

God is Personal & God is Holy

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we have come from all different parts of the city and we have had all sorts of different types of weeks. Some of us have had really crummy weeks, others have had really good weeks.

Some of us are dealing with some tough stuff, others are just kind of flying high. Lord, wherever we may be, Lord, I pray that you will come and by your word, by your Holy Spirit, minister to us in the place that we need your correction and your encouragement and your great love.

We pray all these things in Christ's name. Amen. Please be seated. Good. Obviously, we live in a celebrity culture and a part of a celebrity culture is that we look to celebrities as almost transcendent types of people.

They're not like you and I. They're somehow on like a plateau, a next level of existence. And yet, we want to come near to them.

We want to connect with them. We want them to be intimate with us. We want to be friends with them. At least some of us might. You might be too shy. That's totally fine.

[1 : 22] A couple of stories. When I was 11, I don't exactly know. We were in Toronto. We were at some kind of, I think it was like a car show or something. Anyways, Daryl Sittler was there. I was 11 years old.

I had no idea who Daryl Sittler was. There was a famous guy giving autographs. So, I went up to him. I had no idea who he was. And I don't know if this is like revisionist history, but I remember him kind of making fun of me that I didn't know who he was.

I don't know. I was, you'll have to forgive me. It's like a generation removed if you're like a diehard Leafs fan saying this I know in Ottawa. But, I mean, that's well before my time, Daryl Sittler was. Anyways, it was just interesting that, at least in my memory, I could be totally wrong. But, I'm pretty sure I'm right. Daryl Sittler treated me with contempt because I had no idea who he was.

Another story, a bit more positive. I was helping out at a summer camp. I was volunteering for Youth Week. And out of nowhere, again, Toronto area, Tony Fernandez visited.

[2 : 27] I don't know if any of you Blue Jays fans, yeah, if you know who Tony Fernandez was, but he's a World Series champion. And when I was a kid, I mean, I, the Blue Jays, they were everything.

And I recognized who he was. And I was a bit like, whoa, that's Tony Fernandez. And he was really nice. It was just really interesting. I was like, oh, he's just a regular guy. Anyways, I bring up those stories just to say how it seems like one of the reasons why we're so maybe given to celebrity culture is because we want to touch something that's beyond or greater than us and have some kind of intimate interaction with this transcendent figure.

This morning, we're actually going to be wrapping up our summer series on the attributes of God or knowing God. And this morning, we're going to be talking about God's divine transcendence and imminence.

We'll unpack that if you're like, what? But yeah, that's what we're going to be looking at, this idea that God is both transcendent, exalted, but also imminent, close to us.

There's this intimacy involved with God. So let's just jump right into it. This idea of divine transcendence. What do we mean by God being transcendent?

[3 : 50] The term is actually not a biblical term, but it's more or less like an umbrella term that kind of captures who God is in terms of his exaltedness, that he is high and above all of creation.

In fact, it, in a way, describes him as creator. That God is Lord of all, that there's nobody who comes close to God.

He has complete authority, complete control over everything. And just to be clear, it's not as if we're talking about God being on a spectrum of transcendence, where he's at kind of the very end and we're maybe somehow, you know, on the spectrum, but like farther down this, on this side of the spectrum.

Like we can somehow compare God's transcendence with us. It's not like that at all. Actually, God, he is, we can't understand his transcendence on a spectrum even akin to us.

That would somehow imply that God is subject to the same things we're subject to. We can't think of it that way. God is completely other than us. Separate, distinct in everything.

[5 : 05] He is completely different than us. If you have a Bible, you can follow along. I'll kind of go through some of these texts a bit quickly.

But here's just a small sample size of something that the Bible talks about profusely, about God's transcendence. Psalm 57 verse 5 says this, Be exalted, O God, above the heavens.

Let your glory be over all the earth. Psalm 97, 9. For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth. You are exalted far above all gods.

From Deuteronomy 4, 39, it says, Know therefore today and lay it to your heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath.

There is no other. And then what Shane read, Isaiah 55, 8 and 9. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declare the Lord.

[6 : 06] For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. You get a bit of a sense that God is, he is not just some kind of like superhuman celebrity.

He is completely other than who we are. He is completely separate from his creation. That although we can comprehend God, we can never exhaustively comprehend him, ever, for all of eternity.

This describes God's authority, his dignity, his control over everything. And although we have dignity and control and authority, it can't even be compared to who God is.

So it raises an interesting question, because if God is so transcendent, as we have seen in the scriptures here, really, how can we know him?

How can we come to know this transcendent God? I mean, can we even trust the scriptures to describe who God is? Because, I mean, this is just language. If God transcends everything, can we truly come to know him?

[7 : 17] And the simple answer is yes. And really, it's because God has chosen to reveal himself to us. And he does this primarily in two ways.

