tell me the truth!”

And the angel smiles and lovingly strokes the bald spot on the pastor’s head. “Truth?” he says. “Yes, I could tell you. But could this hold it? Not this little box of brains.”[8](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n8)

How can my “little box of brains” ever hold the truth about God? How can I hope to know *anything* about a Being so immense, so beyond my comprehension, so different from me?

The Bible’s answer: *I can’t.*

I can’t even imagine I know *anything* about God.

Unless…

Unless *God tells me.*

Unless God chooses to reveal Himself to me in terms I can understand. Unless that happens, everything I think about God is potentially an idol, a building of God in my own image.

The really good news is, *that is exactly what God does*. He is, as theologians put it, *self-revelatory*. He reveals Himself.

**God Unveils Himself**

*He who forms the mountains,
who creates the wind,
and****who reveals his thoughts to mankind****,
who turns dawn to darkness,
and treads on the heights of the earth —
the lord God Almighty is his name.* Amos 4:13

God reveals his thoughts to *me?*

This should instill in me a sense of awe and humility as I move into any study of God. *I can only know about God because He chooses to let me know.*

Why? Why does God do that? What is man, that God is mindful of him?

Well, God is not only perfect in power; He is perfect in love. He is not only infinite in *perfection* but infinite in *affection.*

So God’s goal in letting me know about Himself is not just for me to know His *power* (or to impress others with my knowledge), but for me to know His *love*.

**Love is the Agenda**

I like the way Margaret Feinberg puts it: “Some say that love has no agenda, but… I have come to believe that love *is* the agenda.”[9](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n9)

Love is the reason for God’s self-revelation. God *longs* to be known by you, even more than you long to know God.

Think of God’s increasingly intimate self-revelation out of love for you and me:

There are clues to God everywhere in nature. Because God loves you, He speaks to you in leaves and stars and babies and bears and waves and mountains and storms and sunsets and more. It’s what theologians call *general revelation*(creation).

*God’s glory is on tour in the skies, God-craft on exhibit across the horizon.* Psalm 19:1a (The Message)

But God desires your *love*, not just your distant, frightened respect for His greatness. So He also speaks to you in poems and stories and letters and songs and prophecies, recorded in the Bible. It’s what theologians call *special revelation* (Scripture).

You might guess He’s *great* by looking at nature, but you learn He’s *loving* by reading the Bible.

What’s more, *special* revelation gives you a very cool lens through which to see *general* revelation. When you see the world made by God through the lens of the word inspired by God, wonders abound all around. You perceive His Nature revealed in nature, His Beauty behind all beauty, the Creator in creation.

So God reveals Himself to us in nature and in His Word. Then the two come together: The Word comes into the world. Jesus is born.

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.* John 1:14a

At the incarnation, God’s nature exists with human nature. In Jesus Christ I see who God is more clearly than ever before.

God keeps self-revealing, closer and closer.

**The Importance of Incomprehensibility**

Don’t get me wrong. To say

*God is self-revelatory* doesn’t mean

*God is easy to understand.*

He is, after all,

*God.*

He exists far beyond any category I could ever put Him in.

In fact, if I am learning about the true God, I should expect to be blown away pretty regularly with thoughts that stagger my imagination (The idea that He is “three-yet-one,” for example). I’m pretty sure that if I fully comprehend everything in a study about God, I’m not really studying the incomprehensible God!

But God can give me a knowledge of Himself that is *real*, even if I can’t fully wrap my head around it.

I can *know* something *beyond knowledge*, as Paul says. I can taste a berry and *know* its goodness without knowing precisely how to describe it.

This study is not about dissecting God into pieces you can analyze. Because, really, good luck if you want to try to analyze God like that.

It’s about tasting, and seeing, that the Lord is good.

**Praying for Eyes to See**

To know God *that* way I really do need more than my little box of brains. I have to pray that God opens the eyes of my heart.

This is why Paul also says to the Ephesians,

*“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know… his incomparably great power…”*Ephesians 1:18a, 19a

During this 50-day study, I suggest you pray this:

“Lord, may the same Spirit who inspired the Word enlighten *me*.”

Then keep those eyes wide open.

You are not only going to find your mind blown — you are going to find your heart filled.

Because He loves you,

God is… revealing Himself to you right now.

**Questions For Reflection**

When people do not believe God is self-revelatory, how might their relationship with God be affected negatively?

How will thinking that God is self-revelatory have a positive

impact on your thoughts, emotions, and actions?

You might agree that, in theory, God is self-revelatory. But does your life demonstrate that you really believe this?

