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THE NATURE OF GOD

Once upon a time, a scorpion needed to cross a pond. Wondering how he would get to the other side, he noticed a frog nearby. “Mr. Frog, will you please hop me across this pond?”

The kind, gentle frog said, “Certainly, Mr. Scorpion. I will be glad to do so.”

So Mr. Scorpion jumped onto Mr. Frog’s back as Mr. Frog hopped from pad to pad, bringing Mr. Scorpion to the other side of the pond. But just as the frog said, “Well, Mr. Scorpion, here we are,” he felt an excruciating pain in his back. Mr. Scorpion had stung him.

As Mr. Frog lay dying, he looked up at Mr. Scorpion and said, “How could you do this? I brought you from one side of the pond to the other, and now you sting me so that I die.”

Mr. Scorpion looked at Mr. Frog and said, “I can’t help it. It’s my nature.”

It’s important to know the nature of the one you are dealing

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with. If you think you are getting one thing, but when you get it, it's not what you thought it was, you could be in trouble. That happens today with a lot of errant teaching about who God is. God has been so misdefined, tragically redefined, and even dismissed that people do not understand His true nature and, as a result, get stuck with false and damaging views of God.

Had the frog taken into account the true nature of the scorpion, he would have never let him hop on his back. Our understanding of someone or something else influences our connection with and relation to the other. To misunderstand the nature of God is no small thing. Rather, our failing to know God as He truly is leads to our failure to access the abundant life Jesus Christ came to give (John 10:10). It also takes us off course from living out the purpose He has for us, as well as negatively influencing all our relationships with each other, and our love toward ourselves.

When you or I make decisions based on a misunderstanding of God's nature, thinking that we know the true God when in fact we know something totally different from who and what the true God is, the results of those decisions will lead to destruction and death. Now, that may not mean physical death, but it certainly means spiritual, relational, and even emotional death. Knowing the nature of God as He reveals Himself, rather than how we think He is, can save us from a life of confusion and defeat.

God's nature consists in His intrinsic traits. *Nature*, after all, is the inherent characteristics that define any being, animal, or thing. To study and come to know God's nature ought to be the preeminent focus and desire of all believers in Christ. This is

because there is no greater knowledge that you can possess outside of the knowledge of God. To know God means you come to understand and reflect His nature. Jeremiah 9:23–24 emphasizes the importance of this pursuit:

Thus says the LORD, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD.

Wisdom, might, and riches are of no importance when placed against the backdrop of knowing God. In this passage, we are told clearly not to boast about anything other than knowing and understanding God. The knowledge of God is life’s greatest pursuit. When you relegate the knowing and understanding of God to a second-rate discovery, you have unwittingly lessened your ability to know anything else at all. All truth arises from God Himself. In fact, failing to know God fully will similarly keep you from knowing yourself.

You and I were created in the image of God. We exist to be mirrors of His nature, yet in a finite manner. Thus, the better you come to know and understand God, the better you will understand yourself. As you come to recognize and see God more clearly for who He truly is, you will also discover who you are as well as understand the world around you.

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IN THE BEGINNING, GOD

It's always best to start at the beginning, so that's what we are going to do in our discovery of God's nature. The very first verse in Scripture says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Now, that may seem like a short verse, and when you compare it to other passages in the Bible it is a relatively short verse. But in this one introductory verse, we find a significant amount of meaning.

For starters, the Bible does not begin by trying to account for God's existence in one form or another. What we don't read is just as important as what we do. Nowhere do we find a defense argument trying to prove that God exists. Rather, Psalm 14:1 tells us that if you don't believe in God, you are a fool. It says, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

