

# Jesus, the Bible, and You in 7 Steps - God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please have your Bibles open. You read from the screens, and it would be great if you had a Bible with you either on a phone! or in physical book form. They can be found at either entrance.

Last week, Rich was helping us see from Ephesians that it's knowing God more than anything else that will equip us to face life. Better than answers to our specific questions or changes in our circumstances, it's knowing God and his plan and his promises. And what we're trying to do with this series is just build a big and hopefully beautiful picture of God and his work so that when we come to a part of his word or when we come across something in our lives, we have perspective. We know what's going on. We know how to read it. And this morning, we begin where everything begins. If you turn to Genesis 1.1, you probably know it off by heart. You will find these words. In the beginning, God.

Did you know that the Bible actually doesn't set out to give evidence for the existence of God? It never does that. Instead, it assumes that his existence is evident. It doesn't argue for his existence. He just assumes that God exists in the same way that when we wake up, we assume the sun will rise. The Bible assumes God because God explains how the world came to be. You know the logic, don't we? Nothing doesn't produce something. Chaos doesn't produce order. The lesser cannot bring forth the greater. The impersonal cannot bring forth the personal.

That's the logic, isn't it? No. God made the world for himself to love it. And it reflects him. And God explains the way that the world is and why it is that way, doesn't it? The world's beautiful. But it's broken as well. How do you make sense of beauty without God?

It has no functional place. Things kind of would work just as well, even if there was no beauty. But we know the world is beautiful. That's how we read it. And it is so because it reflects his maker. God is beautiful and he values beauty. And the world is broken, isn't it? Full of suffering we can't explain, problems we can't fix because the world has divorced God as its maker. And God explains what we see inside us. Human beings, wonderful, complex in ways that we don't even fully understand yet we can do and we can develop amazing things. Is that blind chance? No. It's by God's design, isn't it? And yet at the same time we have to be taught how to share. And we have to be protected from the consequences of crime. Why? Because of what God calls sin. And God's existence explains the things that most of us believe in as well.

[ 3 : 27 ] Don't we believe in compassion, equal dignity for human beings, freedom, sacrificial service, love? Those values come from who God is. They don't come from atheism or secularism or Hinduism or Islam or any other world faith. And so God isn't a feature of the landscape. You know, if you like him, he's over there. And he's not sort of spread out through the DNA of the whole world. No, he created the whole world and everyone and everything in it and he holds it in his hand. So C.S. Lewis can say that he believes in God as he believes the sun has risen. Not only because I can see it, but because by it I see everything else. Short answer, the world is because God is. Now all of that helps us a little bit, doesn't it? A little bit. But we don't really want a conceptual God, a God who just exists in logic.

We want to know God. That's what we said. We need to hope in someone, don't we? Not in something. Someone who can do the stuff that we can't do.

If you know somebody who's powerful, who's in charge, that gives you hope that stuff might change, right? Uncontrollable, impersonal forces, they don't give you hope.

And we can know God because God reveals himself. And in Psalm 145, he reveals himself to be a personal God. So as we look at this Psalm, let's get to know him better. Let's remind ourselves of what our wonderful God is like as we start this year. Psalm 145 is an acrostic. I don't know if you know what that means. It means basically that each verse starts with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Aleth, Beit, Gimel, Dalet, all that sort of stuff. This Psalm basically is telling us about the ABCs of God. That's what it's here for. It's David's last Psalm. It's his final message, if you like.

[ 5 : 38 ] And the things we're going to say today, maybe they'll seem like bread and butter to you. I don't know. Maybe you've been a believer for a long time. Maybe not. I think after Christmas, maybe we could all stand some plain food, couldn't we? So if it comes across as bread and butter, think that.