How might your daily actions change if you really focused on and believed this attribute of God?

Day 4

**Meeting The Other**

Read your Bible: [Isaiah 6:1–8](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+6%3A1-8&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*Holy, holy, holy is the lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.* [Isaiah 6:3b](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+6%3A3b&version=NIV)

I was raised in California by immigrant parents from Switzerland, and my Swiss heritage was a matter of deep personal pride for me as a kid.

Then the summer after I turned 16, I did an internship at a radio station in Switzerland. And something amazing happened.

I was surprised by a call from our station manager.

*The President of Switzerland would be visiting our studios to broadcast his annual Swiss Independence Day message to the nation!*

I was so excited, and dressed in such a hurry, that I forgot to put on deodorant — an oversight that turned out to really matter when, after his radio address, the President turned to me and asked me out to dinner with his family, right then and there!

I remember thinking, “Is this a weird dream? Is the President really asking me to dinner *on the only day all year I have forgotten deodorant?*”

But it was no dream. And believe me, I smelled terrible.

I said, “Yes.”

Then I started strategizing: “I’ll order fondue and blame the odor on the cheese!” For the rest of the night I moved my arms only from the elbows forward, pinning my underarms as tightly to my torso as possible.

That only meant that I proceeded to really stink up the place (a nervous 16-year-old boy with no deodorant! Imagine!) while simultaneously gesturing freakishly. I tried to keep my distance from the Great Man … but then… the President beckoned me to sit right next to his place at the table!

In that moment I was alternately more delighted and more dismayed than I’d ever been in my life: “The President is asking me to sit at his right hand! Yes! I smell like a pickup truck full of wet dogs! Nooooo!”

A jittery chef prepared our meals tableside while he took nervous glances at the president. For one of the courses the chef poured brandy over some fancy food item I did not recognize, the idea apparently being that he would then set it on fire to create a spectacular display. Only he was shaking so badly that he poured out a little too much, and when he lit the dish, a giant fireball suddenly whooshed into the air making me even more nervous than I was before!

Yet to put me at ease the President graciously asked me questions about my life the whole evening. I kept calling him “H-H-Herr P-P-P-President” until he insisted I call him “Kurt.”

Eventually, though I knew I did not belong in the picture, I was soothed by his graciousness and truly enjoyed my meal — and have been looking for openings to tell people about my brush with Swiss greatness ever since!

**Meeting the Ruler of Everything**

I think of that story when I read Isaiah 6, because something like that — but on an infinitely greater cosmic scale, of course — was experienced by the prophet Isaiah.

He was an advisor to kings who lived about 700 years before Christ. So, unlike me, Isaiah was used to being around heads of state. An aristocrat. Not easily intimidated.

Yet he falls flat on his face when he suddenly sees the throne of God. And what happens next gives great insight into the mystery of the Divine.

Isaiah realizes how much his sin must stink in the presence of such holiness. He despairs,

*“Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the lord Almighty.”*Isaiah 6:5

What prompted that kind of response?

**Earth-Shaking Holiness**

Here’s what Isaiah saw: Seraphim (angelic beings), were calling out in temple-rattling voices:

*“Holy, holy, holy is the lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”*

Why do they repeat the word “holy” three times?

Well, when the Bible reiterates a word, it’s like God is circling it, underlining it, highlighting it.

As Max Lucado says, “God is not just holy. Or holy holy. God is *holy holy holy*.”[10](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n10)

The Hebrew word for “holy” is *qadosh*, which means *totally separate*. It has two meanings related to God:

**Other Other Other**

First, *qadosh* means God is totally *other*. God is so different, so separate, so unlike you and me that He is *other, other, other*.

Why emphasize this?

Because although the Bible says God made us in His image, we’ve been trying to make God in our image ever since.

Go to a museum. Look at any ancient idol. It may have been crafted in sincere hope, but you always learn more about the people who made it than you do about God. The Egyptian gods look like Egyptians, the Sumerian gods like Sumerians.

And what about our God?

Garrison Keillor, famous for his Lake Woebegone stories, tells of an anonymous complaint nailed to the door of the local church:

You have taught me to worship a god who is like you, who shares your thinking exactly, who is going to slap me one if I don’t straighten out fast. I am very uneasy every Sunday, which is cloudy and deathly still and filled with silent accusing whispers.[11](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n11)

I need a God bigger than that. Bigger than your ideas of God. Bigger than mine.

