

Hermann Rorschach, the famous Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, developed one of the most famous psychological tests used to this day. It's the inkblot Rorschach test. The way this works is the subject receives a series of inkblots, in which they are asked to respond to what they see within the image. The psychologist who's moderating the test records their responses and then uses psychological tools and interpretive methods to understand and assess the subject's personality characteristics and emotional functioning.

This test, at least so my wife, who has a PhD in psychology, tells me, is a projective psychological test that speaks much more about the individual rather than the image. The idea is that you look upon this image, and what's within you is projected onto it. So, in your interpretation of the inkblot, the psychologist actually learns far more about you than they do the image.

New Testament scholar Scott McKnight, in his book about biblical interpretation, *The Blue Parakeet*, talks about how each semester, he begins with two surveys. The first is a survey he gives to his students that's intended for him as the professor to get to know them. It is a series of questions about their likes and dislikes, what they believe, and so on and so forth. The second survey, given a little later in the semester, is intended to do the same thing but asks the students about Jesus. As he compares the two surveys, 90 percent of the time, the answers are almost exactly alike. One test asks what you like. The other test asks, what does Jesus like, and they seem to align.

Let's go to a social theorist, Baruch Spinoza, who years ago wrote this on the concept of God and how we image and map and project ourselves into our understanding of God, "A triangle, if it could speak, would say that God is imminently triangular, and a circle would say that God's nature is imminently circular. In this way, each would ascribe to God its own attributes, assuming itself to be like God and regarding all else as ill-informed."

This reminds me of the words of Pastor A. W. Tozer, who famously wrote,

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. We tend by secret law of the soul to move towards our mental image of God...Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, "What comes to mind when you think about God?" we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man. Tozer

Do you see the dilemma? Let's work backward a little bit. Tozer rightfully assesses the thing that comes into your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you. Back up one further to Spinoza again. Spinoza assumes that if a triangle could speak, it would assume God is imminently triangular or a circle is imminently circular. Back up one more to the Rorschach test. When we look at the image, we project onto it what is within us. The dilemma is that the most important thing about us is what comes to mind when we think about God, but the problem is often, we project ourselves onto the image of God.

So how do we know that we have come to know God, or if it is some projection by us? John Mark Homer wrote that often what we believe about God says more about us than it does about God. Our theology can be like a mirror into our own soul. How do we know God: this objective, true reality of the world?

We bring all sorts of questions at a basic level. Who is God? What is God like? Is God cruel? Is God kind? Is God imminent? Is he transcendent? Is he tucked away and distant from creation? Is God in creation? Is he an uptight, fundamentalist preacher? Or is he more of the free, easy going, progressive yuppie? Does God vote Democratic? Does he vote Republican? Maybe the Green Party? Is God good for the world? Is he bad for the world? Is God a cosmic life coach just trying to help you manifest your deepest longings into the world? Is God some self-help coach who's just helping to comfort you as life beats you up? Who is God?

This is one of the themes that's been subtly beneath the surface throughout the entire Exodus series. As God has been cultivating this people and developing his own nation or people, slowly, he has been revealing himself to these people. So, the task before the Israelites was the same as that of us.

For the next six weeks through the season of Lent, we're going to explore this question of who is God, but we're going to do so through two verses, Exodus 34:6-7. Because what we find in Exodus 34 is that God, for the first time, reveals his name to Moses. My theory is that we should get to know God on God's terms, not on ours. The challenge, and maybe the litmus test to check to see if our image of God is stemming from our own projection, is if God agrees with us on everything.

Does God always think just like we do? Does he hate the same people you hate? Does he love the people you love? Did he vote for the person you voted for? Does he belong to the same political party? Is he passionate about the same issues that you're passionate about? Do you ever just get mad at him? Do you ever

disagree with God? If it is such a hand in glove scenario with God, we should be cautious and assume maybe like the Rorschach test that we've projected ourselves onto God.

The reality is if that's the case, God is not God, he's simply a projection of yourself. And the insidious part is if you chase that logic all the way down, we come to actually worship a form of ourselves, not the God of the scriptures. This is what we want to explore through Lent, through the text in Exodus, and through how God has chosen to reveal himself.

John Mark Comer wrote a book called *God Has A Name*, which we're using as an outline. So, we have leaned heavily on his work. If you read that book, you'll hear all sorts of overtones. This is my footnote to say he deserves a lot of credit for the material in which we're wrestling with in this series.

