

“Is Your God Too Small?”

Isaiah 6:1-8 and John 3: 1-17

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=isaiah+6:1-8)

(www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+3:1-17)

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Who is God?

Imagine with me that you are in a deep conversation with a friend. You have been talking for several hours. Suddenly the talk turns to spiritual matters. Your friend is seeking to find meaning in life. And, your friend asks you point blank, “Who is God?” The question is framed in such a way that you have an opening to introduce your friend to God. What will you say? How will you describe God? Do you have an answer for the question? There are many possibilities for answers. You can turn to the Bible and find many metaphors for God. You can mention God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. You can talk of your experiences with God. But, how will you answer the question, “Who is God?” Let me suggest some possibilities provided by Ralph Minton in his book, God for Beginners. (Northstone Publishing, 1996, p.60)

God the General. God sits “up there” in command headquarters, directing the troops down here on earth. If the infantry gets a bit outnumbered, General God can always bring in the air force (angels) to join in the battle. General God is always totally on your side and against the “enemy,” whomever the enemy happens to be that day.

God the Coach. If you pay attention to the signals from the bench, you will win for sure. But Coach God has scruples. If you do not play by the rules, you will be benched. You might even get kicked off the team.

God the Computer Wizard. This God does not care at all what happens to us. Computer Wizard God set up the world, worked out all the programs, booted up the system, typed in the “do” command and then went on to invent something else. It does not much matter how many bugs the software has, Computer Wizard God is busy with other things and really does not care.

God the Cop. Here comes the fuzz! The Constable God has your computer brain hot-wired into master control and if you press the wrong button or try to access a protected file or get your pinkies into the wrong cookie jar, “El-zappo!” God’ll get you for that!

God the Rock Star. Some people think of God as a prima donna artist, a very popular, flamboyant Super Star who has lots of fans, lots of money, lots of connections, and above all, lots of ego. If you want to be part of it, you’ve got to be one of the groupies who follows the star around saying flattering things, giving the Star credit for everything good that happens and taking responsibility yourself for everything bad. When you are “in” with the Star, you have got it made.

A variation of this is the **Superhero God**, who will fly in and zap the bad guys, do marvelous miracles for the fans, and make you feel good all over.

God the Kindergarten Teacher. As long as you are in school, Kindergarten Teacher God will feed you cookies, blow your runny nose and give you a hug when you cry. This God will also help you put on dry clothes if you mess your pants. But once you leave kindergarten you are on your own.

God the Social Worker. God is very helpful, but only in the sense of giving really good advice. You still have to make your own decisions and take responsibility for them. And the Social Worker god is ready to talk to anyone needing a bit of advice.

A variation of this is the idea of **God as “best friend,”** someone who is with you all the time, who provides moral support when you are feeling down and goes for long walks with you when you are depressed.

God the Parent. As long God is a very good, very caring Parent. The Parent God, traditionally referred to as Father but sometimes also as Mother, is loving and tender, and has read all the books on how to raise children to be mature and responsible adults. Parent God hurts when the kids mess up. But even so, Parent God knows that's the only way for the kids to grow. They have got to have the freedom. Totally. The Parent God respects us and believes passionately that we can and will grow up. This Parent God gets really upset when the kids fight with each other, or refuse to share things with each other.

God the Lover. Like the Parent God in many ways, Lover God has read all the human potential literature, and wants us to be totally free to love back. So Lover god is never manipulative or bossy. There is always a shoulder to cry on, and when you ask, Lover god will be ready to go to bat for you. There are a bunch of Christian songs written about the Lover God.

God the Artist. God loves to make beautiful things – trees and ducks and people and worlds. The Artist God is wildly extravagant, using up the whole universe for a star-studded, microbe-punctuated gallery. It's a living art exhibit, and the show keeps changing. God has appointed the human race as the curator of this magnificent gallery. We are asked to look after it, to keep it neat and tidy, to love it and appreciate the intricate, delicate beauty of it all, and to make sure there is no vandalism.

Most of these descriptions of God have some truth in them. We could, if we had time, find Biblical passages to identify the truth in each one. Yet, by themselves they are incomplete. One metaphor cannot describe who God is. Indeed, God is beyond every one of the pictures mentioned above.

Let me suggest a way to describe God that is both expansive enough to encompass the eternality of God and intimate enough to share the closeness of God. We can speak truthfully that our God is an Awesome God and the God a close intimate relational God.

Our Awesome God!

The Prophet Isaiah encounters God in the temple shortly after his beloved King Uzziah dies. In grief, Isaiah seeks comfort in the temple. What he finds is an encounter with the living God. God is high and lifted up. God is awesome, pure, and powerful. God is holy, completely separate from anything Isaiah knows, has known, or will ever know. Isaiah encounters the Awesome God and knows that he will die on the spot. We in the western world are so accustomed to reducing everything to the lowest common denominator that we do not easily let our minds expand. Our culture follows the lead of the noted scientist, Ernst Haeckel, who was called "an evolutionary reductionist" made this astonishing statement way back in 1877:

"The cell consists of matter composed chiefly of carbon with an admixture of hydrogen, nitrogen, and sulfur. These component parts, properly united, produce the soul and body of the animated world, and suitably nourished, become man. With this single argument the mystery of the universe is explained, the Deity annulled, and a new era of infinite knowledge ushered in." (quoted by Loren Eisely, in **Quest**, 4-78.)

That is the statement of a man of limited vision, myopic in that he could only see the close-up scene, not the distant one. As was stated by that 17th century visionary, Pascal: "There are two equally dangerous extremes: to shut reason out, and to let nothing else in." Right now I invite you to expand your mind to the farthest reaches. Let go of the modern reductionism and let the Scripture open up your mind.

- **Our Awesome God created time.** Therefore, the most High God is within time and beyond time. The past, present, and future are concepts that we create to help us to understand time. God is not bound by our concepts. God is time and greater than time. The Bible teaches us this truth of time and God in **Psalm 90:4**, (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+90:4) "*For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.*"
- **Our Awesome God created matter.** Therefore, God is within all matter and beyond all matter. The black holes in space are created by God. God is beyond them. The galaxies upon galaxies are created by God. God is greater than all of them. The Psalmist writes after describing the power of God over all the earth, *The Lord rules on His throne, king of the flood forever. Pray that our Lord will make us strong and give us peace.*" (**Psalm 29:10-11**) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+29:10-11)

- **Our Awesome God created life.** God is life. God breathes the breath of life into this planet and any other world God chooses. Life itself belongs to God. Again, the Holy Scripture speaks of God the Creator of life in **Psalm 104:27-30**
www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+104:27-30. *“These all look to You to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them they gather it up; when you open your hand they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.”*
- **Our Awesome God is the Judge of the world.** All nations, all tribes, all people will one day stand before the eternal Judge who will completely know them. Everything you have done, said, thought, or imagined is known to God. God will hold you accountable both for what you do and what you choose not to do. The Scripture tells us that; *“The Lord reigns forever; God has established his throne for judgment. God will judge the world in righteousness; God will govern the peoples with justice.” (Psalm 9:7&8)*
www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+9:7-8
- **Our Awesome God is beyond all comprehension.** No wonder Nicodemus a high official in the Jerusalem Temple gang sought out Jesus. He knew something was missing. God was on the throne, but how could he get to him? Nicodemus is searching for a way to God besides fearful adherence to the hundreds of Temple laws. Nicodemus is searching for a:

God who is an ever present God!

In the darkest night, Nicodemus comes to Jesus seeking a closer relationship with God. Nicodemus recognizes that Jesus is from God. He seeks to know God more personally. Maybe Jesus can help.

Jesus surprises Nicodemus with talk about birth. Jesus wants Nicodemus to let go of his previous assumptions about life; to let go of his pride, to let go of his cultural addiction to power; and grasp a new relationship with God. Nicodemus has a heart to know the living God, but his mind is cluttered. New birth is letting go and experiencing new life. New birth is moving beyond the comfortable, familiar womb, and exploring a new world. New birth is God’s way of linking us to God’s Spirit. Jesus invites Nicodemus to place his trust in God’s Spirit rather than his own goodness.

Nicodemus cannot easily make this jump to hyper-birth. His understanding of God is still of the Awesome God of the Universe. Jesus must teach him about the God who comes as close as his breath. So we read of Jesus referring to **Numbers 21:4-9** (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=numbers+21:4-9), when God saved the people of Israel from death by having Moses make a bronze serpent on a pole. When the pole was lifted above the people and they looked up to it, they would be healed of their wounds and saved. Jesus says that God is about saving the world. God is about redeeming the world from Satan. Jesus is demonstrating to Nicodemus that God’s essential being is love. **(I John 4:16)**
www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+john+4:16

In Jesus, God is building a bridge to enable humanity to come to Him. In Jesus, God is providing a way of forgiveness to enable us to stand in God’s righteous presence. In Jesus, God is providing the possibility of a relationship to enable us to live the good life. In Jesus, God is overcoming the slavery of sin and offering the opportunity of freedom. In Jesus, God gives Nicodemus and the world a new way of understanding. God.

The Awesome God who is constantly present with us!

In and through Jesus Christ, we know the Creator God who is also our dearest Father. The mystery of God’s power and abundant love remains. The mystery of God’s creative energy is beyond our finite minds. Yet, the personal presence of the Savior, Redeemer, Counselor, and Friend is an experience that we can know and share. You can celebrate and share with all your friends that the Awesome God who created all that exists is the God whose greatest desire is to share the gift of love with very human being on planet earth. God wants to save. God wants a person to discover their identity and join the family in transforming the world for good.