

THE NAMES &
CHARACTER
OF **G O D**

STUDY GUIDE
St John's Southbourne

Welcome to our new series exploring some of the names and the character of God. While the world around us scrambles to make sense of an ever increasing rate of change, Scripture anchors us in the unchanging character of the Creator. Over six sessions, we will take in Old Testament names like Yahweh-Yireh (The Provider) and Yahweh-Shalom (Our Peace), alongside Jesus' ultimate revelation of the Loving Father. Drawing on powerful insights from Andrew Wilson's book 'Incomparable', we will discover that these titles aren't just labels for what God does—they define who He is. The God we can know. Let's prepare to meet Him afresh.

NOTES ON SMALL GROUPS

Small groups are a great opportunity to encourage one another. Hopefully they are times when God is at work and people feel valued, listened to and open to the Holy Spirit at work in their lives. These questions offer a framework for discussion but please feel free to explore and develop your own discussions on God's word.

My suggestion is that you begin each week with time for one another before getting into the Bible - find out how people are, what's God been speaking to you recently, what have you found encouraging or challenging - those sorts of things. Then after reading and discussing what God's saying through his word, it would be good to pray together. You might like to use worship music, quiet times, and other ways to respond.

Please make time to enjoy spending time together, and enjoy!

FURTHER READING TO DIG DEEPER

- These notes have drawn ideas from the book 'Incomparable' by Andrew Wilson. I highly recommend it - short sections on many more of the names and character of God as revealed in Scripture. I will provide extracts for homegroup leaders but I'd encourage others who find this helpful to get hold of the book as there's lots of great content in there.

1: The Loving Father

Scripture: John 14:1-14

Introduction

For centuries God's people addressed him through His titles of majesty and power, but Jesus' grace opened a way for people to also relate to God personally. In this passage, Jesus points to the revelation of God as a loving heavenly Father. It's worth remembering that not all of us will have been blessed with loving parents, and for some the idea of a loving Father is hard. Let's be kind and gracious in the way we discuss this, and remind ourselves that whatever our earthly experience, God's love for us in Jesus is perfect and unending.

Discussion Questions

1. In verses 1 - 4, Jesus speaks about preparing a place for us in His "Father's house." How does the imagery of a "home" change how you view eternity compared to a sometimes vague concept of "heaven"?
2. In verse 1, Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me." How does anchoring our trust specifically in the character of Jesus help to quiet an anxious heart?
3. Philip asks Jesus to "show us the Father" (v. 8). Why do you think human beings naturally struggle to perceive what God is truly like?
4. Jesus responds that anyone who has seen Him has seen the Father (v. 9). Look at the life, compassion, and interactions of Jesus across the Gospels. What do His actions tell us about the character of God?
5. Jesus claims to be "the way and the truth and the life" (v. 6). In a modern culture that values many equal paths to spiritual truth, how does this exclusive claim offer deep security to a believer?
6. Read verses 12–14. Jesus makes an astonishing promise about asking for things in His name. What does it mean to ask for something "in Jesus' name," and how does this reflect the relationship between a child and a loving parent?

Prayer and Reflection

Spend a few minutes in silence before praying the Lord's prayer together. When you pray the words "Our Father," ask the Holy Spirit to align your view of the Father with the person and character of Jesus.

2: Yahweh-Will-Provide (Yahweh-Yireh)

Scripture: Genesis 22:1-18

Introduction

In one of the most intense and dramatic narratives in Scripture, Abraham is tested on a mountain and seemingly asked to surrender his long-awaited miracle child, Isaac. Right on the cusp of the sacrifice, God steps in with a substitute ram, prompting Abraham to name the place Yahweh-Will-Provide — "Yahweh-yireh".