The ABC of God is just this. So friends, if you're tired and you know you're going to fall asleep before the end of this, here's what you need to remember. The ABC of God is that he is great, that he is good to all, and that he is gracious to save. That means he saves those who don't love him, and he stays near to those who he saves. So let's start right at the beginning. God is unfathomably great. Think more about the sun for a minute. Sorry, it's small writing, isn't it? Probably difficult to read. Here's how much energy the sun puts out. 3.8 times 10 to the power of 26 joules of energy per seconds. Every second of every minute of every hour of every day of every week of every month of every year of every decade for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of decades. That is incredible, isn't it?

There's... I hardly need to say it. There's nothing on earth that comes even close to that level of power and consistency and activity, does it? Nothing. You don't plug into the sun.

The sun beams out that kind of power, whether you like it or not. That is the kind of great that God is. Let's look at verse 3.

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. His greatness no one can fathom. David sings, God is unfathomably great. Just connect that with all that we've been reading in this wonderful book by Jen Wilkin. If you haven't had the chance to go through that with us in community groups, pick up a copy. It will encourage you. You can have this one if you really want. Fantastic.

[ 7 : 50 ] It tells us that he's infinite, that he's incomprehensible, that he's independent, that he's perfect. I depend on my mum and dad for my existence and a bit of food occasionally as well.

God does not depend on anybody. He is self-existing. And all that he is, he is constantly and consistently and completely. Are you like that? I'm not. That is amazing, isn't it? Just take one thing about God.

God is completely saturated with justice and with mercy. He isn't kind of over here being just a little bit some of the time and then over here in some other part of him he's being merciful.

No, he is just and merciful all the way through without any contradiction at all. Because true justice requires mercy. And mercy is pretty meaningless without justice, isn't it?

God is as holy as it is possible to be. Like the Son, he's so radioactive in his holiness that nothing imperfect, no failure, no misdeed can come anywhere near him. Not a white lie, not a secret thought. And yet, God is so loving that people accuse him of being unfair.

[ 9 : 24 ] And he's so just that he's being accused of being unloving. And he's both of these things at the same time without any contradiction.

And God is the Trinity. He's incomprehensible because he is three in one. Not three parts making one whole, no. Not three overlapping circles like the Venn diagrams, no. He is three whole persons and yet he is one being. Can you get your head around that?

He is never incomplete because as the three who is one, he's never alone. He is love because he exists in constant living and loving relationship.

Dad joke alert. He is one, de fully three. Do you get it? I don't think you get it. I'm going to say it again. He is one, de fully three. If you still don't get it after that, come and ask me afterwards. I'll explain it.

Now, in you and me, those sorts of things, justice and mercy and goodness and kindness, they're kind of mixed up and jumbled about, aren't they? With sometimes good motives and sometimes bad motives and we have some opportunities but we also have some limitations. But with God, those things are pure and integrated and completely unlimited in theory and in practice. Is your mind bogging yet?

[ 11 : 01 ] How can that be? It is because God is wonderfully, unfathomably, unimaginably, incredibly, utterly great.

And if you were to look at verses four to six, you can see that David sings, that we see that from his works, his mighty acts, his powerful deeds. And David has in mind there creation, salvation and restoration. Just think about the first of those for a moment. I know some of you were on holiday in

the Alps in the summer and over Christmas as well. Just think of yourself standing at the foot of a mountain looking up. It's awesome, isn't it? The stuff that there is in this world. The world is awesome because God is awesome. And that gives us such hope. We need someone who doesn't fail like us. He can do the things we cannot do.

We don't always need to be enough because he is. We don't always need to know the answer because he does.

It's been a frightening week, hasn't it, if you read the news? We need this hope. He can end the wars we can't. He can restrain evil. He can build a kingdom which isn't rocked by its leaders or by revolution, but is kind and good and fair all the way through. He can.

In fact, he is. He's doing it right now. He's using us. Because part of his greatness is that he is the head of the church and he is the source of all of the amazing people and gifts that we have here at Bethel.

[12:53] And he's using us to build that kingdom. So God is unfathomably great. But if we're to be reassured, I think then we need to know more, don't we? We need to know more about this personal great God.

