



1

UNIT ONE

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Limitless Power, Perfect Knowledge, Absolute Authority

UNIT ASSIGNMENTS Find your assignments here: PERIMETER.org/b3-1

CONTINUE

- 21 Days of Personal Worship

TRUTH

▶ BY MEMORY

*"He who is the blessed and only Sovereign,
the King of kings and Lord of lords,¹⁶who alone
has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable
light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.
To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen."*

1 TIMOTHY 6:15B-16 (ESV) — option a

*"I know that you can do all things, and that
no purpose of yours can be thwarted."*

JOB 42:2 (ESV) — option b

▶ IN BIBLE

This section of *The Journey* will equip you with some basic biblical theology regarding the nature of God.

Unfortunately, the word *theology* often elicits a yawn from Christians because they think of it as a boring, impractical intellectual exercise. Not so! Studying theology will help to mature and equip you, making a significant contribution to your spiritual progress. It is neither boring, nor impractical. True, your mind will be exercised as you wrestle with difficult questions about who God is and what He does. But your soul will benefit from this exercise as you begin to see your expanding biblical understanding worked out in a practical, everyday life of faith.

In this unit you will explore one of God's essential attributes – His sovereignty – by comparing several passages from the Old and New Testaments. *Sovereignty* is the word Christians use to describe God's supreme and undisputed authority. You may find it beneficial to focus on these passages during your personal worship this week. If you use a different Bible reading plan for your personal worship, be sure not to neglect the "S" of **PRAISE** – to summarize specific applications of the Bible passages for your life.

PSALM 29 – This psalm of David is a call to worship the Lord who reigns in power, majesty and authority. It was most likely inspired when he observed a powerful thunderstorm. Notice how David uses the repeated phrase, “*The voice of the LORD*.”

What does David mean by the phrase, “*Ascribe to the LORD?*”

David thought of a storm’s thunder and lightning as poetic illustrations of God’s power and authority. What inspires your awe of God’s power? What adjectives or illustrations come to your mind?

Interestingly, David doesn’t conclude this psalm with a call to fear God’s power, but rather with a prayer of reliance on God’s power (v. 11). What do you think David wanted to inspire in those who heard him sing this psalm?

PSALM 115:1-13 – This psalm contrasts God’s power with the powerless idols which other nations worshipped. Like Psalm 29, this psalm inspires hope, trust and confidence in the power of God.

Verse 3 is a key verse in this psalm. What does verse 3 teach about God’s power and authority?

The psalmist called Israel to trust and hope in the Lord, “*their help and their shield*.” Does this psalm help you trust that God can and will help you in your need? Why or why not?

ISAIAH 40:27-31 – This well-known passage describes the power and knowledge of God as a resource that His people can personally benefit from, if they will “wait for the LORD.” It is a response to the despairing belief that our need is hidden, unknown by God.

What does this passage teach about God’s knowledge, even His knowledge of your personal need?

[Hint: compare this passage with Matthew 6:8.]

What does “wait for the LORD” mean? Is your spiritual journey marked by a habit of waiting for God?

ISAIAH 46:9-11 – This passage gives us insight into the extent of God’s authority and knowledge. What is the extent of God’s authority and purpose? [Hint: compare to Job 42:2.]

What is the extent of God’s knowledge? How does God know what He knows?

1 TIMOTHY 6:15B-16 – Paul’s closing words in this letter to Timothy are a doxology of praise to God.

Several phrases in this doxology describe the authority of God. Put these phrases in your own words. What is Paul saying about the authority of God?

► TO SUMMARIZE

Question: How is God's power and knowledge not like Superman's? Answer: Superman's power and knowledge are finite and can be challenged; God's is not and cannot.

Nothing could be more intrinsic to our basic concept of God than that He is powerful and vastly intelligent. As a child, your earliest ideas about who God is probably included the notions that He was big and strong, and knew more than any adult. As you grew and your concept of God developed, these ideas were refined and you began to grasp the meaning of words like "almighty," "all-powerful" and "all-knowing." You may even have been introduced to the technical terms "omnipotent" and "omniscient." As you began studying this material, you probably had both an intellectual and spiritual commitment to a belief that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and controls all things. You may even have added the word "sovereign" to your God-vocabulary. But, how well did you understand the implications of the statement, "God is sovereign?" The goal of this unit is to help you dig a little deeper in your understanding of the sovereign exercise of God's power and knowledge.

