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Wonder

True worship is based on a right understanding of God’s nature, and it is a right valuing of God’s worth.

—John Piper

I stepped up to the podium at Allen AME church in New York City. The musicians had finished singing and playing, yet there remained a lingering sense of God’s weighty presence. I knew the message He wanted me to declare. He had put it on my heart earlier, and the moment for it was perfect.

Overwhelmed

I motioned to the keyboardist to keep playing. The open jazz chords were very appropriate for what we were feeling in our hearts. The room was electric with the sense that something unusual was about to happen.

I opened my Bible and read this song:

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;

Tremble before andreverently fear Him, all the earth (Psalm 96:9).

Then I read what Moses sang:

Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods?

Who is like You, glorious in holiness,

Fearful in praises, doing wonders? (Exodus 15:11).

Suddenly, from the back of the church, a woman screamed. Something extraordinary was happening. On the opposite side, another woman started to sob. I had not noticed, but some were standing at the back with hands raised, even though I had begun to preach. I sensed it too. It felt like we were caught up into another dimension.

I continued my message by describing, as best I could, the glorious and illustrious character of God. As I did the pianist went with me—the chords swelled and the bass in his left hand thundered. Surprisingly, a man got up and lay prostrate in the aisle and began to sob. We were in the distinguished presence of the only Holy One. Our hearts were being pulled upward in worship as the glories of the Divine were being declared.

I noticed the tone of my voice had changed as I continued to describe the throne of God and the worshippers in front of it:

Before the brilliantly white throne is a crystalline sea where millions of musicians are standing and endlessly singing spontaneous songs to its inhabitant. The throne is the theme of celestial canticles from every creature in soil, sea, and sky.

It is before this throne that the elders prostrate, creatures fall, and human elders bow. All those before the throne are brought low, kiss the dirt, and humbly bow. It is here we will lay all our prizes, trophies, victories, achievements, rank, and title.

I realized that the power and presence of the Holy Spirit inspired my preaching and the prophetic musical accompaniment. We were getting glimpses of the greatness and the glory of God. We were immersed in a prophetic atmosphere and we were aware of an unusually manifested splendor of God among us.

At times I had to stop speaking because I was overwhelmed. Other times I sang parts of the message. It really wasn’t my message any longer. It was as if someone was speaking through me, painting a picture of worship on the other side. I fought back the tears and tried to wipe my nose and not interrupt what was happening. The weight of God’s presence was so heavy on us. We were overwhelmed.

Wonder

Three important things happened that night:

First, the atmosphere was well prepared by the worship team, who led us in appropriate songs of praise and worship to God. We sang our way into God’s manifest presence. His revealed essence could be felt among us. The team had chosen the correct songs and led in the way that turned this encounter into a reality.

Second, there were worshippers present who were hungry for God, with hearts focused, receptive, and anticipating meeting God. Our faith was high. We were there to worship and encounter God.

Third, and most importantly, we were contemplating the greatness and grandeur of God, which took us to a higher level of worship. These are key principles in leading or experiencing transcendent worship and the power of God’s revealed presence.

To begin to comprehend God, we must look at what God has revealed about Himself, because your worship is tied to a revelation of the divine nature of God.

The character of a person is fundamentally what that person is like; this also applies to God. God reveals to you aspects of His character that inspire your worship. When you study His nature, you will see what He is like. Pondering the character of God invokes worship. When you realize His unique and perfect attributes you are inspired to worship at a higher level.

True worship always flows out of a revelation of God’s perfect character. Although to fully understand God is far beyond human comprehension, the Bible does offer several revealing glimpses into His multifaceted nature. As A. W. Tozer said in his book, The Knowledge of the Holy, “The history of mankind … will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God.”[[1]](#footnote-1) What is your idea of God? It is connected to your worship of God.

God Is:

Here are some aspects of God’s character to contemplate and communicate and then to transcend in wondrous worship. If you as a songwriter write about these aspects of God, then your songs will facilitate authentic and transcendent worship. If you as a preacher preach about these characteristics of God, then you will see people overwhelmed and undone by His greatness and grandeur. If you as worship leaders and worshippers focus on these attributes of God’s personality, then you will be elevated to higher plane of worship.

Self-Existent

God revealed Himself to Moses, saying, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). God has no origin and exists independent of all other creatures. He is independent in His virtues, decrees, works, and everything else. He is self-existent and self-dependent. He exists for Himself, and man exists for Him.

Self-Sufficient

And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (Colossians 1:17).

God needs nothing. All that God is and who God is, is in Himself. He contains all and He gives all that is given. All life comes from God and is in God. He upholds all things. He maintains and sustains everything without help from anyone or anything. He has no need for anyone or anything.

Eternal

Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God (Psalm 90:2).

From vanishing point to vanishing point, Yahweh is God. God lives in the everlasting now. He has no past and no future. God dwells in eternity and appears at the beginning and end simultaneously. To God the end and the beginning are the same. He sees them in one view. If we talk about Him in terms of time, we make a serious error.

