Last week I spoke about some of the characteristics of God as being Sovereign, Eternal, Unchanging, All Knowing, All Powerful and being Present Everywhere.

We depend on those things to be able to approach Him and to try and understand His ways. It is because He is dependable that we can trust Him.

This week we will look at the personal characteristics of God that encourage and allow us to have a relationship with Him. Remember these are not new. They have been present since before God created us and they have not changed since.

They are things that we depend upon, in God’s grace, to enable us to get close to Him and to stay close to Him. **PRAY**

**SLIDE** God is Patient **Psalm 103:8-14**

**…the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.9He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger for ever; 10he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. 11For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; 12as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. 13As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; 14for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.**

I summed the above up by saying God is patient. The Psalmist says He is **merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.**

God is righteous and shows absolute justice, but His anger will come, only slowly and after He has shown a great deal of mercy.

David knew the slow anger and abounding mercy of God in a very personal way. He knew that his sins (and the sins of his people) deserved much greater judgment or discipline than they had received.

What an example that is to us and our nation. Spurgeon said, that should take us to a point where we praise Him for what the Lord has not done as well as for what he has given us; even the negative side deserves our adoring gratitude.

Central to any relationship with God is a need to fear Him. As individuals we need to have a high respect for God – to the degree where every action we take should be checked against whether it is honouring to God and will ultimately glorify Him. If not, then it is probably not the right course of action.

We are dependent on His mercy. If you think you are not dependent, ask yourself about the judgement that we are told will take place after we die. Do you want to be judged mercifully, or harshly? All based on the fact that we have all sinned, we all fall below God’s standards and only by attaining those standards will we be acceptable to God.

Spurgeon said, God loves us, and he will love us for ever. He loves us infinitely and he could not love us more than if we had never fallen. But there is a need to accept Jesus as Saviour to take full advantage of that love.

**SLIDE God is Just and Righteous Psalm 11:7**

**For the Lord is righteous, he loves justice; the upright will see his face.**

God’s righteousness should be both a comfort and encouragement to us, as they were to David.

We can’t earn God’s love by our personal righteousness, but by believing in and following Jesus, we can benefit from God's love and from which nothing can separate us.

If you don’t stay close to the Father you end up drifting without ever receiving the full measure of blessings that God want to provide. You will become like the Prodigal Son of Luke 15, who was always loved by the father, but for a time not he did not benefit from that love. What a waste of your life.

**SLIDE** God is Love **1 John 4:8**

**Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.**

To know and acknowledge that God is love is a glorious truth – it describes the very character and heart of God. He is so rich in love, that it can be used to describe His very being.

But as someone once said, ‘great problems come when we try to say *love is God*. This is because love does not define everything in the character of God and because when most people use the term love, they are not thinking of true love, the God-kind of love. Instead, they are thinking of a squishy, namby-pamby, have-a-nice-day kind of love that values being nice, more than wanting what is really best for the other person’.

Is that how you see God’s love?

We need to appreciate God’s love fully:

* It is a love for us that may have led to creation in the first place.
* It is a love that led to creating man in God’s image, so that we could fully reflect His glory and worship Him.
* It is the kind of love that led to Him sending His only Son, to die for us on a cross, so that we can have a restored pre-fall relationship with God, both here on earth and in eternity.
* It is a love that may human interpret God’s actions as angry, but who is in fact trying to admonish us and guide us back to the right path.
* It is a love that showed itself in the father of the Prodigal Son, who kept a constant watch for his son’s return, so that he could unreservedly welcome him back into the family.

**SLIDE** God is Holy **1 Peter 1:15-16**

**But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.**

Being Holy is to be set apart – it doesn’t mean unreachable, it means you have been taken by God from your former life and lifestyle, to be a worker for Him.

God is actually calling us to come to Him and share His apartness. He says to us, **“Be holy, for I am holy.”**

For 1st C believers this was radical – ‘the God of the Bible is radically different from the pagan gods commonly worshipped in New Testament times. ‘Heathenism produced gods whose example was to generate impurity at the very best.’

Those gods did not require their followers to separate themselves from their normal everyday lives. Our God will have no rivals.

**SLIDE** Make God first in your life **Matthew 6:33**

**But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.**

This should be the rule when ordering our priorities – it isn’t just putting God at the top of your ‘to do’ list, it is seeking His kingdom as a priority.