Let's explore these concepts.

Our **OMNIPOTENT** God is frequently addressed as "The Almighty" throughout Scripture. To address Him as such means that He is all-powerful. What does this mean? You might think it means that God is the most powerful being among many who have power, but that would be inaccurate. To say that God is almighty, or all-powerful, means that He *has* all power. He is the source of all power that exists. All other powers, natural and supernatural, are derived from His. Therefore, there are no competing powers. No one comes in second place to God. Galaxies, angels, even Satan, have only the limited power that is granted to them. God's power is infinite; it is not diminished bit by bit because of

First of all, let's establish a good definition of sovereignty. Sovereignty has to do with control and authority. The dictionary definition describes sovereign authority as superlative, exalted, supreme, undisputed, unlimited, absolute and autonomous. When speaking of God, sovereignty describes the absolute authority with which He exercises His power and knowledge over creation. To say that God is sovereign means that God is the supreme, absolute ruler of the universe. He is completely free from external control, and His rule cannot be challenged. He exercises His power and knowledge so that all that He wills is accomplished. He is "...the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords..." (1 Timothy 6:15b).

As you've noticed, God's sovereignty is closely related to His power and knowledge. He is sovereign because He is omnipotent (all-powerful) and omniscient (all-knowing).

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the power He grants to His creatures. Therefore Jeremiah could say, "*Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you!*" (Jeremiah 32:17).

Our **OMNISCIENT** God knows all that was, is, will be and *could* be. He knows the actual and the possible all in one simple act of knowing. That is to say that God always knows, but never learns. He has always had perfect knowledge (Job 37:16), that is beyond the realm of human comprehension (Isaiah 40:28). He also exercises perfect wisdom by always using His knowledge to bring about the best goals by the best means.

But how can God really know everything that could be possibly known? There are two answers to this question. One has to do with the fact that God is eternal. God knows the future because He stands outside of the limits of time. The past, present and future are all the same to Him. The second answer has to do with God's purposes.

God knows the actual and the possible because He declares, He determines all that is. Nothing is or comes to be of itself. He says, "*I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'*" (Isaiah 46:9b-10).

Let's put two and two together now.

Now that you understand what it means for God to have all power and all knowledge, can you see what it means for God to be the sovereign Lord and King? He uses His limitless power and perfect knowledge to exercise absolute authority over all He has made in the physical and spiritual spheres. His will cannot be successfully opposed; His purposes always stand. Job said, "*I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted*" (Job 42:2). Therefore, it can be said that God is the most joyful being in the universe because He does all He wishes to do. "*Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases*" (Psalm 115:3).

The Bible's teaching about God's **SOVEREIGNTY** raises challenging questions about the existence of evil in the world. If God is all-powerful and all-knowing, why does He allow evil to exist? Unfortunately, this question can't be adequately addressed in this unit. But, suffice it to say that God has power and knowledge to control all things so that, ultimately, they only serve His good purposes.

The wind, thunder, and lightning were enough to convince David of God's sovereignty. In song he called upon Israel to "*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name...*" (Psalm 29:2a).

He wanted Israel to recognize God's sovereign

power with worshipful awe. He declared, "*The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever*" (Psalm 29:10). But he also wanted to inspire trust and confidence in the God who gives strength to His people. Isaiah echoed this theme adding that God knows the needs of His people and sustains them with His power, "...*they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength*" (Isaiah 40:31). Therefore, in response to God's sovereignty, worship Him with awe and wait in trusting dependence upon Him to meet your needs.

EQUIPPING

In your own words, describe how God's sovereignty, power and knowledge are related.

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Look back to the **IN BIBLE** questions and review your answer to what inspires your awe of God's power. Take a few minutes in silent worship focusing on God's power, then conclude your worship by writing a few lines of praise to your almighty God.

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Now, think about your personal needs. Your needs may be typical or you may be in dire need. How can the teaching of God's sovereignty help you trust that God will meet even your greatest needs?

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Finally, take a few minutes to bring your needs to God and confess your trust (and doubt) to Him. Write your prayer below.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Before your Journey Group meeting, use the questions below to examine your life in light of the truth you explored this week.

Do you trust God's sovereignty over your life?

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Are you struggling to surrender any area of your life to His control?

E
Do you struggle to trust that God can and will do what is best for you?

A
How have you attempted to impact someone on your prayer list this week?