So much debate goes on today about whether God even exists, yet the Bible begins on this assumption because His existence is self-evident. Nature itself attests to the existence of God, since the heavens and earth declare His glory (Ps. 19:1). The galaxies, stars, mathematical precision of all created things, and living beings proclaim God's reality. To deny God exists in light of the impossibility of the creation in which we live is foolish. Romans 1:20 states it this way:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Just as you cannot have a watch without a watchmaker or a painting without a painter or a building without a builder, you also cannot have a creation without a Creator. And the cause must be sufficient to bring about the result. Whether it's a refusal to believe by the overwhelming majority of physicists and astronomers who study our universe, or whether it arises out of hearts that do not want to be held accountable, the notion that God does not exist is a notion without excuse. It is a notion based on lies and falsehoods. Scripture (and the created order) is clear that God exists. Should the earth move roughly the distance between the moon and the earth, times four either closer to or further from the sun, the earth itself would be uninhabitable. Yet it doesn't because it is held in place by Christ. Not only were all things created by Him, but He also holds them all in order. Colossians 1:16–17 states it like this:

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

This truth introduces our first aspect about God, which is that He is transcendent. He existed before all things and is not limited to space or time. He is totally distinct from His creation. The word *distinct* is a synonym for transcendent. God is unique. He is one of a kind. You can make no comparison that will give you an understanding of God unless He grants that comparison because there is nothing you can compare Him to.

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That's the problem with coming up with your own idea of God. If it's your idea, the idea is probably wrong. The only understanding you can get of God's nature is the understanding He gives you because nothing else in the universe is like Him.

God exists above His creation. A key passage for this powerful truth is found in Isaiah 40:

To whom then will you liken God?
Or what likeness will you compare with Him?
As for the idol, a craftsman casts it,
A goldsmith plates it with gold,
And a silversmith fashions chains of silver.
He who is too impoverished for such an offering
Selects a tree that does not rot;
He seeks out for himself a skillful craftsman
To prepare an idol that will not totter.

Do you not know? Have you not heard?
Has it not been declared to you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
It is He who sits above the circle of the earth,
And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers,
Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain
And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.
He it is who reduces rulers to nothing,
Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless. . . .

“To whom then will you liken Me
that I should be his equal?” says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high

And see who has created these stars,
The One who leads forth their host by number,
He calls them all by name;
Because of the greatness of His might and the strength
of His power
Not one of them is missing. (vv. 18–23, 25–26)

God is the transcendentally perfect, uncreated Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of all things.. God is so spectacular in His creative power that He can take two cells that come together and turn them into billions upon billions of cells that comprise a solitary human body. Scientists have discovered that each human life consists of roughly thirty-two trillion cells. Before you can wrap your mind around that, also consider that every single second, each of us has approximately two million red blood cells die. That's every single second. All the while, during this same second, another two million red blood cells are being created. The frailty of a life form is beyond our own understanding. Only a mighty Creator can sustain life in the way we are sustained, let alone create it.

For example, when you crush a roach or an insect, you have disconnected its cells from each other. The cells are no longer interconnected with each other and so the insect no longer lives. The reason you and I live is not only that we have cells but also because our cells are interconnected. One cell talks with another cell. The nerves work with the muscles. Cells by billions interface in a perfectly harmonious manner with each other. Without this harmonious interfacing of billions upon billions of cells, you will not live well. Nothing will live apart from God's grand design. The human body is just one example. But

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we also have trees, grass, animals, and more. For God to create the kind of living connections that He has produced is beyond our understanding. Yet, while you and I can't understand Him, He has also made Himself intimately available to us as well. He is the Great High God but also the very intimate, personal God, as we will see in our study on His attributes.

God is bigger than the sum total of His creation. He is infinite and boundless. Yet even though He is bigger than all creation, He has decided to mix it up with us on earth. While He lives outside time and space, He has chosen to hang out with us as well. He has chosen to locate Himself on earth, through the mechanism of the church (Eph. 2) as well as the creation of each one of us as the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19–20). This God whom you and I are dealing with and learning about is way up in the third heaven, outside His creation, but He is also within His followers by the indwelling Spirit. We have been bought with a price to make His habitation possible.

As a result, the glory of God must be the passion of our lives and of our churches. Wherever God sees His glory comfortably residing, He makes Himself more available to His people. God's kingdom agenda involves the furthering of His glory on earth. It ought to be our individual and corporate mission statements. The kingdom agenda can be defined as the visible manifestation of the comprehensive rule of God over every area of life. It starts with surrender on a personal level, resulting in the spiritual fruit of love, grace, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, and more. We are able to carry forward this agenda through our thoughts and actions when we recognize the nature of God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

THE ESSENCE OF GOD

God's transcendence also speaks to His essence. God is a spirit. He is non-material. This also means He is not physical, but rather, He is invisible. Thus, if you are going to get to know Him, you need to connect to Him spiritually. Physical activity alone does not connect directly to God because He exists as a spiritual being. Jesus sought to explain this to us as it is written in John 4:23–24, where He said,

“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Our worship and understanding of God is limited when we seek to identify with Him purely on a physical level. That's one reason why He started out the Ten Commandments with the command that we not make a god before Him or any images of Him. We are to not create physical idols, even if we are seeking to make them as a replica of Him. Because whatever we fashion will fall short. The only known physical reflection of God is Jesus Christ. John 1:18 puts it this way: “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” Jesus is, essentially, God's “selfie.” He's a human picture of God. Jesus is the closest we will get to seeing or experiencing God on earth in a physical form. The only revelation of God in terms of full visibility is the person of Christ.

Outside of how He revealed Himself to us in Jesus, no one

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has ever seen God. Moses once prayed, “show me Your glory” (Ex. 33:18). But the Bible says that God had to hide Moses “in the cleft of the rock” lest Moses see God and die (v. 22). That’s why when you go to heaven, you must have a new body. This body would not make the transition into God’s presence and survive.

Some people might object to this reality by saying, “Tony, wait a minute. How can you worship someone you can’t see?” I can answer that question through a comparison. It is the same way you can know it’s windy. Tell me, what does the wind look like? What are its component parts? How does it feel? No one can visually describe wind because it’s invisible, even though you know it’s there. You can say, “It’s a windy day.” Why? Because its effects are clear. Tree limbs bend, hats blow, umbrellas turn inside out. It’s obvious when it’s windy, not because you can see the wind, but because its effects are without question. God’s existence and reality is clearly manifested in His creation (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20).

You see the reality of God in what He does, not in what He looks like. So if God never blows any wind in your direction, you will not experientially know He’s real. But if you are growing in your faith and He’s blowing in your direction, even though you can’t see Him, you will know He’s all around you. God is invisible, yet His effects can be clearly seen.

If you are ever going to find the meaning of life and live it out, your spirit must be in touch with God’s Spirit, regardless of circumstances. If you are not developing a spiritual relationship with God, you cannot personally come to know Him, for God is spirit.

Being connected to God, who is spirit, also means that you

are complete in Him (see Col. 2:9–10). Everything you need for everything He has called you to be and do is located in Him. Listen to what Paul says in Acts 17:24–25:

The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things.

Do you see what Paul is saying? He says that God is so comprehensive and so complete, He is self-generating. He is the source of all things. You and I are spiritually complete in Him if and when we do as Jeremiah 29:13 says: “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.” The word “heart” in this verse is a symbol for the spirit. It indicates the internal consciousness of our soul and spirit. When we seek God with all of our spiritual being within us, we will find Him.

Conversely, when we seek Him according to our physical logic, thinking, or pursuits, there is no guarantee that we will find Him. Far too many people confuse church attendance with spiritual intimacy. But, unfortunately, someone can go to church every Sunday and yet never find God because the spiritual makeup of the heart must be in the search. If your body is in church but your spirit is not in it, you won’t meet God. You may tap your feet to the music and clap your hands at the sermon, but you will not meet God. Due to the essence of God, He requires your full heart to connect with Him. He demands that you worship Him in spirit and in truth. He is spirit, and unless your spirit is in your worship, you will be no different twelve

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months from now from who you are today. Yet when your spirit connects to Him, based on the truth of His Word, you will experience life transformation and a release of His wisdom and authority both in and through you like you never could have imagined.

GOD IS A PERSONAL BEING

Now, while God is spirit in His essence, He is not unapproachable or unreachable. This is because He is also personal. We discover this truth in Exodus 3:13–15:

Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.”

In this name that God reveals to us about Himself, we find the personal pronoun “I.” Personal attributes include intellect, emotion, will, and consciousness. God has all of these, and more. In fact, Scripture talks about the mind of God. It also talks about His feelings, such as jealousy, love, joy, laughter,

grief, and compassion.¹ God created each of us in His own image and, thus, we reflect these same emotions in our beings as well. One reason He has done this is so we could personally and intimately relate to Him and He could relate to us. God is not an ethereal puff of light floating around like a mist in the air. No, God is a personal being to whom relating can occur, as long as we discover how to do it on a spiritual level.

Another aspect of the personal nature of God is that He is a triune being. He is one God, existing in three coequal persons who are one in essence yet distinct in personhood. He is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Keep this in mind as you consider the Trinity. The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Spirit. And yet they all share the same divine nature and attributes, just like a single pretzel has three holes that are distinct from one another yet they still are connected together by the same dough. Each member of the Trinity has a specific role that they play, although they are equal to one another in essence, glory, power, and honor.

Let's revisit the parameters again because it's important that we build our understanding on the foundational truth: There is only one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 affirms, "The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!" God Himself declares, "Besides Me there is no God" (Isa. 45:5). Paul says the same: "There is no God but one" (1 Cor. 8:4). There is only one true God, not the god of this or that religion. Yet, while we have only one God,

1. See 1 John 4:8; John 3:16; Jeremiah 31:3; Proverbs 6:16; Psalm 5:5; Exodus 20:5; Joshua 24:19; Zephaniah 3:17; Isaiah 62:5; Jeremiah 32:41; Genesis 6:6; Psalm 78:40; Psalm 2:4; Psalm 37:13; Proverbs 1:26; Psalm 135:14; Judges 2:18; Deuteronomy 32:36.

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God is uniquely triune in His being, existing as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Bible gives us a lot of information on this reality. First, we see the plurality of God in creation: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The Hebrew word for God here is *Elohim*, a plural word. Even in the first sentence of the Bible, God lets us know that He is plural even as He is singular.

He shows this in the creation of man, because in Genesis 1:26, God says, “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image” (emphasis added). But then the very next verse says, “*God* [*Elohim*, plural] created man in *His* [singular] own image” (emphasis added). The text moves freely from plural to singular and back to plural. Why? Because our one God exists in three persons.

We also get a glimpse of the Trinity in Isaiah 48:16, where the pre-incarnate Christ says, “the Lord GOD has sent Me, and His Spirit,” associating God the Father with the Son and the Holy Spirit. That’s why you can have Jesus on the cross saying to the Father, “why hast thou forsaken me?” (KJV). They are two different persons. The Father is not the Son; the Son is not the Spirit. But the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. All three are equal in essence, members of the singular Godhead while remaining distinct from each other in their personhood.

The plurality of God also appears in the descriptions of God. The Father is called God (Gal. 1:1, 3; Eph. 1:2–3). The Son is called God (John 20:28). The Holy Spirit is called God (Acts 5:3–4). In fact, in Hebrews 1:8, God the Father calls God the Son “God.” This is why believers are baptized in the one,

singular name of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

The Bible says all three persons of the Trinity are at work in salvation (1 Peter 1:1–2). Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 13:14 that one member of the Trinity gives us grace, one member loves us, and another unites us in fellowship. These are not mutually exclusive ministries, of course. All three members of the Trinity are working together to sanctify us.

The Bible ascribes creation to God (Gen. 1:1), to Jesus (Col. 1:16), and to the Spirit (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30). The Trinity is active in prayer (Eph. 2:18) and in the blessing of the believer (2 Thess. 2:13).

As a triune being, He is able to do something differently from every other so-called god humanity has invented over time. He exists as love. God is love. Yes, God loves. But, what's more, He literally *is* love. No other god can make that statement. Other religions can claim that the god they worship can love, but they cannot say that their god *is* love. Because in order to love or be loved, you have to have existed in a state of having somebody to love.

So the question is: Who did God love when there was nobody to love? He loved Himself, existing as the Trinity. The Godhead eternally lives in community. He exists as singular and plural at the same time. God's personal, singular nature also includes the perfect unity found in His Triune nature. All three persons of the Trinity exist in this name God revealed to Moses, "I AM THAT I AM" (KJV).

GOD IS AN ETERNAL BEING

When we dig even deeper to uncover the attributes of God revealed to us through His name “I AM THAT I AM,” we discover that God is not only personal but also present, continually in the “now.” God has eternally existed only in the present tense. He doesn’t have a yesterday nor does He have a tomorrow. Time has been given to humanity for the reasons God has, in His wisdom, chosen for us. Yet when it comes to God and His attributes, He is the timeless God—forever existing in the present moment. To God, all moments are present. That’s how He can know the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10) because to God, there is no end and there is no beginning. Humanity lives in this dimension of time while God exists outside of it, not bound by it. Everything for God is “now.”

We may not be able to appreciate this attribute of God as much as we should because we are linear beings. We live in a continuum known as time and space. It progresses forward in a linear, beginning-to-end path. But when we transition to our eternal reality known as paradise, heaven, we will be in that place where there is no day, no night, no sleep, and no time, as Scripture states (see Rev. 21:23). Even the concept of “time,” will be meaningless once we transition to glory. God has always existed outside His creation of time while simultaneously operating in it.

I understand this is difficult to understand. In Deuteronomy 29:29, we read, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.” God keeps secrets. He

says so in His Word. There are things that we can glimpse and seek to comprehend but will remain beyond our full awareness simply due to the differences between our nature and His.

As an eternal being, God is self-existent and self-sufficient. He doesn't need food. He doesn't need water. He doesn't need air in order to live. None of us are self-sufficient. We are dependent on many things in order to live each moment in time. But God is completely self-sufficient. His name "I AM THAT I AM" tells us that. It also tells us that He defines Himself. He is not defined by anyone or anything. God does not have to go outside of Himself in order to be Himself. Everything God needs is within Him. He is complete.

Nothing can be added to or taken away from God. That thought defies comprehension because we don't know anything else like that in our universe. But that explains why the Bible says nothing compares to God (Jer. 10:6).

It frustrates autonomous humans that they can't put a limit on God. They can't box Him in. The test tubes don't work when it comes to Him, nor does cloning. The mathematical formulas don't equate when it comes to God, because His sufficiency means all that makes God who He is already resides within Him.

So God does not need you or me. We need Him. God is sufficient, complete within Himself. He does not need anything in His created order to make Him feel better about being God. Job 22:2–3 says that God receives no benefit from man.

Job underscores that again by reminding us that people at their best offer nothing of benefit to God (Job 35:7–8). Jesus said that even our best, when it's placed against God, makes us "unworthy slaves" (Luke 17:10). This is true for entire nations,

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too: “the nations are like a drop from a bucket . . . a speck of dust on the scales” to God (Isa. 40:15). He simply blows on them, and they cease to exist.

God’s self-sufficiency also means He is answerable to no one. He does not need our permission to do what He plans to do. Our complaints don’t make a difference either.

What are the implications of God’s sufficiency? First, you cannot help God. God will do what He is going to do no matter what you do. Therefore, He cannot be intimidated. You can’t threaten Him.

Second, God does not need to be defended. He can defend Himself. He can move people and nations. He can shut down and raise up. That’s why the Bible says, for example, “‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19; Deut. 32:35). He basically says, “I can do things you haven’t thought about.”

Third, God does not depend on us. He enjoys us and wants our worship and fellowship, as we will see. But when you come to know God, you have to bank on Him, not the other way around.

I don’t know of any more important statement I can make than this: God’s sufficiency means that we can find our completeness only in Him. This truth appears all through the Bible, but I want to take one of the most beautiful poetic passages in Scripture to make an all-important point.

David wrote Psalm 23 while reflecting on his previous occupation as a shepherd. David knew God. The Psalms reflect his intimacy with God and his knowledge of God. God Himself said that David was a man after His own heart. As he reflected, David realized that what he was as a shepherd to his sheep, God was to him.

So David wrote, “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want” (v. 1). He says that if you really come to understand who God is, if you begin to live in the light of who God is rather than who you think God is, if you simply let God be God, you will have no lack. Many of us are failing in our lives because we want to make God into a glorified man. David is essentially saying, “Let God be God.” In making this statement, we are recognizing that only God is self-sufficient, and we are not.

When sheep try to make shepherds into sheep, the sheep are going to be confused. But as long as sheep let the shepherd be the shepherd, they will have someone to lead them where they ought to go. Sheep cannot take the place of shepherds nor can sheep become shepherds. Likewise, shepherds do not want to become like sheep. Each has a distinct role.

Stop trying to get God to be like you, and simply let God be God, as He defines Himself to be.

When you do that, He will let you be you as you ought to be. David says, “I shall not want.” The remainder of the Psalm then explains that if the Lord is your shepherd, He will meet every category of need you will ever have. You may doubt that He will, but God never doubts. In fact, God never doubts Himself. He doesn’t scratch His head and say, “I wonder whether I can pull this off.” He never says, “Oops!”

That being so, it’s no wonder He has asked us to trust Him, because He trusts Himself. He knows what His name “I AM THAT I AM” truly means, even when we are unable to comprehend the various truths on God’s attributes.

This holiest of names for God, known as the *tetragrammaton*, is the name of God that He gave Himself directly in revealing

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it to humanity. In fact, the name is made up of four consonants and no vowels, making it impossible to pronounce. It was viewed so holy in the biblical days that the Israelites could not and would not dare speak it. So, to give it a way to be pronounced, they took some vowels to create the name Yahweh. Yahweh's root is in this name YHWH. This "I AM THAT I AM" nature of God speaks to His holiness. It speaks to His transcendence. But it also speaks to His eternality. As we read in Psalm 90:1–2, "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God."

This profound truth we discover about God's attributes speaks to His present reality. According to the Scripture we just read that Moses penned in Psalms, "from everlasting to everlasting"—God has always existed. When did God begin? From everlasting. But if you exist from everlasting, you have no starting point.

To put it another way, there has never been a time when God was not. Now, don't try to figure that one out, or it will cause your brain to truly struggle. I remember when I was a young Christian, and I just stood in my room one day thinking about the fact that God has no beginning. But how can something not have a beginning?

The evolutionists say that out of nothing a beginning happened. They give a lot of different reasons such as the "Big Bang" or cosmic energy or primordial slime. But they try to argue that something came out of nothing. I'll stick with God because everyone has the same problem: Who or what is the first cause here?

God existed from everlasting. There never was a time when

God was not, and there will never be a time when God will not be. It is very important to realize that God is forever. This truth has a fundamental implication for us: With God, there is no such thing as the succession of events. History is a meaningless concept to Him but very important for us.

We are creatures of history because we are linear creatures. We go from point A to point B to point C. We go from this event to that event to the next event, one after the other. We are creatures of the past, the present, and the future. We are linear, successive creatures, but God is not. He knows about history because He's the God of history, but history doesn't define Him.

The eternity of God also means that God is independent. Everything created needs something outside itself to exist. But God depends on nothing outside Himself to exist. He is self-generating.

Now I've got good news and bad news.

The bad news is God does not need us. He did not create us out of any need or lack in His being. Before there was earth or anything else, God was. When the earth was created, God had already existed zillions of years. In fact, even that is an understatement, since one can go back into eternity forever and never find a time when God did not exist. How did He make it that long without us? Because God needs nothing outside Himself to be Himself or to be complete. He is totally self-generating. He is totally fulfilled within Himself.

The good news is that God created us so we could get in on what He is enjoying: Himself. He created us so we can enjoy Him, benefit from Him, and participate in His world, not to make up for something that was lacking in Himself.

GOD IS AN IMMUTABLE BEING

God is not only transcendent, eternal Spirit; He is also immutable. *Immutability* means not having the ability to change. “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (James 1:17).

God cannot, does not, will not change. That makes Him unlike everything in creation. The second law of thermodynamics says that every transformation of energy is accompanied by a loss of available energy, so that future use of that energy is no longer available to the same degree. In other words, people change, clothes change, seasons change, times change, hair changes, and shoes change. But God does not change. His Word does not change. Psalm 119:89 says, “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.”

The writer of Hebrews testifies that God’s purpose is unchangeable (immutable, incapable of change), and to prove it, God swore “by two unchangeable [immutable] things in which it is impossible for God to lie” (Heb. 6:17–18). God’s character does not change. Neither does His love (Jer. 31:3). The Son of God does not change, for “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb. 13:8). God’s plans do not change (Ps. 33:11), and His knowledge is the same today as it was on the day He created the world.

Do you get the point? God does not, cannot, and will not ever change. Let’s go back to James 1:17: “Father of lights” means that God is the Father of the moon, the stars, the sun, the lights in heaven. He’s not one of the lights. We don’t worship

the moon. He is the lights' "Daddy." He made them. Then James throws in a wonderful line about God: "with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." That's sweet.

Every day, we have to deal with shadows because the earth, rotating on its axis around the sun, shifts the light of the sun every twenty-four hours. We have a shadow on our side of the earth at dusk because of the earth's rotation. Several hours later, that shadow will turn to darkness. If it were not for the lights up in the heavens (and, in modern times, artificial light), you would be able to see virtually nothing at night.

But then the next morning, that shadow will disappear again. It will be daylight here and night somewhere else, a never-ending process. But God is not like our twenty-four-hour time period. He does not move from dark to light, from night to day. He is constant. That's why heaven has no night, no "shifting shadow," since God Himself is the light. It will not be light today and dark tomorrow because God's nature is consistent. He is immutable.

Whenever we talk about God's immutability, someone always says, "Wait a minute. The Bible talks about God changing His mind. In fact, He changed His mind about destroying Israel after Aaron built the golden calf."

That's true as far as it goes. The Bible does say that God was going to destroy the people for their sin (Ex. 32:10). But Moses pleaded with God not to do it: "So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people" (v. 14).

Let me add another one to that. God also changed His mind concerning Nineveh (Jonah 3). He said that He was going to destroy the city in forty days (v. 4), and then He changed His

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mind. So we've got a problem here. If God doesn't change, how can He change His mind?

Although God's character does not ever change, His methods may. Here's what I mean. God's character is constant; however, if a change on man's part affects another part of God's character, God is then free to relate to that person out of that facet of His character rather than out of the another facet of His character.

For example, God was going to destroy Nineveh because of its sin. God does not change His mind about sin. But what changed was that the people of Nineveh repented. When they did, they appealed to another part of God's character, His grace and mercy. God was dealing with them from one part of His changeless character, His wrath against sin. But their repentance brought them under another part of His changeless character.

So God "changed" only in that He allowed the Ninevites' actions to pull in another part of who He is. God doesn't change in His essence, but He changes in His methods and His actions based on our willingness to adjust. It's not God who adjusts. He reacts to our adjustment. When you get right with God, you appeal to another aspect of His character—but that character never changes because it is already perfect.

By the way, God has given us proof that He will never change: the rainbow. The rainbow was God's promise to Noah that He would never destroy the earth by water again. Destroying mankind in the flood grieved God so bad that He said, in effect, "I'll never do it again, and to let you know that, I'll give you a rainbow as a sign in the heavens." Every time you see a

rainbow, you can be reminded of this changeless aspect of God and the peace this truth provides you.

Knowing and understanding the attributes of God will take you deeper in your spiritual walk than any other pursuit. It is in knowing Him that you know all other things because He is the source of all things. In fact, you will access spiritual power through knowing Him. As Daniel 11:32 says, “but the people who know their God will display strength and take action.” All boasting must be rooted only in the knowing and understanding of God (1 Cor. 1:28–31). He has made this knowing available to you and me through Jesus Christ so as to nullify the things of this world order. Yet, while knowing Him is an available pursuit for each of us, we will never fully know God until we transition to heaven (1 Cor. 13:12) and even then it will take all eternity to fully come to know our inexhaustible God.

King David said it best when he penned Psalm 139:6: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it.” That is not to say we are to give up the quest. Rather, it is to propel us forward as David also wrote about his soul resembling that of a deer panting for the water brooks (Ps. 42:1).

I applaud your search to know God more. It is a search we are on together as we explore, study, dissect, discern, and come to experience more fully the many attributes of our great and awesome God.