If you're thinking of marrying or maybe signing a partnership with someone or something like that, you don't really want to see a CV, do you? You want to meet them. It's not enough to know they're great on paper because they could be great and horrible. No, you need to know them. You need to meet them.

So secondly, we learn, verse 9, that God is good to all. Elroy was praying it earlier. We know there is good in the world, don't we? You'd have to be blind to believe there's no good in the universe because we've all felt it. We've all been part of it. We've all seen it. But where does it come from? Why isn't the world just a pitiless struggle to survive long enough to pass on our genetic material? Why isn't the world that? Why do we even have this concept of good that seems common in some way to all of humanity?

It has to have a source, doesn't it? It has to come from somewhere. That idea, that goodness itself. The Bible says, yes, it does. It comes from a person, someone who embodies and perfectly lives out that goodness.

[14:29] Verse 9, the Lord is good to all. He has compassion on all that he has made. God is good and his goodness flows out from him to us. And it's indiscriminate. All of us have received things from him that we cannot give to ourselves, starting with life. And in this country, beyond that, the huge blessings of living in 21st century Western Europe. These things come from his hand. We couldn't have given them to ourselves. And all of us, even those who suffer daily, and some of us do, don't we, suffer daily, all of us have been spared dreadful pain and difficulty that God has protected us from.

Things we can't even conceive of. It's what's called common grace. God is good to all. And he's not stingy about it. Look at verse 7. They will celebrate your abundant goodness. God is generous. It's humanity who do a bad job of stewarding God's goodness, who don't share it out equally. God is good to all.

He sustains it all. Even those, amazingly, who hate him and reject him and do everything that grieves him. God is good. God is good. And he is good to all abundantly. And that he is good as well as great gives us not just hope, but it gives us confidence in his character, doesn't it? Praise God that he is good as well as great. But if we're honest, getting good things doesn't fix the problem of us, does it? Because there are plenty of people in the world who have lots of good things and they aren't okay and they do bad stuff. Well, everybody, in fact. Let me make it clearer. If there's a God, we need him to be more than good, don't we? And praise God, he is. Let's read verse 8 together.

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. Gracious just means that he gives us love, gives us blessings that we don't deserve and we couldn't earn. He loves those who don't love him. In fact, Augustine says he loves each one of us as if there were only one of us. He loves you as if you were the only human being alive. Amazing. How can he do that? What shape does that take? If you were looking at verse 13 and verse 17, you would see that God is trustworthy. He is faithful to his promises. His promises are how he relates to us.

[17:36] And those are also called covenants in the Bible. You'll find that word throughout. God is gracious because he is a covenant-keeping God. That is grace because humanity, Israel, God's Old Testament people, us, we don't keep our end of the agreement with God. So he's perfectly free if he

wants not to keep his. But he does. God keeps his promises and his promises to his people throughout the Bible are, I will free you. I will forgive you. I will bless you and I will restore you.

In other words, I will save you. Let's look at verse 19 together. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him. He hears their cry and saves them.

God's graciousness is seen in the fact that he saves us. And when it comes to salvation, he's slow to anger and he is rich in love. 2 Peter chapter 3 verse 9 says, he's not slow in keeping his promises, as some understand slowness.

He is patient with us, not wanting any to be lost. So his anger when it comes is slow like a lava flow. You're not turning it back, but he's not rushing. His love breaks out like a flash flood which soaks the whole country in seeds and in nutrients, rich in love.

And those he saves, he watches over, verse 20. The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. Literally, that means he will keep them until the end.

[ 19 : 33 ] And those who save, who are saved by him, they love him. And for those who love him and don't treat him like he's tame, God's graciousness means that he is near.

Look at verse 18. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. Which means he's not only transcendent, far above us in greatness.

He is imminent, near to us in grace. And we see that most of all in the incarnation, don't we? God drawing near to us by becoming human in the person of Jesus, which we've just celebrated at Christmas.

And then staying near to us through his Holy Spirit. And that gracious nearness, what does that look like? Verse 14, it means that he doesn't kick us when we're down.

