

Sunday: Who is God?

AIM: The student will understand the awesomeness of God's nature, His love for us individually, and respond to His love by loving Him back.

Images

Pass out pieces of paper and pens and tell them to draw a picture or symbol of God, expressing his nature. It should be the kind of picture or symbol that they could use to help explain what God is like to someone else. After a few minutes, have the creations displayed and explained.

Then ask:

- Did you find this assignment difficult or easy? Why?

Discussion

Ask the campers who they think God is. What is God? What's He like? Is He a person, a spirit, a force? Have them share a little bit about what they know about God. Don't feel compelled to correct them or answer all their questions that might arise. Just use this as a time to get them thinking on this subject matter.

Misconceptions

Introduce this topic by saying something like:

Some people picture God as a person who looks like their fathers, only much larger. Others imagine God as an old man with a long, flowing beard, like Father Time. Still others may picture a blur far off in space, perhaps sitting on a cloud. But is this what God is really like? It's hard for us to come up with an accurate description. What are some misconceptions we have about God?

Take a number of suggestions. Misconceptions may include: no fun, a police officer or judge, Santa Claus, imaginary friend, etc.

God's Attributes

Say something like:

What kind of God do we believe in? We believe in the God of the Bible. And since we may not be quite clear on what the Bible teaches about God, let's look.

Read the following passages and facilitate a discussion based on each one.

- *Isaiah 40:12-18, 21-22, 25-26* – This is a very visual passage, so have the campers close their eyes and picture the comparisons being made between God and creation. Afterwards have the kids look at their hands and picture all the waters of the earth measured off in the palm of one hand and the entire universe measured off in the other one. Use this passage to emphasize how overwhelmingly huge God is compared to us and everything we know, but yet just as he knows all the stars by name and calls them out one by one (vs 26), so he also knows each of our names and watches us, too.
- *Romans 5:6-8* – Ask if anyone has ever done something nice for someone else even though that person was really mean to them. If so, have them share their story. Then explain that this is what God has done for us. Even though we sometimes do things that

displease Him, He still loves us anyway, even enough to give his life to pay our death penalty. Use this discussion to whet their thoughts for the next day's salvation message, but mostly use it to emphasize this BIG God's unconditional love for us.

- *Phil. 1:6; 2:13* – This passage talks about God's daily interaction in our personal lives. He's not a God who sits way up in heaven and is only concerned with important people, like President Bush or Osama Bin Laden. He is working His plan out in THEIR lives, which includes bringing them to camp for this week. Emphasize that God loves them and takes interest in their personal daily lives, everything from how they tie their shoes to their hardest struggle in life.

When You Say Good

Use this as a discussion guide. Ask:

- What comes to your mind when I say "good car"?
- "good music group"?
- "good candy bar"?
- "good day"?
- "good person"?
- How is God good?
- How should we respond to all this about God? (love Him back, share our lives with him, talk with Him through prayer, read what He has to say to us through the Bible, etc...)

Brief Discussion (repeat)

Ask the campers again the same question you started out with: Who do they think God is? What is God? What's He like? Take note of how/if their answers have changed. Gently redirect any skewed answers to the truth of what God's Word says based on your preceding discussion.

Thank God

Say, "We need to thank God for his goodness and love for us."

- We ought to thank him for all his blessings.
- We need to thank God even if things don't appear to be going our way.
- God deserves our praise and worship because of who he is.

End in prayer, thanking the Lord for his goodness, his love, how big He is and how He still loves little us, and how much you love Him back because of it.

Other helpful passages:

Genesis 1-2—God's creativity

Exodus 3—God's name

Job 38-41—God's power

Psalms 23—God's love

Isaiah 40—God's holiness

John 1:1-18; Colossians 1:15-23—God's revelation in Jesus

Romans 8:28-39—God's presence and plan

Monday #1: Good News, Bad News

AIM: The student will realize their sinfulness, Christ's holiness, and respond in confession.

