

A Psychological Profile of God

On Sunday, we explored a Scripture that offers a penetrating glimpse into the mind of God.

1. Warm-up question: If someone were to do a psychological profile of you, what is a key descriptive word or phrase that would lie at the heart of your profile?
2. Sunday's sermon began with a word of caution – God is infinitely beyond us. Us trying to understand God is kinda like your dog or cat trying to understand you. Much of who you are, and what you do, is beyond them.
 - a. Do you ever wonder what your cat or dog thinks of you? What's your best guess?
 - b. What's an example of something you do that your pet could never understand?
 - c. Do you agree that we can only grasp a tiny fraction of what and who God is? Why or why not?
3. Because we're human, the best way for us to understand God is in human terms. So, after centuries of us humans groping in the dark to try to better understand God, it's as if God finally said, "Let me just come down there, become one of you, and show you who I am at a level you can understand." Thus, Jesus was born.
 - a. When Jesus was conceived, an angel told Joseph that his son would be called "Emmanuel, which means, God with us." Matthew 1:23. If a child asked you to explain what it means to say that Jesus was "God with us," how would you explain it?
 - b. When Philip the disciple wanted to better understand God, Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." John 14:9. What do you think that means?
4. So if we want to know what God is like (as best we can understand), we need to know what Jesus was like. For that, the best place to look in the Bible is, surprisingly, an Old Testament passage written hundreds of years before Jesus was born. In Isaiah 53, the prophet Isaiah was allowed to see into the future to describe the coming Messiah. The way the details of the passage parallel the life of Jesus is almost spooky. The result is a penetrating psychological profile of Jesus. Each of the three sections of the chapter highlight a different core characteristic of the divine personality. For the first characteristic, read Isaiah 53:1-3.
 - a. What does verse 1 mean?
 - b. What does verse 2 mean when it says Jesus was "like a root out of dry ground?"
 - c. What does it mean when it says there "was nothing in his appearance that we should desire him?" How do you imagine Jesus' physical appearance?

5. Verse 3 says that Jesus “was despised and rejected by others; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” Jeff highlighted the phrase “**man of sorrows**” as an apt summary of this first section of Isaiah’s prophecy. “If we want to understand God,” Jeff suggested, “we have to understand that phrase.”
 - a. We typically think of God as being, in the words of Dallas Willard, “the most joyous being in the universe” since God sees and experiences every beautiful thing in the cosmos continually. But that also means God sees and experiences every devastation and tragedy that unfolds on planet earth. To illustrate, Jeff showed a brief interview with the parents of a child lost in the Sandy Hook massacre. When you saw the interview, how did you feel?
 - b. When God witnessed the death of that little girl, how do you think that affected God?
 - c. What has been the worst tragedy in your life? How do you think that affected God?
 - d. Do you buy the notion that “God is the saddest being in the universe?” How does that make you feel?
6. Read Isaiah 53:4-7. This middle section of the chapter emphasizes that Jesus “was wounded for our transgressions . . . , upon him was the punishment that made us whole.” Here then is the second key element of his personality profile – **sacrificial love**.
 - a. How do you imagine Jesus felt the night before his crucifixion? Why do you think he did it? What was his motivation?
 - b. Read Luke 6:38. We tend to fear that sacrificial love will drain the life out of us, but usually it does the opposite. Think of a time recently when you’ve engage in an act of sacrificial love (large or small). What happened and how did it make you feel to get to “be Jesus” to someone?
7. Read Isaiah 53:8-12. This last section of the chapter repeatedly refers to Jesus’ resurrection. Identify each phrase in this last section that seems to allude to some aspect of his resurrection.
 - a. This last section of the chapter identifies the third element of Jesus’ personality profile. He is **triumphantly persevering – meaning, he never gives up until victory if finally won**, even if he has to go through death and hell to get there. What are the implications of this for us? Where in your life right now do you need to push through to victory?
 - b. To summarize, Jesus showed us that God is a being who (a) feels acute sorrow, (b) overflows with sacrificial love, and (c) never gives up until victory is won. Which of these three characteristics most speaks to you right now – and why?