Key Insight from Incomparable

This is one of eight places in the Bible where God reveals a compound name to people, adding to their understanding of the name Yahweh. The Hebrew word yireh carries the distinct sense of "seeing to" something. Provision is a foundational element of His nature; He cannot be anything other than a provider. He sees what we need before we even arrive and already has the provision waiting in the thicket.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Genesis 22:7-8. Abraham answers Isaac's agonising question with deep faith that "God will provide for himself a lamb". How does our past experience of God's faithfulness help us trust Him when a current situation feels impossible?
2. God waits until the last moment to teach Abraham to rely on Him completely - what would be different if he had found the ram on the way up the mountain?
3. What does the ultimate fulfillment of this name—God providing His own Son as a substitute sacrifice on the cross—provide for us?
4. The word "provide" is built from pro (before) and vide (see), matching the Hebrew meaning of yireh as "seeing to" a need ahead of time. How does knowing that God has already "seen to" your future battles change the way you face tomorrow's uncertainties?
5. Is it sometimes the case being prepared to surrender something important is the gateway to experiencing God's provision?
6. If Abraham had dismissed the ram as a mere "coincidence", he would have missed the revelation of God's name. Are there times we accidentally explain away God's timely provisions as mere luck or coincidence in our own lives?

Prayer and Reflection

Is there an area of your life (a dream, financial security, a relationship) that you are holding on to and not trusting God for? Pray a prayer of hands-open surrender, choosing to trust that Yahweh-Yireh has already seen to your future.

3: Yahweh-Who-Sanctifies-You (Yahweh-M'qadesh)

Scripture: Leviticus 20:7-8

Introduction

Leviticus can be difficult to read: dense with laws, blood sacrifices, and complex cleansing rituals. Yet buried in these strict codes is a liberating truth about identity: "Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am Yahweh your God... I am Yahweh-who-sanctifies-you." The surrounding laws and punishments sound harsh to modern ears, but we need to be aware of the cultural distance. The point of these laws is to emphasise the holiness of God, and ultimately to call people to his grace.

Key Insight from Incomparable

Without Leviticus 20:8, a series of commands to be holy can seem deeply depressing, leading to scary questions like, "How can we ever be pure enough to stand before God?" But this compound name reveals that our holiness does not depend on us, but on God. This is how the Holy Spirit works in us to make us holy—transforming us by the grace of God in Jesus.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it comforting that God's name is "Yahweh who makes you holy," rather than a name that demands our holiness first?
2. Have you ever fallen into the trap of waiting for a word from God such that you didn't make a decision? How do we know when to wait, and when to act?
3. How does knowing that Jesus offered a perfect, once-and-for-all, sacrifice alter how we read the regulations of the Old Testament?
4. In what ways does a self-made effort to look perfect usually end up in a mess?
5. What is one small, specific step of obedience you feel the Holy Spirit nudging you toward right now?
6. Even though the Holy Spirit did not live within people in the same way when Leviticus was written, God still revealed this name as an unchanging feature of His character. When you have the Holy Spirit living inside you today, how should that help us live a life set apart for God?

Prayer and Reflection

Can you share one area where you are tempted to play the "DIY expert" instead of listening to the Word and the Holy Spirit's guidance. Pray for one another, asking for the willingness to heed the ways in which the Lord is refining us and making us more like him.

4: Yahweh-My-Shepherd (Yahweh-Rohi)

Scripture: Psalm 23

Introduction

Psalm 23 details the deep, peaceful trust between a sheep and shepherd. By declaring Yahweh-Rohi, David reminds us that the Creator of the universe humbles Himself to micro-manage our care, safety, and rest.

Key Insight from Incomparable

In the ancient world, shepherding was an incredibly humble, dirty, and dangerous job. Sheep stink, and nobody wanted to be around them—which is why David, the youngest brother, was stuck with the chore. Yet God was prepared to get down into the mess to care for a stubborn, dirty people. The shepherd takes full responsibility for finding lush pastures, defending the flock from wild predators, and guiding them away from turbulent rivers. He protects the sheep through both defence (the rod) and discipline (the staff).

Discussion Questions

1. The word sheep appears in the Bible more than grace, pray, or church. Why do you think Scripture relies so heavily on this specific animal analogy to describe our relationship with God?
2. Shepherding was a low-status job. How does it affect your view of God to realise He willingly uses such a profession as an image of how he cares for us?
3. Look at the distinction between the rod (a wooden cudgel to fight enemies) and the staff (used to round up the flock) How have you experienced both God's protective defence against evil and His discipline to protect you from yourself?
4. Left to themselves, sheep might walk toward a turbulent river and fall in. When we fret about whether we are walking in the will of God, how does the phrase "He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake" offer comfort?
5. Consider this statement from Andrew Wilson's *Incomparable* (end of page 126): "Unless you have been disobedient to him, you are exactly where he wants you to be!" How does this combat the worry that we might accidentally ruin God's plans for our lives?