Summary

The format of this study is “good news—bad news—good news.” The first section, Good News, focuses on the holiness of God. God is perfect, totally without limitations or imperfections, and completely good. This is good news because:

- **God is in control.** Although events may seem chaotic to us, a sovereign God is working his plan.
- **God is unlimited.** God’s power and knowledge mean that he can do and change anything and that we can never be lost to him (Psalm 139).
- **God’s will is best for us.** We can trust completely in him.

The second section, Bad News, emphasizes our sinfulness. We are imperfect, finite, full of sin; therefore, we fall short (qualitatively) from God’s glorious ideal (Romans 3:23). Our sin separates us from God, and so we cannot experience his presence, love, and direction. Even worse, we fall under judgment, and the “wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

The third section, Good News, explains the gospel—that Jesus, the holy, sinless Son of God, became sin, took our sins on himself, paid the penalty for our sins on the cross, and rose victorious over sin and death. Now, through faith in Christ, we can be justified, forgiven, and free to draw near to God. We can experience God’s love and plan in our lives . . . and heaven too.

DISCUSSION

Ask, “*What is sin? What do you think of when you hear the word sin?*” (Sin is anything that is contrary to the nature of God. Anything we do that is wrong, that hurts other people, attitudes, thoughts, hateful feelings, etc...)

GOOD NEWS

Print out the following verses on cards and distribute them.

- *Leviticus 11:44*
- *1 Samuel 2:2*
- *Psalm 99:1-5*
- *Isaiah 6:3*
- *Revelation 4:8*

Have selected campers read the verses aloud, one right after another, without comment. Then ask:

- What is the key word mentioned in all of these passages that best summarizes their message? (Holy.)
- What does it mean that God is *holy*? (He is perfect, without sin, etc.)
- How does this make you feel about God? How could this fact about God (his holiness) be good news for us?

BAD NEWS

Next, have everyone look up the following verses together, one at a time, and follow along as a designated student reads each one. After each verse, ask the discussion questions listed below.

1. *Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:15*

- What does God expect of us? (to be holy, just like him)
- Is anyone here perfect? When do we become “imperfect” and “unholy”? (at birth.)
- Why is it impossible to fulfill the requirements of the verses we read? (because sin gets in the way)

2. *Romans 3:9-20, 23*

- These verses seem to emphasize what we’ve already discussed. What do they say? (No one is righteous or holy; all have sinned.)
- What are the consequences of all of this “unholiness”? (separation from God, judgment, and hell)
- Why is this bad news? (No one escapes; everyone deserves hell.)

GOOD NEWS

Say something like:

I once asked someone, “Do you think heaven’s perfect?” He responded, “Yes, of course, because God is there. If it weren’t perfect, it wouldn’t be heaven.” Then I asked, “Are you perfect?” He answered, “No, of course not.” “Well,” I responded, “how do you expect to fit in?”

That’s the real issue. So far, we have looked at the good news of God’s holiness and the bad news of our sinfulness and separation from him. Now let’s look at the rest of the story.

Read *Romans 3:24-26* and ask:

- Remember these verses follow the ones we just read about sin. What does “justified freely by his grace as a gift through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (v. 24) mean? (We are made right with God through Christ who paid the price of sin.)
- What does Jesus’ blood have to do with all of this? (Jesus died for us, paying the penalty for our sins.)

Read *Romans 5:9-11* aloud and ask:

- What’s the good news about this passage? (We are saved from God’s wrath.)
- What does “reconciled” mean? (brought back into friendship and fellowship)
- What does Jesus’ resurrection mean in all of this? (It is proof that the Gospel is true and that Christ lives today to intervene for us.)

Read *Romans 6:20-23* aloud and ask:

- What is the free gift? (salvation, eternal life)
- Why is it free? (We don’t have to earn it.)
- Who paid the price? (Jesus paid the penalty for sin.)
- How can we obtain the gift and have our unholiness and sins covered? (We need only ask for it.)

MAKE IT REAL

Bring a pair of handcuffs and hold them up in front of the crowd. Explain that you want volunteers to put them on and then try to get out. There is a trick to it, but it is possible to escape. Challenge them to see who can be the first person to escape within 30 seconds.