Infinite

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).

When we say God is infinite, we mean that He is limitless, and it is impossible for our limited minds to comprehend the unlimited One. God is so great that He cannot be adequately perceived. No language, book, painting, or digital imagery can express Him.

Yahweh is beyond definition. God is above all, outside of all, and beyond all that exists. There are no measurements or degrees with Him. God has no intervals, sizes, weights, or distances. He is absolutely boundless, unlimited, indefinable, and uncontainable.

Immutable

For I am the Lord, I do not change (Malachi 3:6).

God cannot change in any dimension of His character, purposes, or promises. He does not grow or diminish. God cannot get better or worse. Nothing can be added or taken away from Him because He is forever the same.

He is always consistent in action and character. It is impossible for Him to detour or deteriorate from what He is. There is no mutation of the character of God.

Omniscient

Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,

Or as His counselor has taught Him?

With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him,

And taught Him in the path of justice?

Who taught Him knowledge,

And showed Him the way of understanding? (Isaiah 40:13–14).

The One we worship knows all; He has perfect knowledge of all things. He has never learned. He cannot learn something because He already knows everything.

God is the Source and Author of all things and, therefore, He knows all that can be known, instantly and infinitely. He knows every mind, spirit, creature, law, relation, secret, cause, thought, mystery, motion, material, and matter. God knows all life and death, good and evil, space and time; in the past, present, and future.

God is never surprised or amazed and He never wonders about anything. He sees all, so He knows all.

He knows all things about all people, in all places, in all of history, all the time, both excellently and equally.

Wise

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever (1 Timothy 1:17).

God is wise and has the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action based on His perfect knowledge. He has the ability to plan perfect outcomes and to achieve them by the most perfect means. He does not guess or engage in conjecture. Everything for Him is in focus and in proper relation to everything else, and He works flawlessly to do what He knows is best.

God acts out of His perfect wisdom for His own glory, for the highest good of the greatest number of people, for the longest time. He works in a way that cannot be improved upon.

Sovereign

Whatever the Lord pleases He does,

In heaven and in earth (Psalm 135:6).

God is free to do whatever He pleases at any time and in any place to carry out His infinitely wise purposes with unlimited power. He has sovereign control over the affairs of nature, men, and history.

 In His sovereignty God has allowed evil to exist as a renegade fugitive in restricted areas of His creation, in a limited and temporary capacity.

Omnipotent

And I heard … the voice of a great multitude … saying, “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!” (Revelation 19:6).

God is all-powerful. Omnipotent means He has infinite power. He is the source of all power and possesses all available power without limit. God can do anything just as easily as anything else. He has so much power that He works effortlessly. He never strains as if He had to muster up more power. He is the Lord God “All-mighty.”

Transcendent

For thus says the High and Lofty One

Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:

“I dwell in the high and holy place” (Isaiah 57:15).

God is exalted so far above and beyond what is human, our minds can never really comprehend Him. He is exalted far beyond our understanding, not in elevation or space, but in quality of being.

God stands apart and above from all that is. He is the highest Being—beyond the reach of human thought. Science can only explore His created laws, and religion can only explore the footprints of where He has been. But the One who walked those paths is transcendent.

He is the Supreme Being, so He cannot be elevated any higher, for there is no place above Him or beyond Him. Any movement toward Him is elevation for the creature; any movement away from Him is descent.

Omnipresent

Where can I go from Your Spirit?

Or where can I flee from Your presence?

If I ascend into heaven, You are there;

If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.

If I take the wings of the morning,

And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

Even there Your hand shall lead me,

And Your right hand shall hold me (Psalm 139:7–10).

God is absolutely everywhere. There is no limit to His presence. There is no place that He is not present. God is to our environment as the ocean is to a whale, or the air to a bird. He is even closer to us than our thoughts.

Faithful

The faithfulness of God is a constant theme in the Bible. The psalmist says,

With my mouth will I make known Your faithfulness to all generations.

For I have said, “Mercy shall be built up forever;

Your faithfulness You shall establish in the very heavens.” (Psalm 89:1–2).

And the heavens will praise Your wonders, O Lord;

Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints …

Your faithfulness also surrounds You (Psalm 89:5, 8).

In this same Psalm, God says,

Nevertheless, My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him,

Nor allow My faithfulness to fail.

My covenant I will not break,

Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips (Psalm 89:33–34).

God’s immutability—His unchanging character—ensures His faithfulness. He cannot act out of character and cannot change; therefore, He is endlessly dependable, persistently loyal, and relentlessly reliable. God is perfectly and eternally trustworthy.

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True (Revelation 19:11).

Good

God told Moses,

I will make all My goodness pass before you. … I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion (Exodus 33:19).

The quality of God’s character that is behind His generosity is His goodness. It is that quality that makes Him kind, cordial, and full of good will. He is tenderhearted, open, friendly, and generous.