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." Exodus 34:6-7

Moses had been seeking the presence of God, and he asked God to reveal himself to him. We will circle back to an earlier point in which Moses asked for God's name. But here we arrive at God giving his self-disclosure, the full aspect of his name. What you see are five characteristics of God's name. What's on tap today is: The Lord, the Lord. We're going to unpack what exactly that means.

After saying he's the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love, and faithfulness. He says he does not leave the guilty unpunished. You're going to have to wait to figure out why God is punishing children to the third and the fourth generation. It's actually quite life-giving when we get there in about four weeks.

This idea that God has a name is important for us to unpack because what's behind the scenes, particularly in the ancient worldview, is that a name is not just a collection of phonetic sounds that draw your attention when you hear them. It has much more depth to it. In the ancient imagination, the name is far more than just that. It speaks to the character, the essence of a person. It gives shape to their destiny and where they're going. A name in the biblical imagination has much more depth to it than it tends to have in the modern world. Let me give you one example.

In Genesis, there's a guy named Abram who starts the story. His name means explicitly the exalted father. Well, at some point in the story, pretty early on, God comes to Abram and gives him a promise, a covenant. God says, "I will bless you, and you will be the father of many nations, and through that nation, you will

bless all the nations." It's at that moment that God changes his name from Abram to Abraham. Abraham means the father of many nations.

You see name changes all throughout the scriptures: Simon turning to Peter, Saul to Paul. All of these are speaking about not just a name, like a change in that phonetic sound, but of a deeper reality, of a change in identity. The very character of an individual taking on something different.

So when we come to Exodus 34, and God reveals his name, he's giving us far more than simply what to call him to get his attention. He's saying, "This is who I am. This is the character, the essence, the core of who I am." But if you've been with us as we've walked through Exodus, you may be thinking that God already shared his name with Moses. Didn't he already have some of this exchange? Well, you're right. Let's flip over to Exodus chapter 3.

This is early on in the story, and it's the scene in which Moses is up on the mountain, and there's the burning bush. The Israelites are currently in slavery. They're crying out to God, and God is selecting Moses to lead the people out of slavery. Moses hears this, and he's a little nervous about confronting the world superpower and saying, "I'm taking your slave labor. I'm taking them and leaving," which is understandable. So he goes a little bit back and forth with God, and we pick up the story in Exodus 3:13.

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, '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, the name you shall call me from generation to generation. Exodus 3:13-15

I Am

God doesn't really answer the question, or at least not in the way that one would assume. Moses says that suppose he goes to the Israelites; he knows his people, they're going to want to know who sent him. He's going to tell them, "Hey, it's the God of your fathers." That may not suffice for the people. God gives him a little more. "I am who I am." Moses is like, "That doesn't help, but thank you." God goes on. "But tell them that I am has sent me to you."

He Is

Did you notice in verse 15 that God gives another name to himself? He says, "The Lord has sent you." So, let's dive into the weeds and understand exactly what's going on here. That phrase, I am who I am, which is the first response of God, is the Hebrew phrase, *ehyeh asher ehyeh*. This is the verb "to be" in Hebrew. So when God says his name, he says, "I Am." Now, what's fascinating

here is when later he says, "Tell them the Lord," what's beneath the surface there is the name Yahweh, which is the same verb as the verb *ehyeh*, just in a different form and a different person.

God says that his name is I Am, but when we say God's name, we say Yahweh, he is. Does that make sense? It's the same verb, but God says, "I Am," we look at God and say, "he is." "The name you are to call me is Yahweh."

Now, I love a few things about this. First, this idea that God says, I am who I am, could also be understood as I am who I will be. It's the same translation. So it means that God is unchanging, that "Whoever I am, whatever my character is," God says, "I will continue to be that forever and ever," which makes a whole lot of sense when we get to Exodus 34 and start to unpack these characteristics.

When you read something about God being compassionate and gracious, God says, I am that, and I will be that forever; I will always be compassionate. I will always be gracious. When it says later that he's abounding in love, this is God saying that I am abounding of love and I am who I will be. I will always be abounding in love. So we get this weird divide in which we love Jesus, but we forget the God of the Old Testament. We think they're different.

It's the same God. It's the same being. Because we read difficult passages, we often think of the God in the Old Testament as something different, and we're so grateful for Jesus. But what the text is going to demand of us is both of those are, in fact, the very presence of God. I am who I will be. I am unchanging. The same compassionate God as we see in Jesus is the God of the Old Testament. There's no difference, no distinction. God says I am who I will be. Then he goes on to say that when you tell them that Yahweh sent you. So how did we get to the word Lord? How did we go from Yahweh to what your Bibles translate as right there in verse 3:15? "Say to the Israelites, the Lord."