Whatever we do in life, should be done in a God-honouring way – whether that be family life, work or hobbies, everything should clearly honour God.

That includes, changing our outlook so that we replace daily worries, with a concern for God’s kingdom.

‘This verse demands us to have a commitment to find and to do the will of God, to ally oneself totally with his purpose. And this commitment must come first.’ (France)

When you received Jesus as Saviour for the first time, you effectively said that you would **seek first the kingdom of God**. The daily search to do God’s will after that first commitment, will show in our Christian lives whether we want to reinforce that decision or deny it.

**SLIDE** We need to constantly communicate with God. **1 Peter 4:7**

**The end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.**

Do you believe we are living in the last days? If so, Peter is telling us that we should be praying – some versions **be serious and watchful in your prayers**.

God wants us to communicate with Him, whatever your thoughts about the imminence of Jesus’ return.

But in a way, as we all have a limited life span and we don’t know how long we will live, we should treat every day as being **the end of all things**.

The Bible contains a lot of teaching about prayer and numerous examples of how, when and where to pray. We would do well to seek those out and practice what we are told - **be alert**.

**SLIDE** Our relationship with God should include doing what He asks you to do.

His mission to each of us will be as unique as we are individual people. Paul expressed that in Ephesians 4 when he talked of the various tasks within the church, but there is a mission that is assigned to every single one of God’s children.

**Matthew 22:37**

**Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind**

**Matthew 28:19**

**Go and make disciples of all nations…**

Jesus was being questioned about the Jewish law and He summed it all up by saying the most important part is to **love the LORD** with everything you have and **love your neighbour** as yourself.

Out of that came the instruction that we should spread God’s Word about salvation through Jesus.

Through Jesus, God commands us to **go**. His authority sends, His Holy Spirit will guide and give you all the resources you need for every situation you face in His Name.

If you are concerned about being unskilled, consider who Jesus first commanded…

Spurgeon said, ‘Jesus instructed ‘**Go’** to some very imperfect disciples. It is Peter, the rash and the headstrong. It is John, who sometimes wishes to call fire from heaven to destroy men. It is Philip, with whom the Saviour has been so long and yet he has not known him. It is Thomas, who must put his finger into the print of the nails, or he will not believe him. Yet the Master says to them, ‘Go; all power is given unto me; therefore, you shall go. You are as good for my purpose as anybody else would be. There is no power in you, I know, but then all power is in me, therefore go.’ (Spurgeon)

One more thing we need to bear in mind as we develop a relationship with God. That is His Name and the respect that He requires us to have for it.

**SLIDE Exodus 20:7**

**‘You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.**

Every word that you say should be worthy of God and glorify Him. Even a conversation at the check-out in a shop, or when passing someone in the street falls in this category.

Remember, you are set apart for God, therefore, so should be your language. Moses wrote, **you shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain**:

Whether you use God’s Name as a swear word, a curse or in a frivolous way, those words act in a way that brings disgrace on His Name.

Jesus taught us to have a regard for the holiness of God’s name, when He taught us to say **Hallowed be Your name Matthew 6:9.**

There are serious consequences for misusing God’ s name as we are warned.

So, with all the above, what should our response be to God?

**SLIDE Luke 5:27-28 27After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus said to him, 28and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.**

When a Jew entered the business of collecting taxes, he became an outcast from society – possibly a rich one, but he was excommunicated from the synagogue and in the eyes of the community his disgrace extended to his family.

This choice was a matter of priorities – live luxuriously as an outcast, or choose a lifestyle with fewer riches, but closer to family and friends.

But after his encounter with Jesus, we are told **Levi got up, left everything and followed him.**

That was costly – in a way, this was more a sacrifice than some of the other disciples made. Peter, James, and John could more easily go back to their fishing business, but it would be hard for Levi to go back to tax collecting.

Instead, he opted to honour God as a priority.

Does that want you to change your attitude to God and the way you follow Him?

God’s greatness and His love to us is shown not only in saving us from the judgment we deserved, but also in wanting us to **live through Him**. Do we **live through Him**? This is a great way to define the Christian life, to **live through Him.**

**OFFER / PRAY**