Bring up the first contestant, put on the handcuffs, and watch him or her squirm. When 30 seconds are up, unlock the cuffs, remove them, and repeat with the next person. (Note: These should be real handcuffs that only can be removed by using the key.) If none of these volunteers can figure out how to escape, bring up a staff member who knows how. Put the cuffs on him or her and say “go.” Then he or she should simply say, “Will you please let me out?” That’s the trick! All the person had to do was ask. Then, unlock the handcuffs and release him or her.

Afterwards, say how this is an illustration of how we are saved from our sin. Trapped in our sins, we can try all sorts of ways to extricate ourselves. But the truth is that only Christ holds the key. He is ready and willing to let us out; all we have to do is ask.

CLOSE

Close with an evangelistic appeal, inviting group members to accept God’s free gift by giving their lives to Christ. Guide them through a prayer like the following:

Lord Jesus, I need you. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.

Explain that if they prayed that with you that they can now look forward to going to heaven when they die to be with the person who saved them from death, namely, Jesus. Explain that they now do not have to live in sin any longer but, with God’s help, can live a life that pleases Him, which is what you’ll talk about tomorrow.

Other helpful passages:

Matthew 8:18-22—Be totally committed to Christ

Matthew 19:25-26—Salvation is by God’s grace alone

Romans 3:8—Jesus died for our sins

Romans 3:23—No one deserves salvation

Romans 8:38-39—Salvation is eternal

Romans 6:23—God’s penalty for sin is death

Romans 10:9-10—How to be saved

Philippians 3:4-11—No one is good enough to be saved

Monday #2: Knowing God Personally

AIM: The student will know God's desire to be their friend and leave motivated to communicate with Him daily.

Father & Friend

Write "Father" and "Friend" on piece of paper. Have kids quickly throw out words that would describe a *perfect* father. List these words underneath the word "Father."

Do the same with the word "Friend." Ask for words that would fit a *perfect* friend.

When kids have come up with 8 to 10 words under each category, read the following passages aloud:

Matthew 7:9-11; 1 Corinthians 8:6

Ask:

- What is God called? (Father)
- What do these verses tell us about God? (God is good; God takes care of us; God gave us life and truly is our Father.)

Exodus 33:11; James 2:23

Ask:

- How is God described in these passages? (As a friend.)

Say something like:

Do you **really** believe that God is your heavenly Father and Friend? Why is this hard for us to grasp and comprehend? Perhaps because our experience with fathers and friends is mixed. Some of us have good dads. Some of us don't. Some of us have a faithful friend or two. Others of us have "friends" who have hurt us or stabbed us in the back.

But here's the point you need to get: Unlike my earthly dad or earthly friend, God is perfect! He always relates to us perfectly as both a Father and a Friend. He'll never let us down, treat us unkindly, walk out on us, or betray us. He will love us forever no matter what we do!

Discussion

Ask for their ideas on how people here on earth get to know each other and build relationships (spending time together, talking and communicating with each other, listening to each other, investing time into the other person, etc...). After some discussion relate this to how developing a personal relationship with God is no different.

Daily Communication

Say something like:

What a privilege we have! We have the opportunity to develop a close relationship with God, the Creator of all the universe.

Like any relationship, we must communicate if this relationship is to be all it can be. Good communication means both talking and listening, letting God talk to you through his Bible and

honestly telling Him what's on your heart and mind. Is it effortless? No! It takes work. But the results are well worth it!

So how do you begin?

A daily devotional time is a great way to get into the habit of talking to and listening to God. Just a few minutes a day of time with God will make a huge difference in your life.

God Talk

Focus on the importance of communication. Say something like: “Let's spend a few minutes exploring how we can deepen our relationship with God through learning to listen and talking with him.”

1. Our Communication with God

Look up and read:

- Philippians 4:6-7
- Psalm 86:6-7 (God will answer us)

Talk it out:

- What should we talk to God about? (anything and everything! Struggles, problems, thanksgivings, things in our personal lives)
- What gets in the way of our communication with God? (distractions, video games, TV, etc...)

2. God's Communication with Us

Look up and read:

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (the Bible comes straight from God's own mouth, His words for you, and is useful for impacting how we live our lives for Him)
- Psalm 19:7-11 (the Bible is perfect, trustworthy, makes people wise, gives joy, is very precious to us, and rewards us for keeping His statutes.)

Talk it out:

- What are some different ways to hear from God? (through what we read in the Bible)
- What keeps us from listening to God? (again, distractions of many kinds)

3. Devotional Time or Quiet Time

Look up and read:

- Luke 10:38-42

Talk it out:

- What does Christ want more—our activity or our time? Why?
- In what ways do we let activity distract our time with God?

When your discussion begins to conclude, discuss what they learned. Some tips on how to lead the discussion follow:

1. Our Communication with God

- All of these passages affirm the importance of prayer. They tell us to talk to God about everything that concerns us, all the time. God promises to listen and to act on what we pray about. Be sure to ask your students what keeps them from praying.

2. God's Communication with Us

- These passages affirm the importance of God's Word, the Bible. God gave it to us, uses it to teach us, and has instilled it with the power to change us. They also remind us that God reveals himself in nature. God can speak to us at almost any time through his creation or his Word. Again ask students what keeps them from listening to God.

3. Devotional Time or Quiet Time

- Luke 10:38-42 tells us that God wants us to spend time with him; that interrupting our daily busyness to listen to him accomplishes more than incessantly doing this or that.
- If your campers get stumped by the question about how we reverse these priorities, point out that it is easy to ignore prayer and Bible study while still going to church and “being good.” God wants the personal connection.

Recommend that each camper begins their quiet time with God by reading the gospel of John. Ask to make sure they all have Bibles. For those who might mention that they can't read, emphasize the importance of prayer and that there are other ways to hear what God has to say through the Bible, like pastors and the Bible on tape.

Quiet Time: How it works

Use the following points to briefly explain how a quiet time with God might look. Be sure to include personal examples!

1. Block out 15-20 minutes of each day (when you're awake). Don't allow anything else to preempt this time slot.
2. Go to a private place that's free of interruption.
3. Start each quiet time by taking a deep breath, clearing your mind, and asking God to say something to you through the Bible.
4. Read consecutively through various books of a recent Bible translation using a guide. Read a short portion each day – a paragraph, story or idea.
5. As you read, answer three questions:
 - a. What does the passage say (What are the surface facts?)
 - b. What does it mean?
 - c. How do I apply this to my life today?
6. Notice the commands, the warnings, the promises, the good and bad examples.

7. Underline verses that mean a lot to you and try to memorize them. Jot down key ideas in a notebook for later reference.
8. Talk to the Lord about what you've discovered in his Word. Ask him to help you understand what he's trying to tell you and to do what he wants you to do. Confess specific situations where you've blown it.
9. Mention problems, needs, and requests—including other people's, not just your own.
10. Finish by thanking God for his answers.

Ask: How do you think this kind of daily format would work for you? What adaptations might be needed to make it work? (Expect some negative reactions to emerge like, "I tried having a quiet time once and it didn't work" or "that sounds boring." Even if they don't accept the idea of quiet times now, remain positive. They'll remember it and the Lord will bring it to their minds sometime later in life when the seed may blossom.)

Wrap it up

Hand out the "Quiet-Time: How it works" sheet to each camper and encourage them to use this when they spend time with God. Answer any questions they might have about this and close in prayer.

Other helpful passages:

Jeremiah 29:13—You will find me when you seek me

Colossians 2:6-7—Gain nourishment from daily devotions

James 4:8—Draw near to God and he will come near to you

2 Timothy 3:16-17—The Bible teaches what is true and makes us realize our wrongdoing

Quiet Time: How it works

1. Block out 10-15 minutes of each day (when you're awake). Don't allow anything else to preempt this time slot.
2. Go to a private place that's free of interruption.
3. Start each quiet time by taking a deep breath, clearing your mind, and asking God to say something to you through the Bible.
4. Read consecutively through various books of a recent Bible translation using a guide. Read a short portion each day – a paragraph, story or idea.
5. As you read, answer three questions:
 - a. What does the passage say (What are the surface facts?)
 - b. What does it mean?
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