The first is a natural revelation. That God has revealed himself in his creation. We look at creation, and what do we see? We see that it is orderly.

Why? Because God is orderly. We see that, hold on a second, the creation is pointing to something greater. So why some of the language around empiricism, or aspects of certain kind of scientific philosophies, that really say that what we see is what we get.

Intelligent design. It fails to comprehend that all of creation has God's fingerprints all over it.

So, like I mentioned before, creation is orderly. Why? Because God is an orderly God. Creation is incredibly and precisely designed because God is a perfect creator.

[8 : 40] He is intentional in everything he does. There is a rationality that we can observe because God is a rational God.

This intelligent design, like I mentioned. Why? Because God is intelligent. And all of a sudden, through the created order, we can see that there has to be something behind the created order, something that has created it.

Romans 1, 18-22, it talks about this. It says, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Verse 19, For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them for his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world in the things that have been made.

What we see in creation proclaims that there is a creator. But that doesn't tell us the whole story.

[9 : 51] That's not God revealing everything about who he is. Because if we observe creation, we can't observe that God wants to be friends with us.

We can't observe from creation that we are sinners with an inability not to sin, that we are in deep need of a savior, that God is triune, that the second member of the Trinity, God, the Son of God,

has condescended, taking on human flesh to die for the sins of the world.

That is, that's not what we can derive from nature. So God, what does he do? Is he gives us his special revelation.

He proclaims who he is and the nature of us and our deep need for a savior. In the words of scripture, through his prophets, through the stories and events that we can read in the Old and New Testament.

This is God's special revelation. And through this, we can know him. So God reveals himself primarily in two different ways. Kind of a natural revelation or a general revelation and then a special or a salvific type of revelation that we see in scripture.

[11 : 07] So all of that, all of the very things that would transcend our ability to know God, he presents it to us.

And it's a gift. It really, truly is wonderful. All scripture, it says in 2 Timothy chapter 3, is God breathed. It is for us, it is for our benefit to know God, to know ourselves, to find Jesus, to find salvation.

So, I talked about God's transcendence and God's revealing himself to us. But what about his imminence? What does this mean? God's divine imminence refers to God's presence in time and space.

He is an involved God. He is not aloof. He is not, kind of the classic illustration is the watchmaker who builds a beautiful watch, winds it up, leaves it.

The watch, he has nothing to do with the watch anymore. The watch is just self-perpetuating. Not at all. God is no absentee landlord. A couple bits of scripture here that communicate this.

[12 : 23] Leviticus 26, 12, it says, and I, God speaking, and I will walk among you and will be your God and you shall be my people. Jeremiah 31, 33 says, for this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord.

I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people. There's this involved care in these bits of scripture.

This is not an aloof God, an absentee parent. This is an involved, involved God. God's lordship, his transcendence, means that he has authority and control over all things, meaning he's connected and involved in all things.

Matthew 6, 25 to 30, if you're not a Christian, this comes from the Sermon on the Mount and it is a weighty, thick, beautiful three chapters in scripture.

Incredible portion of scripture. Matthew 6, 25 to 30 says this, this is Jesus speaking. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.

[13 : 41] Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet your heavenly father feeds them.

And you, are you not of more value than they? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes to the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Does that sound like an absentee God to you? It sounds like an imminent God, a God that is close, that is involved. I mean, that portion alone can dispel any notion that God does not care about your day to day.

That you might be a bit too insignificant for God to care. It is a beautiful, beautiful portion of scripture that describes God's involvement in his creation.

[15 : 01] The transcendent God imminently involved. It's beautiful. There's always a closeness, a nearness, and a care, an intimate friendship between God and his creation, and especially his covenant people, the people that he calls to himself, to a deep relationship with.

So, friends, we can't talk about God's divine transcendence and divorce it from his divine imminence. We can't. We have to talk about them in the same breath, two sides of the same coin. We have to. Few ways we can go wrong if we decide to divorce these two. If there's an overemphasis on God's transcendence at the expense of his imminence, we can become like a, it's like classical deism, like I mentioned before, the illustration of the watchmaker, making the watch,

winding it up, has no more to do with it.

That God is not intimate, he's not close. In many ways, this reflects the God of Islam, who is not an intimate God, but is more of this kind of transcendent type of figure that is more or less aloof.

We want to be on our guard against that, this laissez-faire God. Somehow that God, if we get it in our minds that he doesn't see us, he doesn't care, we can get away with certain things because he's transcendent, he's not imminent, he doesn't see us, it's a big problem.

[16 : 34] The other aspect is if we emphasize his imminence against his transcendence, and what ends up happening is we blur the line between creation and the creator.

What happens there is something similar to, and again, these are generalizations, like a New Age type of spirituality or a Buddhist type of spirituality, pantheism, where we end up sharing divine authority.

We, like I mentioned, there's no separation, and what ends up happening is that human ideologies take on divine authority. When that happens, very dangerous things can happen.

In many ways, this is the type of emphasis that Nazism had. This was something more than just human ideology. It was the Aryan takeover.

It was divinely ordained, which it most certainly was not. We see some of those hints in maybe the intensely woke kind of liberalism that we see.

[17 : 44] And I mean, if you start scratching the surface, we might see it even in other places as well. But we need to be careful that we don't sacrifice the transcendence for just the imminence of God.

You know, another way we get this wrong is we, being made in God's image, it says in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, that God has put eternity into our hearts.

we have this desire, and it kind of goes back to the celebrity culture a little bit, example I gave at the beginning. We have this desire to touch the transcendent, to experience some kind of posterity beyond this life, right?

A legacy beyond this life. And yet, at the same time, we have this deep desire for intimate connection with deep friendship.

friendship. And in God, we have both of those things, perfectly. But what we do is we don't look to the perfectly transcendent, imminent God. We look to things, or people, or reputation, or money, or a house, or whatever it may be in place of God that we think will somehow give us a legacy, will connect us to the eternal, and yet bring us great peace, great connection.

[19 : 07] And those things can't satisfy. The Bible calls this idolatry. Putting in place a person, or a thing, in the place of God.

Those things will never hold up. They will never be a suitable replacement for God. They are doomed to fail because things rust, and things decompose, and reputations don't last.

Matthew chapter 6, just actually before the portion of Scripture we just read, verses 19 to 24, Jesus says this, Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.

And when he's talking about laying up treasures, he is talking about finding ultimate satisfaction.

Because treasure itself isn't necessarily bad. Anyways, let me continue. Where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Verse 24, it says you can't serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

[20 : 24] You cannot serve God and money. You cannot find eternal transcendence and eternal imminence in stuff.

or in people. And you have to ask God to reveal this in your heart because we are very, very clever people. We mask our idols really, really well.

We deny that we have idols really, really well. We do. But when we find our hope in the very things that will let us down, it's a big problem.

By the way, this is not a call for complete, like disconnection from the world. We are involved in the world completely, so I'm not advocating for a type of like disconnect.

But ask yourself the question, am I finding my eternal hope in my spouse, in my friend, in my children, in my reputation, my job, my things, whatever it may be?

[21 : 26] Another way we can get it wrong, and this is especially the case for Christians, is we can focus on God as being the transcendent.

I kind of touched on this a little bit. And it's like our hearts are cold. We don't worship God. We don't seek God's face. And that might be for a whole host of reasons.

Because you've been let down by a church leader or you've grown callous from a hurt and you're angry at God. So you kind of go through the motions of recognizing God and his transcendence. But I mean, you couldn't care less if your heart is warmed. On the flip side, and this is the case, and I think I can speak on this because I come from a bit of a charismatic background, the ultra-charismatics or the charismatics can have a tendency to emphasize the imminence of God, the presence of God.

At the expense of the truth of Scripture about who he is. And all of a sudden, what drives their understanding of God? It's actually experience.

[22 : 36] It's not the truth of Scripture. It's not the transcendence of God. And you see, in worship, as we interact with God, we have to just keep in mind that God is both transcendent and imminent. Friends, the reality is your heart will grow cold if you're charismatic.

It will, if you're seeking after a feeling. By the way, feelings, emoting, however you emote, having emotions is a good thing in worship.

Getting goosebumps because, like, you're singing a praise song and you're just feeling like you might be touching heaven, there's nothing wrong with that. But that is bound to grow cold.

It's bound to. So what do you do? Do you just give up? No, you feed on the truth of who God is. You feed on it. You feed on it.

If it feels like you're going through the motions when you do your Bible reading or if you come to church, I'll say this. This is, I don't know if this is a good thing for a pastor to say, but hear me out.

[23 : 37] Go through the motions. Go through it. Go through the motions and even if you don't feel it, do it because it's not going to last forever. You're not going to go through the motions forever and there's a consistency and a faithfulness that's there.

And you can cry out to God, Lord, change my heart, warm my heart, help me not to disbelieve. And listen, God, it's a beautiful thing to push through.

It really is. Remember, we are marathon runners in this, right? In this life. Whether God gives us 90 years, 100 years, or he takes us home early, it's a marathon.

And sometimes, you know, we don't run too well. And if you are the type of person that is just kind of fine with potentially going through the motions or your spirituality is almost stoic, push into it.

Don't be the type of person that is satisfied with just having really rock-solid theology and yet your heart and your life is not moved closer towards God.

[24 : 44] embrace the divine transcendence of God and seek after his closeness and his presence. How can we interact with God?

This transcendent God? Well, here's a few ways. One thing I love about our communion liturgy, but communion especially, is that it is the transcendent God inviting us to dine with him at his table.

The first communion was at Passover. A wonderful, wonderful remembrance of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. And how do we remember?

How do we take joy in all this? We eat. We feast. And this is what communion is. In our liturgy, we will say in our liturgy, holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

And what is that if not the declaration of God's transcendence in heaven? We recognize it. But what else do we do? We come to his table and we partake of Christ himself.

[25 : 52] That we feed on him in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving. Intimately connected to God. Another way we connect with God is through his word absolutely.

His special revelation to us. His truth revealed to us. It's also being with his people. Fellowshiping with his people. And this is why COVID has really, the restrictions have been really detrimental to the life of the church.

Because, I mean, Zoom has been excellent in many different ways, but you can't fellowship in the same type of way. You can't connect with people. And God is amongst his people.

He is. That's how we connect with God. That's an aspect of how we connect with God. God, through your friend, will encourage you. God, through your brother or sister, will call you out, hopefully in a gentle, kind way.

In a private way, ideally, not publicly. But, you know, will reveal sin in your life. And is that not God working through his people? We feast on God's word, like I mentioned.

[26 : 58] We partake at the table. We fellowship with one another. We pray. If you guys haven't some kind of prayer structure type of thing, and maybe structure is not your thing, you're more of a spontaneous person, that's fine.

I encourage you guys to give Praying the Daily Offices a go. There's some apps, and I owe one person in particular an email with a couple apps on it, but there's apps that will help you and guide you.

You can get a book of common prayer. But it's just a way to pray and engage with the scriptures. Ultimately, Jesus is the greatest example of God's divine transcendence and God's divine imminence.

Jesus, the second member of the Trinity, condescends, wraps himself in humanity, becomes enfleshed, fully man, and yet fully God, fully imminent, but fully transcendent.

Listen to a couple of these scriptures. Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14, Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel.

[28 : 13] A lovely Christmas passage. What is Emmanuel? God with us. John 1, 14, that George read, And the word, Jesus, the God, the Son of God, the second member of the Trinity, became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

God, transcend, the transcendent God becomes so intimate, so involved, that he dies on our behalf, on a cross, a cross made by human hands for our sins, so that we might have this intimate relationship with the transcendent God, that we don't have to live a life of striving or a life riddled with guilt, that we can embrace the transcendent, perfect, the perfect transcendent God.

We can know that our deepest longings are met in him. We can. He will not leave us or forsake us. And isn't this an interesting bit because, and I'll close with this, God connecting to his people says this often, and you can read through it in scripture, that God constantly says to his people, I will be with you.

I will be with you. I will be with you. He says it to Abraham. He says it to Joseph. He says it to Moses. He says it to Israel. He says it to his church. He says it to us this morning. If you are in Christ Jesus, God says this.

[29 : 55] He says, I am with you. That is intimate talk. That is close talk. That is caring talk. That is involved talk. That is patient talk.

Loving talk. Matthew 28, verse 20. What does Jesus say to his disciples at the end of this gospel text? It says, And lo, I am with you always to the end of the age.

We can go through ups and downs. We can go through seasons where we feel like we are on the verge of apostasy. And he will hold us tight.

If you are in Christ, if you confess your faith to him, his grip on you is very, very tight. even when you are not quite gripping God at all.

That if you have been baptized and have confessed your sins, there is a promise on your life from God Almighty saying, I will always be intimate with you.

[31 : 00] I will always care for you. I will always take care of you. Always. Always. And those are the types of truths we need to feed on. And if you are considering the Christian faith, whether it's for the first time or maybe you're giving the church a try, giving the faith a try, this is what it boils down to.

That God, through Jesus, has made a way for all of our longings to be met, all of our sins to be taken care of, so that we can have fellowship with the transcendent God in a very, very intimate way.

Friends, like I said before, do not grow weary. Push through if you're feeling cold-hearted. And it doesn't mean you have to emote a certain way.

You don't have to put up your hands during worship. Although, the rousing worship we had today, actually, I thought it was great, George, by the way. You know how you emote, how your heart gets warm.

And that's awesome. It really is. Whatever way you kind of show your emotions, but like, press into it. Don't give up. God will not give up on you. Let's pray.

[32 : 16] Lord God in heaven, we thank you that you are completely other than us. You are transcendent. That we aren't even on a spectrum with you. We don't share a spectrum with you. That you are completely other than in your authority, in your dignity, in your control, in your majesty, in your lordship. And yet, you are so intimately close to us. That you desire our fellowship so much so that your son dies on the cross for sins that he didn't commit. So that we might be made right with you. Lord, draw us closer to yourself. Help us to be ever aware that you are both a transcendent God and an intimate, intimate God as well. Lord, thank you that you invite us into friendship with you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.