God created us and redeemed us because He is good. All of His creatures benefit from His goodness. His goodness sustains and maintains His creation. He has no debt or obligation to His people or His creatures. His goodness is not owed to us and we do not deserve it, yet He gives it freely.

Just

For the Lord is a God of justice;

Blessed are all those who wait for Him (Isaiah 30:18).

The throne of God is filled with righteousness and judgment. He sits not only as King but also as Judge. He rules from His bench with moral equity.

God is compassionate and good; therefore, He is just and right in all His ways. His attributes are never in conflict with one another. When we were born into the world, we were born into sin, and God’s justice required a penalty to be paid. But His goodness provided a sacrifice for that penalty, and His Son Jesus paid the debt.

Merciful

And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6).

God declared Himself to be merciful as He passed by Moses. Mercy is His nature. We took part in the rebellion to overthrow the King of Creation because of our sin nature. When we were children of disobedience, we made ourselves enemies of God. But because of the merciful nature of God, He has made provision for our guilt and sin to be erased through Jesus.

Mercy is the aspect of God’s character that makes Him inexhaustibly and actively compassionate. Mercy is the nature of God that makes Him kind-hearted and empathetic toward you. His merciful nature causes Him to be forgiving.

Gracious

Jonah declared Yahweh’s nature when he said,

You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and [when sinners turn to You and meet Your conditions] You revoke the [sentence of] evil against them (Jonah 4:2 AMPCE).

Not only is God merciful but also He is gracious. Grace is the good pleasure of God. It is the aspect of God’s character that bestows benefits to the undeserving. He freely grants undeserved favor on us when we are the most unworthy.

Love

John declared in 1 John 4:8, “God is love.”

Love wills the good of all and wants no harm or evil. Love desires your eternal welfare. Because God is love, He gives freely to the object of its affection, and God gives generously and sacrificially.

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends (John 15:13).

Love takes pleasure in the object of its affection; likewise, God takes pleasure in His children and His creation. He loves all people, of all races, throughout all of history.

Holy

And one cried to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;

The whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isaiah 6:3).

The holiness of God is that quality which is His otherness. The word holy comes from a root word meaning separate. God is other than and separate from all that is.

Holiness is the crowning attribute of God’s character. It sums up all the other qualities about Him. Yahweh is not only holy, but also holy in the highest possible way. More than any other attribute, the holiness of God is called out in heaven by angels who stand in His awe-filled presence. The seraphs loudly chant in continuous antiphonal melody—singing to one another with zeal and fervency “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty.”

Great

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;

And His greatness is unsearchable (Psalm 145:3).

Contemplating God’s characteristics inspires us to worship. When you see God as the greatest and grandest, the highest and holiest you are drawn to worship Him in a greater way with your greatest praise.

Praise Him for His mighty acts;

Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! (Psalm 150:2).

How are you to make your praise equal to His excellent greatness? You can’t! However, God encourages you to try. Let’s make His praise glorious.

Beauty of Holiness

Give to the Lord the glory due His name;

Bring an offering, and come before Him.

Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! (1 Chronicles 16:29).

We are called to worship the Lord in the beauty of His holiness or otherness, or what makes Him separate and unique. In other words, we are to worship the Lord according to His attributes. Our worship of God should not be focused on the liturgy of worship; rather, it should be focused on Who we worship—His person and character.

This is the mysterious, glorious, illustrious, and wondrous worship of a God. When you contemplate the transcendence of God’s nature, the appropriate response is to worship Him. Perhaps you sense that desire to adore Him right now as you read about the character of God, who is unimaginable, incomprehensible and indescribable. Tears have flowed down my cheeks as I wrote of the pristine perfections of our beloved Heavenly Father. When we consider all that He is and done, then our eyes look up, our arms raise, and our spirits soar. At that moment our theology turns to doxology.

Study Guide

1. How would you describe God to someone?
2. What attributes of God impact you the most?
3. Why do those attributes impact you?
4. What particular event in your life was greatly impacted by one of the attributes of God?
5. What is God’s crowning attribute, and why?
6. When facing challenges in your life, how will you remind yourself who God is?

Scripture and Reflection

Read Psalm 145 and Psalm 86

1. In what ways has it been challenging for you to know who God is?
2. In what ways has it been challenging to know God’s character?
3. How will knowing the character of God affect your worship?
4. In what way will knowing God better affect your day-to-day actions and attitudes?
5. What will you do to know God more?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You are more majestic and mysterious than I can ever realize. You are high and exalted and greater than I can fathom. You are all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present. You are the only Holy One. Help me understand, comprehend, and experience your mercy, your kindness, and your love. You are magnificent and full of wonder and the sole object of my adoration. As I focus more on who You are, help me, by your Holy Spirit, to grow in my worship of You. May I make You glorious as I reflect back Your attributes in my life and worship. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

1. A. W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1961), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)