In his classic book *Your God Is Too Small*, J. B. Phillips describes how the world sees many Christians:

If they are not strenuously defending an outgrown conception of God, then they are cherishing a hothouse God who could only exist between the pages of a Bible or between the four walls of a church.[12](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n12)

As Ana-Maria Rizzuto observed, “No child arrives at the house of God without his pet God under his arm.”[13](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n13)

That’s why I need to remind myself continually that the real God rattles the foundation of any church. I don’t have God figured out. Or tamed. He is not my pet. He is beyond any limitations.

This is a good thing. God is not constrained by my fears or my imagination. It is a relief to know: God is *totally other*.

**Pure Pure Pure**

Then there’s another level of meaning to *qadosh*: God is *totally pure*.

God is not contaminated by impurity or sin at any level.

He is *pure, pure, pure*.

What’s the point of that?

Again, look at the ideas of God held by other cultures during Isaiah’s time: You see deities infected by envy, pettiness, grudges, pride, lust… because if you create God in your own image you’ll magnify not only your powers, but your shortcomings as well.

The repetition of the word “holy” is meant to convey that God has none of those moral flaws.

So the word *holy* indicates that God is totally *other* and totally pure, the one who sets up all the rules, writes all the definitions, creates all the standards. Any true encounter with Him is always on His terms.

**Unworthy Me**

Isaiah declares that he is unworthy to stand before such a *qadosh, qadosh, qadosh* Being.

And he *is* unworthy.

God never says, “No, Isaiah, you’re the man! You’re totally my equal, absolutely worthy to stand alongside me.”

Instead… *God cleanses him.* What Isaiah needs is not a self-esteem boost. He needs pardon. Forgiveness. New life.

One of the seraphim flies to Isaiah with a coal from the altar which he touches to Isaiah’s lips as he says, “Behold… your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.”

Then God asks for someone to be His ambassador to the people, and Isaiah, rejuvenated by the fact that God has cleansed him, immediately says, *“Here am I. Send me!”*

And God does.

**The Rhythm of a God-Encounter**

This is always the rhythm of any true encounter with the *holy, holy, holy* God.

First, there is an awestruck awareness of my own unworthiness.

Then there is a reaching out to me, from God. He is the one who extends grace to me while I am flat on my face, as good as dead.

And then…

Then I want to go and tell the world about what a great God I have met!

My message becomes all about God, not about me: I have received His grace and so I cannot stop telling others about my experience.

Kind of like the day I went to dinner with the President:

When you think of God you might become uncomfortable, aware of how much you must stink in His presence, even on your best day. I think that’s what people mean when they say, “If I ever walked into church, the building would collapse!”

That’s an understandable emotion.

But God is the one who says, “Now that you see my holiness, let me cleanse you. And then deputize you.”

After I encounter the totally *different* God, I am *different*.

The *Pure One* purifies *me*.

The *Other One* makes *me* into another.

Meeting the *qadosh* God makes me *qadosh* too.

God is… *Other*.

**Questions For Reflection**

How does the story in Isaiah 6:1–8 inspire you?

Summarize what it means to you that God is holy holy holy.

Many people do not realize how holy God is, both in other-ness and in purity. Because of this, what unrealistic ideas do they have about God and themselves, and how do the two relate?

Day 5

**Making Idols**

Read your Bible: [Isaiah 44:6–22](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+44%3A6-22&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*Who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing?* [Isaiah 44:10 ESV](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+44%3A10&version=ESV)

“Our premier human problem is idolatry and its consequences.” — David A. Hubbard

A lot of Christians seem more *pagan* than *Christian*: We get many, if not most, of our ideas about God from Greek, Roman, and Northern European mythology.

Really, when we think of an old man in heaven with a white beard throwing down lightning bolts, we’re thinking of*Zeus*, not Jehovah.

Compare that to what God reveals about Himself.

Here are a few of the biblical attributes of God we’ll look at in this book:

**Omnipotence**, meaning God is all-powerful.

*No matter what I face, it’s never too much for God.*

**Omnipresence**, meaning God is everywhere.

*I don’t have to go to a special temple or other sacred place in order to meet God.*

**Sovereignty**, meaning God is in control.

*Nothing that happens can possibly ruin God’s plans.*

**Immutability**, meaning God is unchanging.

*He always keeps His promises, He is always faithful.*

And one of my favorite attributes, just because it’s so mind-blowing:

**Aseity**, meaning God is not dependent on anything for His existence. The Hebrew name God gives Himself in the Bible, *Yahweh*, is derived from the Hebrew verb meaning *“to be.”* This means God simply *is*.

*Everything else in the universe is contingent, or dependent on something for its existence.*

*Except God. He is dependent on nothing.*

These attributes are so unlike the god I create when left to my own devices.

Just go through some attributes on that list.

The pagan gods were not believed to be *omnipotent.*

And when I live with the unspoken fear that some things are just too big for God to work out for good, I prove I really have more of a pagan picture of God than a biblical one.

They were not *sovereign*. Other gods and even people conspired to thwart their plans.

When I get the idea that God might have His plan for my life spoiled by a seeming disaster — or my own stupid moves — I’m thinking of something like an old pagan god.

They were not believed to be *immutable*. They changed their minds all the time.

And when I get insecure that God has changed *(“Does God still love me?”)* I betray the true origins of my theology.

I might not think I have much in common with an ancient craftsman who carved an idol. But when I worry, when I get insecure, when I feel shame, it’s often because deep down, in the core of my being, it’s that I have forgotten what the Bible has to say about God.

**Fashion God?**

I like the way some older translations put it: People *fashion* idols. That phrase nails it. I often make a false god that fits my fashion, or society’s fashions and trends. A fashion-god.

This is especially so in our current pop culture, where, in a genuine desire for tolerance and unity, everything that sounds vaguely religious is thrown together and cooked into one big spiritual soup that blurs legitimate distinctions between theological systems. The resulting concoction often is so bland, and has so little “bite,” that it’s unappetizing and ineffective.

We look down at the creations of our own meager imaginations while the God beyond imagining is right there next to us, ready to love and empower us.

In Acts 17, Paul is explaining this to the Greek philosophers in Athens. He says:

*…we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill.*Acts 17:24–25, 29

Paul explains further that, although God is totally different from the images we make of Him, He still preserves us and reaches out to us:

*God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being.* Acts 17:27–28

God is all around you, waiting for you to reach out and do exactly the kind of thing we’re doing in this study. He will help you. He *wants* you to linger and learn and love Him.

**Meet the One Who Loves You**

It’s intriguing to me that of all the attributes God wants the people to remember in Isaiah 44, He reminds them most often to remember this:

He is their *Redeemer*.

That’s because the most damaging thing about idols is that *they can’t save you.* They’re powerless, not only to bring rain or fertility, but far more importantly, to bring redemption.

So God is calling you to turn away from your fashioned god to the God who Is, not just to find *truth*, but to find *life*. When you delve into the mystery of God you are exhilarated, and not just from the joy of unraveling a mystery.

You are meeting the *Other* who loves you.

God is… not an idol.

**Questions For Reflection**

Which of the attributes of God discussed in today’s chapter do you see yourself struggling the most to believe? How does this affect your life?

Which of the attributes do you most long to learn more about?

Day 6

**Child-Like Wonder**

Read your Bible: [Psalm 8](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+8&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me.* [Psalm 131:2 NIV1984](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+131%3A2&version=NIV1984)

Yes, God will blow your mind. Yet He communicates in ways even a child, or a childlike adult, can understand.

The infinite speaks even to infants.

I love the book *Children’s Letters to God*, a collection of real notes written by kids in various Sunday School classes.[14](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n14)The sense of worship these letters often express proves to me that getting *God-soaked* meets a basic human desire:

Dear God: I didn’t think orange went with purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday. That was cool. Love, Eugene.

Dear God, I think about you sometimes even when I’m not praying!

Dear God: I don’t ever feel alone since I found out about you.

Have you noticed how often kids think about God, and ask great questions? They’re amateur theologians.

But as they get older kids often stop the God-talk. Why?

I think people slowly grow to believe that a study of God is only for the super-smart specialists. So they defer all their God thoughts to the experts. And they grow thirsty.

Maybe, if you’re honest, you even feel a little under-qualified to think theologically in this study, just because you don’t know all the Christian vocabulary.

**The Wisdom of Wonder**

I would love for you to meet Sarah Kritikos.

In her early 20s, Sarah’s an enthusiastic regular attender at our church’s class for adults with special needs, *Joyful Noise*. And she is so full of the joy of life.

But Sarah’s had a lot of challenges. She was born with numerous life-threatening health problems as well as several physical and developmental difficulties.

Sarah has been in and out of hospitals at least *30 times* over the years. She stands somewhere near four feet tall and is not much bigger around than one of my legs. One of her arms is half the normal length and is missing a thumb.

I might be tempted to give up if I had those kinds of challenges. But Sarah knows something about the attributes of God. Because, even if she doesn’t call them by their theological names, she thinks about them. *A lot.*

I saw Sarah at a Christian camp recently. Some men were up for the day doing volunteer construction work and Sarah bounded right into the middle of their break and chatted with them. Then later in the week I got this email from one of those guys:

Hi, my name is Ron. I met Sarah only for a moment but her impact was like a thunder clap.

There was a short break before dinner. We sat down on the deck to rest — and Sarah walked by and said, “Can I ask you guys a question?”

“Sure,” we replied.

She asked, *“What do you think is the most beautiful part of God?”*

We each answered.

“Can I ask you another question?” Sarah said with enthusiasm. *“When you have troubles, who do you turn to?”*

We were stunned that this tiny woman with a strange delivery but beautiful smile could ask us questions that would make us grown men weep. God used her voice and He spoke directly to me. Through my experience with Sarah, I had a conversation with God. *This was my first experience like this.* Sarah truly is an instrument of God. Thank you, Sarah!

I think I know the reason Sarah’s been able to navigate all the crazy rapids in her young life. She really loves God — and loves to think about the One she loves.

Sarah is not what many would call sophisticated or clever. But she is full of wonder. And I’ll take that over sophisticated or clever any day.

As you continue this study of God’s attributes, don’t be intimidated by it. And don’t keep it academic. Think about the difference it makes at every turn, like Sarah does.

God is so loving that He reveals Himself with gentleness and patience despite anyone’s apparent weaknesses. *In His self-revelation to you, God is not limited by any of your limitations.* Isn’t that an awesome thought?

But you must have a willingness to wonder. Like Sarah.

Ask yourself her wise question:

*“What do you think is the most beautiful part of God?”*

God is… eager for you to know Him!

**Questions For Reflection**

What do you think is the most beautiful part of God?

Day 7

**Perspective Shift**

Read your Bible: [Psalm 100](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+100&version=NIV)

Spotlight Verse:

*Know that the lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.* [Psalm 100:3](http://mobile.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+100%3A3&version=NIV)

In Max Lucado’s book *It’s Not About Me*he describes the Copernican Revolution:

Until Copernicus came along in 1543, we earthlings enjoyed center stage. Fathers could place an arm around their children, point to the night sky, and proclaim, “The universe revolves around us.”[15](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n15)

He goes on to point out how for centuries, earth was thought to be the hub of the wheel in the sky, the center of the solar system. All the other planets revolved around… us!

Then along came Copernicus.

He pointed to the sun and said, “Behold the center of our system.”

No one wanted to hear it.

His book was immediately placed on the papal index of forbidden books. When Galileo later said the same thing, the king locked him up and the church kicked him out.

But he was right. And his new, accurate perspective changed everything, explained so much and put us in our proper place.

Well, as Lucado says, “What Copernicus did for the solar system, God does for our souls.”[16](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n16)

A study of God reveals the truth:

I am not the center of the universe in any sense.

I am not the star of the show.

I am not in charge.

This is one of the healthiest results of a study of the attributes of God. But this new, accurate perspective is resisted by the medieval monarch of my soul: *Me.*

**Not Number One**

The ugly truth is, I *want* to be the center of the universe. I want to be in charge. I want to look out for number one.

I do not like it when I am told that my default mode — wanting the weather and the traffic and the economy and my kids and my spouse and my cat and my church and my whole world to suit my wishes — is not reality. I like to live in denial of this, imprisoning the messenger instead of considering the message.

But the Bible reminds me:

*Know that the lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.* Psalm 100:3

I love the way the Psalmist orients me to the true center of the universe in that verse:

*Know that the lord is God.*

Not me.

It is He who made us.

Not we who made Him.

We are His.

Not our own.

We are His people, the sheep of His pasture.

Not the other way around.

That’s hard for us humans to really get. To quote Anne Lamott, “The biggest difference between you and God is that God doesn’t think He’s you.”[17](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n17)

Try this as a helpful exercise: Take your index finger and point up and say out loud: “God.” Now point at yourself and say: “Not.” Repeat as necessary.

This is important to remember for your own sanity.

**Not God**

Ernest Kurtz wrote a history of the 12-step movement. It’s called *Not God*.[18](http://godis.tlc.org/endnotes#n18)

Healing and recovery, he says, begins with a single realization: I am not God. I need help from a power *greater than myself*.

And then, when you read the Bible’s teaching that this same God, awesome in power…

chooses to show love

and bring healing

and reveal Himself

to *you*

something happens.

Something people call worship, or release, or freedom. Whatever you call that encounter, you are changed. Because you have met God. And He is not you.

God is… not me.

**Questions For Reflection**

In what ways do people sometimes show that they expect to be the center of their universe?

In what ways do you do this?

Why is it important to realize that God is God, and you are not? How can this help your life?