He doesn't pile guilt on top of a guilty conscience. He lifts us up when we're bent double, when we're broken. The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.

[ 20 : 44 ] The Lord is near to all who call on him. It means when we fall on our faces in front of everybody, he's the first to step out and pick us up.

And unashamedly stand next to us. And do you know what's really comforting? That his nearness doesn't depend on us feeling like he is near. We can see here it depends on his graciousness. On who he is. Which doesn't change. That is why he is always near. To those who love him. It depends on his unchanging grace.

And in the end, his grace will satisfy our deepest desires. Verse 19, he fulfills the desires of those who fear him. Even if that's in his time.

And not ours. And so we don't just have a reason for hope and confidence. But now we have comfort too. Don't we? Because God is not just great and good.

[ 21 : 45 ] He is gracious. Which means he's near those who love him. There's a warning here too. It's not enough to like the idea of this God.

We're called to love him in truth. And submit to him in our hearts. Not just with our lips. Because, verse 20. All the wicked he will destroy.

Just look at the joy that knowing this God produces in David. Just go back to verse 7.

This is how we're to respond. They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. Knowing God this way. Knowing him to be great and good to all and gracious.

Leads David to celebrate. Celebrate. And he does that in two ways. In two ways which I hope will shape our lives in 2026. And the first of those is that he praises.

[ 22 : 52 ] Verse 10. All you have made will praise you, O Lord. And verse 21. My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord. We need to keep our eyes on God.

And not on our circumstances, don't we? On this God. This year. And one of the best ways to do that. Is to do what David does. Sing. Sing to God.

About his greatness and goodness and graciousness. As exactly we've been doing this morning. Haven't we? It doesn't matter if you're out of tune. It doesn't matter that you hate singing. What matters is who you're singing to.

And that you're singing about him. So come and praise God in 2026. Secondly. David encourages us as we praise to tell other people about how great and good and gracious our God is.

Verse 4. One generation will commend your works to another. They will tell of your mighty acts.

Verse 6.

[ 24 : 01 ] They will tell of the power of your awesome works. And I will proclaim your great deeds.

Verse 11. They will tell of the glory of your kingdom.

And speak of your might. Why? So that all men may know of your mighty acts. And the glorious splendor of your kingdom. That's the reason we praise, isn't it?

In order to proclaim how great and good and gracious our God is. So that all people will know. And what are we primarily talking about?

I've been reading a series of books with our youngest over Christmas. About the Christmassaurus. Have you heard of the Christmassaurus?

It's a fairly new series, I think. And the title probably says it all. There's a dinosaur and Christmas. I mean, what could be more believable, right? One of the books is called The Christmassaurus and the Naughty List.

[ 25 : 10 ] Now, we know the problems with the naughty list and the nice list, don't we? It's all about moral achievement, outward good behavior, earning our reward. Nothing to do with the heart or the soul.

That's one problem. And the other problem is that if this God is the standard, then I don't make the nice list. Do you?

I'm a good person, as my defense before God. Or be nice, as the lesson that we teach, is a broken record. It has no power.

No power to save us or change us. And I just love that at Bethel, we are busy with a better story than that. Aren't you glad of that? It's the story of the cross.

Because the cross reveals how God's greatness and goodness and graciousness saves us.

Doesn't it?

[ 26 : 17 ] It reveals Jesus to be the great king. It reveals Jesus to be a great king whose arms are open wide to all.

Doesn't it? And it reveals Jesus to be the king who, in grace, humbles himself, comes down to us, to die sacrificially in our place, so that we can be done with trying to earn our way into God's good graces.

So that our safety and our joy and our lives depend instead on God's goodness and grace. And that we can live in the light of that.

Christ on the cross. God is great. God is good. God is gracious to all. That is our God. Lord God, help us in our hearts to praise you as the great and good and gracious God.

We pray, 2026, continue to be our God. Help us to rejoice as David rejoices. Celebrate your goodness in praise.

[ 27 : 37 ] And as we praise, to proclaim how good you are. We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen.