

A Guide to God

What Is God Like?

Basic Bible Studies
for Everyone



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WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

Stonecroft Bible Studies

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Welcome to Stonecroft Bible Studies!

At Stonecroft, we connect you with God, each other, and your communities.

It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done... God wants to be in relationship with you. And one place He tells you about Himself is in His Word—the Bible. Whether the Bible is familiar or new to you, its contents will transform your life and bring answers to your biggest questions.

Gather with people in your community—women, men, couples, young and old alike—and explore together what God has revealed about Himself in the Bible. Find out how a God who is magnificent and powerful beyond words has expressed His love and His desire to have a relationship with each person. And find out how He has made this life-transforming friendship with us possible.

Each chapter of *What is God Like?* includes discussion questions to stir up meaningful conversation, specific Scripture verses to investigate, and time for prayer to connect with God and each other.

Discover more of God and His ways through this small-group exploration of the Bible.

Tips for Using This Study

This book has several features that make it easy to use and helpful for your life:

- The page number or numbers given after every Bible reference are keyed to the page numbers in the *Abundant Life Bible*. This handy paperback Bible uses the New Living Translation, a recent version in straightforward, up-to-date language. We encourage you to obtain a copy through your group leader or at stonecroft.org.
- Each chapter ends with a section called “Thoughts, Notes, and Prayer Requests.” Use this space for notes or for thoughts that come to you during your group time or study, as well as prayer requests.
- In the back of the book you will find “Journal Pages”—a space available for writing down how the study is changing your life or any other personal thoughts, reactions, and reflections.
- Please make this book and study your own. We encourage you to use it and mark it in any way that helps you grow in your relationship with God!

If you find this study helpful, you may want to investigate other resources from Stonecroft. Please take a look at “Stonecroft Resources” in the back of the book or online at stonecroft.org/store.

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God Is

I don't know what I believe." The young woman's eyes were dark with questions as we sipped from our steaming cups of coffee. It was clear to me that she was unable to fathom the idea that a loving God existed, let alone that God would care about her or want a personal relationship with her.

I ventured out and asked, "What if I told you that the God of the Bible wants to be your Father? How would that make you feel?"

"I'd hate it," she said without reservation.

"Why does that bother you? What is it about knowing He's a Father that's so disturbing to you?"

"Why would I want to know a God who resembles a man who was so distant, so demanding—domineering even? What kind of a God is that?"

I looked down at my coffee, mulling over her questions...internally struggling with what she had experienced. Her questions made sense to me—and they are questions that demand more than a pat answer. *How would you respond if you were part of the conversation?*

I listened. She shared how her father had been physically present in their home, but was very distant and disconnected from her. It seemed the only time he gave her any attention was when it was time to enforce discipline or set her or one of the other children straight.

I gently continued our conversation. “If you would allow me, I would like to introduce you to the God of the Bible. This true God, who calls Himself ‘Father,’ is very much interested in you personally. He wants a relationship with you.”

There was a long silence. I waited and watched as she carefully considered the risk. I prayed in my heart, *Oh Lord, let her see you for who you really are.*

And then she spoke. “Okay, I’ll do it. But you need to know that I’m not even sure what I believe, and I don’t know much about the Bible.”

“That’s fine,” I replied. “We’ll learn together.”



This study will introduce you to God. Along with growing together in our understanding that He is a Father, we will explore other facets of who God is and what He is like. And while we can’t possibly cover everything about God in one study, our desire is that together we will discover—or rediscover—who He really is.



Prayer

God, I want to know you, the real you. Your Word says that when I seek you, I will find you. As I begin this study, help me to seek you sincerely and intentionally. And when I experience doubt, or when my own filters get in the way, and when I have questions, help me—yes, help me with my unbelief (Matthew 7:7-8, page 738, and Mark 9:24, page 769).

Who Is God?

Who is God? This question has perplexed humanity for thousands of years. Generation after generation has searched deep into

history and explored the far reaches of what is possible, hoping to unveil the ultimate answer to the existence of our universe. Everyone—even those who say they are agnostics and atheists—recognizes there is “something” that, even with our staggering accumulation of knowledge and discoveries, still cannot be explained. So the quest continues to discover the “who” or “what” behind our universe.

Human beings seem to want irrefutable proof that God exists. We want to understand how He works. And we want to know how He relates to each of us individually. This is big. It’s a little like an ant trying to understand how the mind of a quantum physicist works. But the wonderful truth is, there are some things, in fact many things, we *can* understand about God because He Himself has made it possible. And exploring those things is the purpose of this study, as we

- learn what the Bible says about God
- gain a deeper understanding of His character
- develop a deeper, more meaningful relationship with Him as our Father
- discover how different and exciting life can be when we know Him intimately

Our Source About God

You may not be familiar with the Bible, and perhaps you aren’t sure whether it can be trusted or whether it’s relevant to us in the twenty-first century. Much could be said about these questions, and later in this chapter we will consider them more.

Briefly, however, the Bible is the most radically life-changing writing that has ever existed. It is also, by far, the most reliable ancient writing we have today. It has been investigated, tested, and trusted by countless people over the centuries.

These are just two of the reasons that many people have trusted it as God’s own communication to humanity—His inspired Word, an

amazing gift He has given us so we can know Him intimately and have our lives changed by our relationship with Him.

As you read the Bible, test it by asking the following questions:

1. What is it saying?
2. What does it mean?
3. What is God saying to me personally?

As you consider these questions, you'll find that the words will begin to have an impact on your life. The Bible will gain more significance for you as you begin to understand how God wants to communicate with and relate to you and everyone in the world.

God *Is*

When you see the statement “God is,” what is the first thing that comes to your mind? Be very honest.

The very first words of the Bible are “*In the beginning God...*” There’s no attempt to explain *who* God is or *that* He is. It just says, “*In the beginning God...*” In other words, God is. Read a little further down the first page of the Bible and you see that He is the One who has caused everything else to come into existence. It can’t be explained in terms understandable to us, but the truth is...

God always has been.

God always will be.

Therefore—*God is*.

In the New Testament, the Bible expresses the fact that “God is” in another way. Colossians 1:15-17 (page 902) tells us about Christ, who is God.

What does it say about God?

There has never been a time when God did not exist and there never will be. He simply *is*. He always *was* and always *will be*. God is present tense. God is always *now*.

God Is Eternal

The concept of eternity is ultimately impossible to grasp because we, as humans, live within the limitations of time. Everything we do is measured relative to time, so we cannot comprehend timelessness. Despite the limitations of our understanding, God is timeless.

What do the following verses say?

Nehemiah 9:5 (page 377)

Psalms 102:12,25-27 (pages 459-460)

God is always present tense. We aren't. We live in three tenses—past, present, and future. We had a beginning point in the past, we are living in the present, and our physical bodies will have an ending point in the future. The Bible tells us that God created human beings in His image, and God is eternal. Although we have a specific point at which

we came into existence and have always lived within the restriction of time, there will be no ending point to our existence.

There's something else to think about, though. We tend to think of *eternal* and *eternal life* just in the sense of timelessness. But it's more. Read what Jesus says about God the Father in John 5:26 (page 813).

What do you think "*life in himself*" means?

Consider it. Can you sustain and supply your own life—body, emotions, intellect, spirit, everything that's *you*—without help? Can you do it for ever and ever? No. But God can. He has life in Himself, and He is the very Source of Life.

And here is the amazing part. God wants to share His kind of life—eternal life—with us. Go back a few verses to John 5:24 (page 813). When you believe in God, you receive eternal life now. Jesus says

Some people suggest that hell is best described as an unending existence totally and finally separated from God and His light, life, and love. God forces no one to choose Him, so people can choose to remain separated from Him now and for eternity. The apostle Jude described such self-obsessed people as "*wandering stars, doomed forever to blackest darkness*" (Jude 13, page 947).

that those who have believed "*have already passed from death into life.*"

All people will exist forever. But existing forever will be unimaginably dreadful if we are cut off from God and His life. No one needs to suffer this fate. As Jesus said, "*Those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life*" (John 5:24, page 813).

Now read John 11:25-26 (page 820). Share your thoughts about these verses.

God Is Creator

Before time began, there was nothing but God—no universe, no earth, no sun, moon, or stars—nothing. Then God began filling the emptiness, creating things out of nothing. He is the Creator of all that exists. Let's see what the Bible says about God the Creator. Read Genesis 1 (pages 3-4).

How did God create these things?

Isn't that amazing? He *spoke* things into being. All that exists around us is here because God spoke it into being. The one exception is humanity. Read Genesis 2:7 (page 4) and Genesis 1:27 (page 3).

How was the man created?

What caused the life within him?

Why do you think God spoke every aspect of creation into existence *except* human beings? What is the significance of that?

Think about how *personal* this process was. God didn't just speak the first human into being—He formed him, using *Himself* for a pattern. Not only that, He breathed the breath of life into him (Genesis 1:27, page 3, and 2:7, page 4). Do you sense the extra measure of love and creativity that went into the creation of humans? Could it be because God had something more significant planned for us?

There Is Only One God

Something else the Bible tells us about God is that He is the only true God. While there are man-invented gods, the Bible is clear when it speaks of the one true God. Read the following verses, and note what they say:

Isaiah 44:6 (page 551)

Isaiah 45:5 (page 552)

1 Corinthians 8:4-6 (page 874)

Revelation 22:13 (page 962)

These verses, and many others in the Bible, state very clearly that there is only one true God.

God Is Relational

After reading what's above, you may ask, "What does this God want with me?"

God made us so that we could know Him and have an authentic relationship with Him. Throughout the Bible, from the very beginning, God reveals Himself as in community. He describes Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. During the formation of the world and of humankind, God describes Himself as "us." Read the following passages, and note what they tell us about the nature of God.

Genesis 1:2b (page 3)

Genesis 1:26 (page 3)

John 14:7-9 (page 823)

The Bible indicates throughout that God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one Being. We have one God who is three different Persons. They are co-equal, co-existent, and co-eternal. We often refer to all three as the Trinity.

From eternity past, the Three have been One, and the One has been Three. They exist forever in a loving, giving relationship. This information is clear in the Bible, but to a degree is not understandable to us. It is sometimes referred to as the “mystery of the Trinity.” When we trust Jesus as our Savior, God gives us His Spirit to live in us, guide us, and bring us into His wonderful life of relationship.

What are you learning about God through His nature?

Through our relationship with Him, God has promised us an abundant life—a “*rich and satisfying life*” (John 10:10, page 819). One aspect of that abundance—an incredible aspect of it—is that it will continue on throughout eternity.

All of our earthly relationships will end eventually—some by choice or unavoidable circumstances, some by betrayal or abandonment, and some by death. Our relationship with God, however, will last forever. When we choose Him, no power in the universe can separate us from His love.

If you’ve been wounded by a past or current relationship, this might be difficult to imagine, but by the end of this study, my prayer is that you will know God and understand that He is 100 percent trustworthy. When He promises you that His love is as eternal as He is, it’s true! Write down your honest thoughts and view of God.

Now, read what you just wrote and turn it into a prayer to God. Whatever you wrote, He will understand, and the more honest you are, the better. He wants to prove Himself to you.

God Relates to Us Through His Word

Why did God give us the Bible? This is a great question and warrants discussion. Depending on our view of God, we might be tempted to view the Bible as a rule book, a list of do’s and don’ts. Or we might tend to think of it as a book of principles for getting what we

want out of life. But the relational Father God we are learning about cannot be reduced to rules or principles. He wants a relationship with us, and the Bible is one way He communicates with us. It is filled with life-giving messages of hope, love, and faith. When we read His words in the Scriptures, we will discover more fully all that He has done for us, so that we will know Him better and better.

What is your view of the Bible today?

Is the Bible True?

You might be having questions come to mind such as “How do we know the Bible is true?” “Is there proof of its validity?” Since we’ve been answering all of our questions from the Bible, let’s take some time to see exactly what it is. Is it a dependable, authoritative resource for our answers?

Approximately 40 different people authored the Bible, and all of them indicated that they were writing under divine inspiration—in fact, that claim is made over 3000 times in the Bible. Remarkably, these people wrote from three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa—and their writing occurred during a span of more than 1500 years. Further, they were from widely varying socioeconomic groups and had different levels of education and different philosophical backgrounds. Finally, they wrote in three different languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

Even with the variety of authors and the huge span of time and distance, the Bible is in perfect harmony from beginning to end.

Although it deals with many difficult subjects, each part of the Bible is dependent on the other parts to complete the incredible story of how God provided a way for people to be reconnected with Him—all who choose to believe and receive His wonderful gift of relationship through Jesus Christ.

Prophecy Supports the Truth of the Bible

Some of the books of the Bible were written by prophets. These were people who, under God's influence, foretold coming events before they happened. The purpose of Bible prophecy is to show that God exists and that He has a plan for His creation. By foretelling events sometimes hundreds of years before they occurred, God gave us knowledge of His plan and what will happen in the future. He also shows us He can be trusted to follow through on what He promises.

The fact of fulfilled prophecy is perhaps the strongest argument for the divine inspiration of the Bible. Many prophecies in the Old Testament concern the birth, life, death, and resurrection of a man called the Messiah—God's "Chosen One." The New Testament reports in detail the fulfillment of these prophecies by Jesus Christ. We don't have time to look at all of them, but let's look at two examples of Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in the New Testament.

The word *Christ* is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. Both refer to exactly the same person: God's "Anointed One" or "Chosen One."

Two Examples of Fulfilled Prophecy

The prophet Micah predicted the birthplace of Jesus 700 years before He was born. Read Micah 5:2 (page 706). What is the prophecy?

Now read Matthew 2:4-11 (page 734). Where was Jesus born?

Mary (Jesus' mother) lived in northern Israel, in a town called Nazareth in the region of Galilee, for most of her pregnancy. Bethlehem was in the region of Judea in southern Israel, near the city of Jerusalem. However, just before Jesus was born, the Roman government ordered a census to be taken for tax purposes. People were to return to the hometown of their ancestors to be registered. Joseph and Mary were from the royal line of King David, whose hometown was Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:1, page 223). While they were there, Jesus was born, thus fulfilling the prophecy that He would be born in Bethlehem. How likely is it that the alignment of all these events is pure coincidence? Only God could have brought all those different factors together at the right time.

Another example of Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled in the New Testament has to do with King David. In his poetry, written about a thousand years before Jesus was born, he foretold numerous details of Jesus' crucifixion.* Read Psalm 22:18 (page 423). What does it say the people did?

* Interestingly, historical research indicates that crucifixion was unknown in David's time. It was invented hundreds of years later.

Now read John 19:23-24 (page 827). What does it say the men did?

Don't you find it amazing that a detail as small and seemingly insignificant as throwing dice played a part in a prophecy and its fulfillment? Compound that small detail with the larger detail that the prophecy was fulfilled by *Roman* soldiers, who would have known nothing about the prophetic poetry of David, a Jew from the distant past. They would never have connected their actions with the man they'd just crucified. Only God, who sees all of time from beginning to end, could have seen to it that every tiny detail was fulfilled hundreds of years later.

A Reliable Source

Jesus had something interesting to say about the Old Testament prophecies concerning Him. Read Luke 24:27,44 (page 808).

Why do you think it was necessary for every prophecy to be fulfilled?

By the time you get through all the prophecies about the Messiah, to claim that everything was a coincidence would be lunacy. And remember, Old Testament prophecy covers other events besides the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The book of Daniel, for

instance, prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple hundreds of years before these events occurred. Every fulfilled prophecy further confirms the Bible is a divinely inspired book.

How does knowing more about the fulfillment of prophecy impact your ability to believe that the Bible is trustworthy?

There's one more verse for us to look up about the Bible being divinely inspired by God. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (page 915).

What does it say?

What are the five ways God's inspired Word can help us?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

There are many self-help books available for any issue we could possibly face—from drug addiction to stress and anxiety to trouble with children, and hundreds more. Some are beneficial, some aren't. Only one book has *reliable* solutions for the issues of life. It's called the Bible. Whatever kind of help you need, God, through His inspired Word, has given you every tool necessary to live an abundant, productive life.



To summarize this chapter, we've seen the following:

- God *is*. He is present tense, always now.
- He is eternal—He always has existed and always will exist.
- He is life Himself and wants to share that life with people.
- He is the Creator of everything in heaven and earth.
- He is relational. He has existed eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and wants to be in a relationship with each one of us.
- God recorded His inspired Word in the Bible.

Which of these truths do you think will make the biggest difference in the way you live your life tomorrow?

What questions do you have in relation to these statements about God?

What does the expression “God is” mean to you since you have studied this chapter?

Personal Reflection and Application

From this chapter,

I see...

I believe...

I will...



Prayer

“You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased.” Help me as I learn more about you (Revelation 4:11, page 952).

Thoughts, Notes, and Prayer Requests