Prayer and Reflection

Read verse 6 aloud together to lead you into prayer. Commit to intentionally looking for God's "goodness and love" following you throughout the upcoming week, tracking small moments of grace.

5: Yahweh-Your-Healer (Yahweh-Rophe)

Scripture: Exodus 15:22-27

Introduction

Fresh off the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, the Israelites journey for three days into the wilderness and find only bitter water they cannot drink. As they grumble in desperation, God shows Moses a piece of wood to throw into the water, turning it sweet. In this moment of physical relief, God introduces a new name: "I am Yahweh-your-healer."

Key Insight from Incomparable

Systematic theology books sometimes skip over this name, entangling it in debates about the cessation of spiritual gifts or the timeline of the Kingdom. But these debates miss a vital truth: healing is an immutable part of the character and identity of God; it is part of who He is. Throughout Scripture, we find countless records of God restoring sight, curing chronic ailments, casting out demons, and raising the dead.

Discussion Questions

1. Read Exodus 15:26. Why do you think God chose a moment of physical thirst and bitter water to reveal Himself as a healer, rather than waiting for a crisis of physical disease?
2. How does Jesus' ministry—healing both physical bodies and forgiving sins—demonstrate the comprehensive scope of God's desire to heal a broken world?
3. Before this crisis at Marah, the Israelites only knew God as a deliverer from Egypt, not as a doctor. Does God allow us to encounter hardships and "bitter waters" if those hardships are what we need to get to know him better?
4. Look at the conditional statement in Exodus 15:26: "If you will diligently listen... and do that which is right in his eyes...". What is the connection between spiritual obedience, listening to God's voice, and the way we experience him in our lives?
5. Think about the exhaustive list of ailments healed in the Bible (internal bleeding, blindness, skin diseases, lameness). When you face a physical, emotional, or mental affliction, do you truly believe that nothing is too small or too messy for Yahweh-Rophe to touch?

Prayer and Reflection

Take time as a group to pray for anyone present who is suffering from a physical ailment, chronic pain, or any other difficulty that you want to share, anchoring your requests purely in the goodness of Yahweh-Rophe's character.

6: Yahweh-Is-Peace (Yahweh-Shalom)

Scripture: Judges 6:11-24

Introduction

Gideon is hiding in a winepress to thresh wheat, terrified of the Midianite raiders who keep roving around the country ruining crops. Into this chaotic, fear-filled setting, the angel of Yahweh appears, offering a profound reassurance that prompts Gideon to build an altar called Yahweh-Shalom—"Yahweh-is-Peace."

Key Insight from Incomparable

Peace is deeply sought after, yet widely misunderstood as simply the "absence of fighting." True biblical shalom is positive: it means wholeness, completeness, welfare, and fullness. To illustrate, Andrew Wilson describes a World War II art contest to paint "peace." The winning entry didn't depict a quiet countryside, but a raging waterfall under a violent storm, where a tiny bird sat on a branch right in the crashing water, singing its heart out. When God reveals Himself as Yahweh-shalom, He doesn't guarantee the fighting will stop; instead, He guarantees to be with us, leading us, right in the middle of the turmoil.

Discussion Questions

1. Is peace merely the absence of fighting? Many people, thousands of miles from a war, still have no peace. So what causes this internal lack of peace?
2. How does the image of a bird singing in the centre of a raging waterfall inform your understanding of what God's peace looks like in daily life?
3. Gideon was so scared of the Midianites that he was threshing wheat inside a hole in the ground. When fear paralyses our thinking, how does Yahweh-Shalom meet us in our irrational hiding places?
4. God did not promise Gideon that war would stop; in fact, he had to lead it. Why does God often bring peace within trouble rather than removing all the trouble?
5. Look at Ephesians 6:15, Romans 8:37, Philippians 4:7. How does the "peace of God" act like a sentry patrolling our hearts and minds during a spiritual battle?
6. God told Gideon, "Peace be to you. Do not fear..." In what area of your life do you need to hear Yahweh-Shalom speak those exact words to you?

Prayer and Reflection

Conclude this series by inviting group members to share which name of God spoke the most to them over the course of the studies, and pray for one another based on those specific needs.