Now, my guess is in your Bible, where it says the Lord, it is in all capitals. There is a long, winding history as to why, but in short, as people were developing the oral tradition of the Bible, they were very cautious to not break one of the Ten Commandments, which was don't use the Lord's name in vain. It's actually, "Don't use Yahweh's name in vain." They got so scared to break that commandment, and they held such a reverence for the name that they began to translate it as the Lord instead of potentially using the name in vain. So they made this shift from Yahweh to the Lord, and that carries over into the New Testament. So when the New Testament writers use the Lord, they're using that as a placeholder for Yahweh.

Although this is a healthy reverence for the name Yahweh, it poses some challenging side effects subconsciously when we go from calling God his personal name that he wanted to be called

to the title Lord. It is proper, healthy, and not necessarily wrong, but there are some challenges that take place.

Turn with me now to John 1. I know we're jumping around a lot, but the payoff is worth it. I just want to show you how the New Testament picks up on this theme of God saying that his name is Yahweh to this concept of Lord, or the title Lord. But look at how we arrive at Jesus in John 1. You'll hear John call Jesus the Word. It's the same thing. It's Jesus.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word [think Jesus] was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:1-5

Now, you should hear echoes of Genesis. This is John's retelling of the scriptures. It opens with the same words, "In the beginning." John is retelling the gospel story all the way back to Genesis. In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. He's the same God, same person, right there, all the way back in the beginning. Then John plays off this imagery of light and darkness again. He wants our minds to be thinking about the creation in Genesis. That's where it goes.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. vv. 6-8

There was somebody named John, who was pointing to Jesus, saying, "This is the guy we've been waiting for." That's all that's happening there.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. vv. 9-13

Now, verse 14 is a very important verse in which John is pulling together all sorts of threads. I'll preface it with he's going to move from Genesis to Exodus language. So listen for the echoes of Exodus. *"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (v. 14).*

We covered a little bit of this in the Exodus series, but the phrase "made his dwelling among us" is the word tabernacle. God tabernacled among us—echoes of Exodus. Then he talks about the glory. "We have seen the glory." Think of the cloud on Mount

Sinai. Then, this one's a little harder to see, when John uses the phrase grace and truth, it's the same words that are linked to love and faithfulness, which is what we just read in Exodus 34. John is rewriting Exodus 34 to introduce us to Jesus.

What's the point? Jesus is Yahweh in human form. We have to catch that. That is why the New Testament writers pick up on this, and throughout the New Testament, they say, "Oh, this is the Lord." And they begin to call him the same thing the Old Testament people of God would call Yahweh. Jesus is Yahweh in human form.

This is why later in John 17, Jesus is praying with the Lord right before he goes to the cross, and we won't go to it, but he says, *"I have revealed your name, God. I have revealed and made you known to them."* Jesus in John 17 is saying, "Your name," the one you revealed in Exodus 34. Jesus says, "God, I am the embodiment of it. My character, my being, my essence, I am the fullest expression of Yahweh." He has revealed it.

The clearest understanding of the character person of God that we find in all of the scriptures is when we look at Jesus. If you look at Jesus, you see who the Father is, you see who God is, and you see who the Holy Spirit is. Jesus is Yahweh in human form. The early Christians begin to pick this up, and that's where you get the title Lord, which is the Greek word Kyrios. The word Lord, Kyrios, is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Yahweh. Jesus is Yahweh.

Let's get back to the problem with this. Why is this an issue? The problem is Lord isn't a name. It's a title. It was always intended to revere the name of God and point to Yahweh as the name of God, but the Lord is a title. In some ways, it's the function of Jesus, not the essence of him. An example is if I just walked around calling Lindsay the wife or if I called my daughters the daughter. It's not wrong. It is, in fact, the title that they hold within my life. But we laugh, and it hits our ears as weird because we recognize that this is not the language of intimacy.

The language of intimacy would be to call her Lindsay, or Love, or whatever pet name you may have. It certainly isn't to call her the wife. But often, the way we approach God, which is not wrong, I want to make sure you hear me there, is we call God the Lord. Back in Exodus 34, God says that we can call him by his personal name. "You can call me Yahweh." He invites us into connection. He invites us into intimacy. I mean, there's something beautiful and profound about that.

What often happens is that because we relate to God in his title, we've created a distance between ourselves and God. Throughout Exodus, Moses and the people of God learned the language of intimacy. "Call me Yahweh. That's what I want you to call me for generation upon generation." Let's unpack some of the implications of that because God begins with "Yahweh, Yahweh, the Lord, compassionate and gracious."

God Is Relational

The first implication is God is a relational being. God is a person. When I say person, I don't mean that in the sense of male and female, but I mean it in the sense that he's not an impersonal force. He's not a divine spark. He's not somewhere far off calling the shots. God is a relational being at the very core and essence of God. This is where that doctrine of the Trinity comes in. When we say Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we mean the three entities of God, but one being; it's three in one.

This paradox at the heart of the Christian faith is that God, at his core, is relational. This is where the New Testament writer in John would say that God is love. That concept isn't God is loving; he is love. That is an inherently relational term. The very core and existence of God is this cycle, this connection of mutual self-giving love in which the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Father. There's no hierarchy; there's no give and take. It's simply this mutuality and self-giving love to one another. That is the essence of God. It's the very core of who God is. God is love, a relational being.

This isn't to say that information about God is bad, but what often happens is if we put God out of the relational context, we place him in a category that's more of a chapter to be studied, a doctrine to be understood, or the right answer on a multiple-choice test. Again, I'm not down on information. I am still in school at this moment, studying God. That's important and healthy. But in that early part of my journey, I assumed that if I just learned more facts about God, then I'd be in a relationship with him. But that's just not true.

I can know everything there is to know about Lindsay, and yet keep her at a distance and not be in a relationship with her. Relationship is the language of intimacy. We revere the scriptures, and the scriptures are how God is revealed to us, but ultimately, our goal is not to love the scriptures—it's to love the God of the scriptures. The scriptures are the clearest pathway to our understanding, but it's difficult for us. We get it backward. The love of the scriptures is a good thing, but it should always cultivate and foster in us a deepening relationship with the God of the scriptures. In some ways, it's the means to an end. It's how we understand the God that we desire to be in relationship with.

God is not a doctrine. He's not the correct answer on some exam. He's a relational person, and he's a person who wants to be in relationship with you. Don't get caught creating that distance. Think of the story of Moses and the numerous ways Moses interacted with Yahweh. Think of their encounters, their conversations, their face-to-face arguments, their discussions; all of this is the relational language that we sometimes believe is something for back then. However, it's very much for here. We have the opportunity before us to be in relationship with God.

We often reduce our relationship with God to a formula. We think that if we have good behavior, and we do Jesus-type things and sin a little less, then God's favor will be on us. But could you imagine if you approached your relationship with a friend like that? What if that's how you believed you'd encounter with them?

I've come to believe that a lot of parenting is trying to break down that formula that our kids project onto us. They think that if I just act right and do the things my dad wants me to do and take away the bad things, then maybe they'll love me. It seems like most of my parenting is just trying to communicate to my children that there's nothing they can do to make me love them more or less. It's just there. It's just a love that's present. I often think that if I can love my children that much as broken and flawed as I am, as imperfect as my love is for my children, how much more does God love us?

I loved that last song we sang, *The Blessing*, He's for you, Church. The most important thing about you is what comes to mind when you think about God, and often we have this image of God as this angry tyrant up in the sky waiting for us to screw up. However, the scriptures attest over and over that he is for you. "May he make his face to shine upon you, his countenance be brought to you." Yahweh desires to be in relationship with us. Sometimes, I wonder if we're more comfortable relating with God as Lord.

The challenge and tension we live in are that we shouldn't hold that with flippancy. It doesn't mean that because the title is the Lord that he isn't Lord. He is that. There is a reverence there, and that's the hard tension of being in relationship with God. However, we must come to see God as the one extending the intimate invitation. "Call me Yahweh forever. Call me that name." God is a relational being, person.

God Meets and Responds

The second implication of this is that God meets and responds to us. It seems simple, and it flows right out of that first one. But do you believe that God actually can meet with you? We've spent the past three weeks or so as we've closed this Exodus series talking around this. God can meet with us whether it's in the dark night of the soul, when we sense the distance of God, or whether it's in prayer before the Lord. God can meet with us during meditation and we are encountering the glory of God, contemplating the glory, allowing that to transform us, and all of that. It doesn't matter; God meets and responds to us wherever we are at.

It's impossible to not see this if you read the Psalms. They're hard expressions of people who are pouring themselves out before God with both the raw emotion of the painful circumstances they're in, the elation of God showing up and changing in different ways the circumstances around them, and then the angst

and the tension of waiting for God to do something. All of them are testaments to God's presence, who meets with us and responds to us.

Your prayer is not hollow; they're, in fact, words that God hears. We saw that with Moses, and it seemed that when Moses interceded on behalf of the people, the text says that God relented. He changed his mind. He went in a different direction. Do you believe that in your prayer life? That God hears your prayers, and it isn't just a weird exercise before God? Do you believe that God actually hears the heartbeat of your heart? God desires to know what's going on within your life. God meets us in our prayers. But often, for whatever reason, we keep God at a distance.

My guess is, like the Rorschach exam, we've taken in a vision of God within our own life, whether it was from a person of authority in your life or otherwise, and projected that back onto God. We assume God is either the easygoing God who won't ask anything of us and, so we can just keep doing what we want. Live and let live. We assume God's just our big life coach in our corner, always cheering us on. Yet we find yourself caught in brokenness over and over again, and we wonder why our life is such a mess.

It's a bit of a spoiler of the gospel in that text in which God punishes the sin. Sin doesn't remain unpunished. There's a beauty in that, in which God punishes the sins of us for the purpose of our healing and reconciliation, the same way that it would not be helpful to my daughters if I never told them, "Hey, this is the wrong thing to do."

Some of us can view God as this angry, vengeful person. Of course, you wouldn't want to have an intimate connection with a God like that. It makes a lot of sense. I wouldn't either. But that's a projection of God. It's not God himself. Can we do God the honest service of allowing him to define who he is? He is faithful over and over to show himself to be: Yahweh, Yahweh, the compassionate and gracious God, abounding in love and faithfulness.

Church, what would it look like, how would it change your relationship with the Lord if we allowed God to define himself in his own terms? What if you hold the image of God you have before him and say, "Lord, I don't know if this is who you are. Could you take this and reshape this?" You would have the potential to reshape everything about how you relate to God. We often hide behind the term, the Lord, but God is inviting us in. He is, in using the language of intimacy, inviting us in and allowing that to reshape how we understand God and how we interact with him. First and foremost, it would change the way we pray. That's where I want to end today.

I'm fascinated that in the gospels, the one time the disciples asked Jesus to teach them anything, they asked, "Teach us to pray." Isn't that interesting? When you think about all that the

disciples saw. They could have asked Jesus to teach them how to do the bread trick. They could have asked him to teach them how to heal people, or how to raise people from the dead. There was something about Jesus that they witnessed for three years, which was the relational connection he had with God.

They saw that in Jesus' prayer and wanted that. "Lord, teach us to pray," Jesus responds to that with the Lord's prayer. It should be called The Disciples' Prayer. It's the thing he's teaching us as his followers to pray. It opens with familiar words, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

It's a beautiful prayer in which the very beginning of it, as Jesus is responding to the disciples on how to pray, starts with "Our Father." Not our Lord, not our God, although he is those things. It begins with "Our Father." The language of intimacy. I understand, too, that in a room this size, that image of our father is often the one we've projected on God. It's the very source of the pain that you have in your relationship with God. I can do nothing but offer my condolences and say, would you allow God to reshape an understanding of what a proper, good, true father should be?

Many of you have had an experience with a parent who wasn't one that fostered intimacy but fostered fear, concern, and skepticism. But I just want to attest that this Father language with God is, in fact, that language of intimacy, the vision of what a father is supposed to be, but for the brokenness of so many of us, isn't the case.

Jesus begins, "Our Father in Heaven." Now, this idea of heaven is not something distant. Our imaginations have been shaped by Michelangelo far more than the scriptures. "In heaven" is really "in the heavens." In the biblical imagination, there was the heavens, plural. God created the heavens and the earth. It's the air, the place the birds swim or fly and the fish, all that. There are the heavens.

Then, there's the second tier of the heavens, which is the sky. There's that third tier of heaven, which is like the place where we speak of God and Jesus. It just says, "Our Father in the heavens." Jesus is near to us, as one author would say, "as close as the air touching your skin." God is present. Jesus is here, "Our Father in heaven."

We won't go through this whole prayer, but that second line, "Hallowed be your name." Jesus understood his relationship with God so much so that he said, "Hallowed be your name," the essence, the character of who you are. The word hallowed is old language. It just means worthy. Worthy is your name. Set apart

is your name. This is the essence of our relationship with God. "Our Father, as close as the air touching our skin, your name is worthy."

As we walk through Lent, we're going to learn more about that name. We're going to hear over and over, compassionate, gracious, abounding in love. All these things about God that point to the essence of God, and I just wonder if at the beginning of Lent, we could offer this prayer to God of "Our Father." Could you lean in and accept the invitation to use the language of intimacy with God and see what God could do over that time?

As you sit in the presence of God, just be reminded of his presence with us and hear these words that Jesus, our rabbi, was teaching us on how to relate to God.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. Matthew 6

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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