M
How are you doing in developing a personal worship habit?

S
Did you complete the Mission assignment this week?

MISSION

► SERVING

For several weeks now you have been praying for people on your missional prayer list. Please continue building a daily habit of prayer for the least and lost that you are concerned about.

You have learned that missional living is making the gospel known to all people through word and deed, across the street, track, and ocean. For the next several weeks you will concentrate on demonstrating the gospel through service to the least and the lost. You and your Journey Group will partner together in a small service project of your group's choice. Your project could be anything from writing letters to

servicemen and women in harm's way, to doing yard work for an elderly neighbor, to visiting a children's hospital, or to serving a meal at a homeless shelter. At your next meeting, your Journey Group leader will have several options for a service project for your group to discuss. Your Mission assignment for the next several weeks will be to participate in the planning and execution of your Journey Group's project.

As soon as you read about *serving* you had some sort of mental and emotional response. What was your response? Did you think about the obstacles that might prevent you from participating (e.g. schedule, priorities, travel, disinterest, anxiety, discomfort, etc.)? Take a moment to describe your response and any obstacles you perceive in the space below.

Now bring your response to God in prayer. Tell Him what you think and feel. Ask Him to help you respond to this opportunity to take up His mission as Christ would, and to give you the right motives

SUPPLICATION

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

MATTHEW 6:31-33 (ESV)

"You do not have, because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."

JAMES 4:2B-3 (ESV)

God knows all your needs; seek His kingdom as your first priority and He will provide for you. When you have a need, ask, but also examine your motive in asking.

My prayer request regarding the truth for this week:

My prayer request regarding a situation in my life:

My prayer request regarding living a missional life:

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Prayer requests from others in my group:

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*"If God sees that
my spiritual life
will be furthered
by giving the
things for which
I ask, then He will
give them, but
that is not the end
of prayer. The end
of prayer is that
I come to know
God Himself."*

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2

UNIT TWO

THE SPIRITUALITY OF GOD

Transcendent, Omnipresent, Immanent

UNIT ASSIGNMENTS Find your assignments here: PERIMETER.org/b3-2

COMPLETE

- Prepare for your upcoming service project

TRUTH

▶ BY MEMORY

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

JOHN 4:24 (ESV)

▶ IN BIBLE

Last week, you learned that God exercises His limitless power and perfect knowledge as the sovereign Lord over all things. He has absolute authority over all He has made in the physical and spiritual spheres. His will cannot be successfully opposed and His purposes always stand.

This week, you will learn that the Father accepts those who come to Him for the sake of His one divine Son, Jesus Christ – who He is, and what He accomplished.

This week, you will explore another attribute of God's supreme being – His spirituality. You will learn what it means that God is spirit and the implications this has for His people. You may find it beneficial to focus on the **IN BIBLE** passages during your personal worship this week. If you use a different Bible reading plan for your personal worship, be sure not to neglect the “**S**” of **PRAISE** – to summarize specific applications of the Bible passages for your life.

PRAY FIRST | **READ THE TEXT** | **ASK QUESTIONS** | **INTERPRET IN CONTEXT** | **SUMMARIZE APPLICATIONS** | **ENGAGE WITH GOD**

GENESIS 28:10-17 – This passage relates the story of “Jacob’s Ladder” – a dream in which God revealed His active presence to Jacob, assuring him that God would keep His covenant promise.

What do you think the vision of the ladder and angels signified to Jacob?

Verses 16-17 show us that somewhere between Beersheba and Haran, Jacob experienced God’s presence where He least expected it. Evaluate Jacob’s conclusion about God’s presence in that place. In what sense was Jacob’s conclusion correct? In what sense was it incorrect?

EXODUS 20:4-6 – The second of the Ten Commandments allows us to infer something about God’s being and His likeness (or unlikeness) to the physical world.

What can you infer from this commandment about God’s nature? [Compare with Romans 1:21-23.]

1 KINGS 8:22-30 – These verses from the beginning of Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the Temple in Jerusalem reveal what he understood about the nature of God’s being.

What could you learn about the nature of God from verses 27-30? [Compare with Acts 7:48-50.]

PSALM 139:1-10 – David begins this psalm with a meditation on God's intimate knowledge of his life and on God's inescapable presence.

Where specifically does David say God can be found (see vv 7-10)?

What are the implications of this for God's people?

PROVERBS 15:29 – This verse seems to contradict the teaching that God is everywhere.

Can this verse be reconciled with those that teach that God is everywhere? How?

A **JEREMIAH 23:23-24 & EPHESIANS 4:6** – These passages capture two complimentary implications of God's spirituality – the fact that God is both transcendent over creation, and immanent in creation.

Use a dictionary to look up the words "transcendent" and "immanent." Using these verses to help you, describe what it means for God to be both transcendent and immanent.

S The following verses are examples of how God manifests His presence differently in different places. Read each verse, noting the places specified or inferred from the context, and answer whether God is manifesting His presence to punish, sustain or bless in each verse.

Psalm 16:11

Amos 9:1-4

Colossians 1:17

Hebrews 1:3

Revelation 21:3-4

► TO SUMMARIZE

Last week, you began investigating the supremacy of God by examining His attributes of limitless power (omnipotence) and perfect knowledge (omniscience). This week, the **IN BIBLE** passages have introduced you to the attribute of God's universal presence (omnipresence) and the associated concepts of His transcendence over creation, and His immanence in creation. God transcends His creation, is present throughout creation, and is immanent in creation because of what He is. So let's start our investigation with the question, "What is God?"

Jesus said, "*God is spirit...*" (John 4:24). That is to say that God, in His essence, is a spiritual being. This is not just to say that God has a spirit, or that one member of the Trinity is the Holy Spirit. Jesus meant that God's fundamental mode of existence is spiritual, not material. And so, we must not make the mistake of attributing material qualities to Him. This is why God commanded through Moses, "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth*" (Exodus 20:4). Any conception of God represented by an image of created things is necessarily a gross reduction and distortion of who, and what, God is. Everything that is part of our physical, material world (e.g. the sun, a bull, mountains, oceans and people) has attributes of location and dimensions.

For example, right now your location can be plotted on a map, and your height, weight and physical characteristics can be measured. But, none of this is true of God. He is one divine, pure spirit, and therefore does not have a physical location, or physical dimensions. This is why, when the Samaritan woman asked Jesus where people should go to worship God, Jesus answered, "...*those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*" (John 4:24). In His answer, Jesus taught that since God is a spiritual being, He is universally present. Space does not define or restrict God's present

location. He is **OMNIPRESENT**. Therefore, the proper location of the worshipper (Jerusalem vs. Samaria) is a non-issue for true worship; but the condition of the worshipper's heart is.

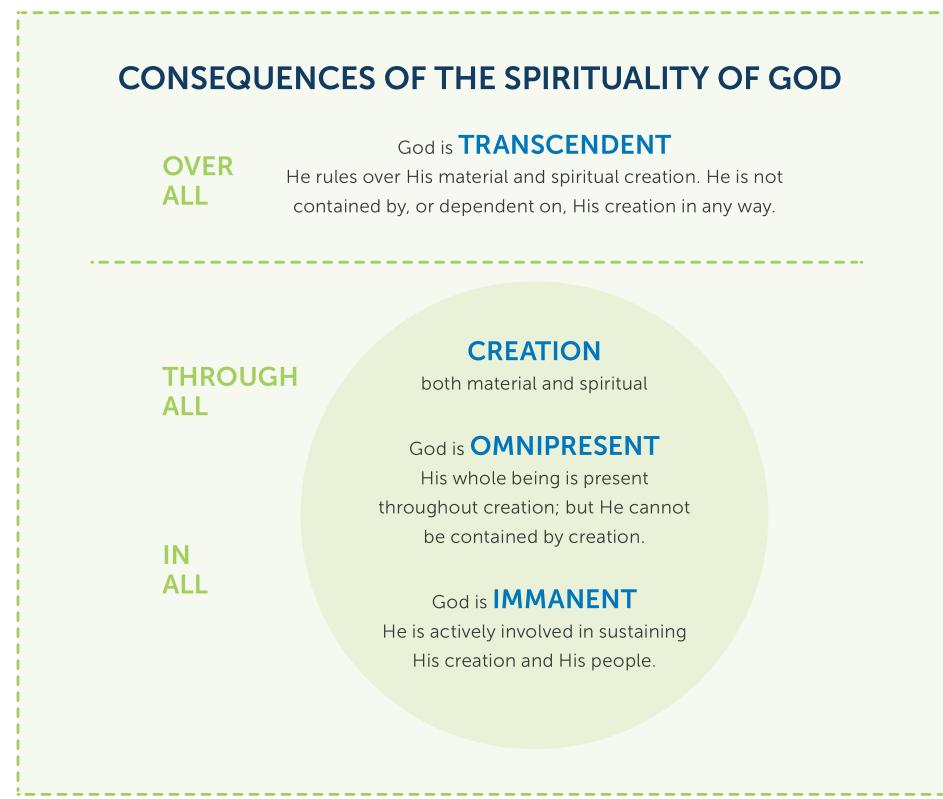
Jacob's dream of a ladder connecting heaven and earth introduced him to the idea that God's presence was not restricted to one geographic location. The vision was given to assure Jacob that God was not absent; He was actively involved in Jacob's life to fulfill His covenant with him. Jacob worshipped when he learned that God is near, even in the most unexpected places, "*Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it*" (Genesis 28:16). He rightly concluded that God was present to bless him, but it seems his understanding was limited to the thought that God *could be anywhere*, rather than that God *is present everywhere*. But, God is everywhere; He fills His creation. His whole being is present throughout His entire creation because He is not a physical being. However, you should not conclude that creation fully contains God. God is greater than His creation. He is not bound by it, nor dependent on it. Solomon demonstrated that he understood this as he prayed the prayer of dedication for the Temple: "*Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!*" (1 Kings 8:27). It is difficult not to think of God in spatial terms. We attempt to grasp His immensity with feet, or miles, or light years. But because He is spirit and cannot be measured, we must resist this temptation.

God's omnipresence throughout the physical universe is one consequence of God's spirituality. Another consequence is that He is normally invisible to physical eyes (see 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16). Physical ears do not hear Him. In fact, none of our physical senses will alert us to His presence. This makes Him inconceivable to us; we cannot fully comprehend a being who exists beyond the limit of our awareness within this material existence. Therefore, if God is to be known, He must condescend to make Himself known.

He graciously does this through various manifestations of Himself – light, cloud, smoke, wind, fire, the angel of the Lord and ultimately, the Lord Jesus – so that human minds can comprehend His character and will. Jesus Christ is the perfect representation of who God is and what He is like (John 14:9, Col. 2:9), but all the others are only manifestations of God, and not His true essence. So, we must still resort to speaking

of Him with anthropomorphisms (metaphors that attribute human characteristics to God) to communicate, however imperfectly, what He is like. Even the inspired writers of Scripture spoke of God this way, describing Him as having a face, eyes, ears, nostrils, a mouth, hands, arms and feet, as well as a house, a throne, and a footstool. They used the familiar, so that we might better grasp the unfamiliar characteristics and activities of God.

Now, returning to God's omnipresence, what does this mean in terms of God's relation to the spiritual and material spheres He created? The traditional answer scholars give is that God is **TRANSCENDENT** over creation, and yet **IMMANENT** in creation. These terms may be new to you, so the diagram here may help somewhat to illustrate them.



The two main points you should grasp are that while God fills His creation (**omnipresent**), He is not contained, limited, or dependent on it. And while God is greater than His creation (**transcendent**); He is also actively involved in it (**immanent**), especially to bring glory to Himself and to bless His people. You have already seen

God's immanence demonstrated in Jacob's vision of the angelic ladder and His transcendence described in Solomon's prayer. You also studied two passages that capture both of these together. When rebuking false prophets, Jeremiah wrote, "Am I a God at hand, declares the *LORD*, and not a God far away?" (Jeremiah 23:23).

The implication is that God is both immanently involved with those prophets who claim to serve Him, and the transcendent Lord to whom they must give account as well. And Paul summarizes all three consequences of God's spirituality – transcendence, omnipresence and immanence – when he said that God is, "...over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:6).

Of course, it is true that God manifests His presence differently in different situations. In general, God is present to sustain His creation: "...in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). More specifically, God is present with His people to bring them blessing. Psalm 16:11 tells us, "...in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Yet, the blessedness of His presence that we experience now is only a foretaste of heaven, where God is consummately present to bless His people. There, the barriers between the material and spiritual spheres will be removed and His people will experience His presence in ways that can now only be dreamt of. This experience is described in Revelation 21:3-4, "*Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.*"

In response to this you may wonder if God is present with those who are not His followers. The Bible does sometimes speak of God's judgment as a withdrawing of His presence. For example, Solomon said, "*The LORD is far from the wicked...*" (Proverbs 15:29), and David prayed, "*Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me*" (Psalm 51:11). But, in light of the clear teaching of God's universal presence, it seems best to interpret these passages as referring to the withdrawal of God's favor, or His presence to bless.

The biblical teaching of God's spirituality can be difficult to grasp, but the applications of this teaching to your spiritual journey are clear. First, since God is universally present, you should feel encouraged to meet Him in prayer and worship wherever you are. There is no one place (e.g. a church, a mountain, a city) where God will hear and receive you better than another. Special places or events may focus your attention to God's abiding presence more intensely. But, His promise in Christ is to be with you always – always present to bless you – as your heavenly Father. The second application is a warning. When we pursue sin, there is nowhere to hide from God. He understands the motives of our hearts and He cannot be fooled. His presence becomes troublesome to us until we turn in repentance to Him again. But even this trouble is evidence of His grace that will not let you go.

EQUIPPING

Is it hard for you to believe that God is near, listening to your prayers, knowing your heart and receiving your worship? Why or why not? Take a few minutes to write about your awareness of God's presence in your life.

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When you sin, how do you deal with the knowledge that God is near, and that He knows? Are you quick to repent? Do you crave His forgiveness and the filling of His Spirit? Or do you hesitate to return to Him? Do you feel awkward, or unaccepted? Explain.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Before your Journey Group meeting, use the questions below to examine your life in light of the truth you explored this week.

How do you feel about God being transcendent over your life, and yet immanently involved in your life?

Have you been trying to hide a sinful habit from God?

What's the best way your Journey Group could help in your spiritual journey right now?

How have you attempted to impact someone on your prayer list this week?

How are you doing in developing a personal worship habit?

Did you complete the Mission assignment this week?

MISSION

► SERVING

¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

MATTHEW 5:14-16 (ESV)

Your Mission assignments for this week are to continue building a daily habit of praying for those on your prayer list, and to continue your participation in planning for your upcoming group service project.

Now that you know what your Journey Group's project will be, think about how this project is, or could be, a vehicle for making the gospel known. As you know, you don't have to be a Christian to serve or give with compassion. So, how will this project be a uniquely Christian mission? How will this project serve to make the gospel of Christ known to the people receiving your service?

Use the space below to ask God to use you and your Journey Group to make the gospel of Christ known through this service project.

SUPPLICATION

"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

ROMANS 8:38-39 (ESV)

God is always near ready to commune with you. Nothing can separate you from His love in Christ. He is always ready to hear the prayer of His children. He loves to listen when you pray.

My prayer request regarding the truth for this week:

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"Four things let us ever keep in mind: God hears prayer, God heeds prayer, God answers prayer, and God delivers by prayer."

My prayer request regarding a situation in my life:

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E. M. BOUNDS

My prayer request regarding living a missional life:

Prayer requests from others in my group:

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"Of all the duties enjoined by Christianity none is more essential and yet more neglected than prayer."

FRANÇOIS FÉNELON



3

UNIT THREE

THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

Unchangeable, Eternal Perfection

UNIT ASSIGNMENTS Find your assignments here: PERIMETER.org/b3-3

COMPLETE

- Prepare for your upcoming service project

TRUTH

▶ BY MEMORY

"Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ²Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."

PSALM 90:1-2 (ESV) — option a

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

JAMES 1:17 (ESV) — option b

▶ IN BIBLE

This is the final week of your theological study on the supremacy of God. Is your vision of God growing? Are you coming to a better understanding of how grand and glorious He is? You have learned that God exercises His limitless power and perfect knowledge as the sovereign Lord over all things. He has absolute

authority over all He has made in the physical and spiritual spheres. You also learned that God, in His essence, is a spiritual being. His fundamental mode of existence is spiritual, not material. Therefore, He is transcendent over all creation, omnipresent throughout creation and immanently involved sustaining creation and His people.

This week, you will explore the immutability of God and will discover that God's being and character will never change. Then you will consider how the theology of God's immutability applies to your personal spiritual journey. You will compare several passages of Scripture this week including some that seem to teach that God does change His plans when unforeseen events arise, thus contradicting the theology of God's immutability. You may find it beneficial to focus on these passages during your personal worship. If you are reading other passages for your personal worship, be sure to follow a plan such as **PRAISE** so that you apply the Scriptures to your life and respond to them in prayer.

EXODUS 3:1-15 – This famous passage records the account of the burning bush. One of the most important facets of this passage is the revelation of God's name – “I AM” (3:14, Hebrew – YHWH). [Note: YHWH (pronounced “Yahweh”) is normally translated as “LORD” (with all capitals) in English Bibles.] Have you ever wondered why you see both “LORD” and “Lord” in the Old Testament? The difference is due to the different Hebrew words being translated:

- **LORD** – (“Yahweh”) I AM or I WILL BE, the eternal name of God.
- **Lord** – (“Adonai”) Master, or Lord; a title of reverence to address a superior, especially God.
- **LORD God or Lord God** – (“Adonai Yahweh”) used especially by Old Testament prophets.

How is God's unchanging nature implied by the name “I AM,” and the title “*The God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?*” [Hint: compare this passage with Moses' prayer in Psalm 90:1-2.]

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NUMBERS 23:1-20 – This interesting passage tells the story of a Moabite king named Balak who hired the prophet Balaam to curse Israel for him. But instead of cursing Israel, Balaam pronounced God's blessing. Balak asked Balaam to try a second time, but God gives Balaam a message for Balak.

What do verses 19 and 20 teach about God's decisions?

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PSALM 33:1-12 – This song of praise is meant to inspire joy and awe by focusing the worshipper's attention on God.

Verses 10 and 11 contrast the plans of nations with the plans of God. What do these verses teach about God's plans and how does the contrast strengthen the teaching?

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JOB 23:1-15 – Here Job is wrestling with his thoughts. On the one hand he wants to argue with God about his situation. On the other hand, he knows that God always does exactly as He wishes.

Why does Job's knowledge of God's unchanging will trouble him? How might his mind have been comforted if he had had the luxury of seeing his situation from God's perspective?

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HEBREWS 6:13-19 – This passage explains how God provides two convincing proofs to those who hope in His promises that His promises will not change.

What are the "two unchangeable things" that give us such a sure hope in His promises?

[Hint: one has to do with who God is; the other has to do with what God has said.]

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Now that you have looked at several passages that teach that God does not change His mind, let's look at some that seem to teach that God *does* change His mind.

GENESIS 6:5-7 – These verses record God's response to the universal wickedness of humanity and His resolve to destroy humanity with the flood.

1 SAM 15:22-35 – In this passage, the prophet Samuel confronts Israel's first king – King Saul – to declare that God would remove Saul's family from ruling over Israel.

EXODUS 32:7-14 – God announced to Moses that He intended to destroy Israel because they had worshipped a golden calf, yet God seemed to change His mind after Moses interceded for Israel.

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These passages apparently contradict the ones you studied earlier. How do you explain this?

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► TO SUMMARIZE

Among many other famous proverbs, Benjamin Franklin is attributed with saying, "In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes." Perhaps Franklin should have added a third certainty: change. Change is one of the inevitable, defining attributes of our existence. It is so typical of our lives that though we often try to avoid it, we know that it is ultimately unavoidable.

Because this is so, it can be difficult for us to conceive of the unchangeable – *something that can never change at all*. Yet immutability (unchangeableness) is one of the defining attributes of God's existence. He is the only aspect of our life experience that does not change.

Because an unchangeable being is difficult for us to conceive, you may never have thought about God that way before. So let's begin with a definition of God's unchangeable nature – His immutability – that is consistent with what the Scriptures teach. The immutability of God means that *God is unchanging in His person, purposes and promises; and yet He feels emotions and interacts responsively with His creation*. This definition brings together two very important attributes of God's existence that are taught in Scripture. First, it maintains the *eternal perfection*

of God's nature, character and will. And second, it upholds the truth that God is a *living being* with intelligence, will and emotion, capable of interaction with His creatures. When God is said to be immutable, it does not mean that He is static and unresponsive like a stone. Our God is an unchanging God, yet not in such a way that He is incapable of responding to us. If you were puzzled by some of the **IN BIBLE** passages, you may be helped by reviewing them with this understanding of immutability in mind.

Let's now address the statement that God is unchanging in His *person*, or being. That God cannot change in His person can be logically deduced from the perfection of God. If God is perfect, then any change must necessarily be a change from perfection to imperfection, and is therefore impossible.

The unchangeableness of God's being is also plainly taught in Scripture. It is stated over and over again in many ways. Here are some samples:

"But you are the same, and your years have no end."

PSALM 102:27

"For I the LORD do not change."

MALACHI 3:6

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

HEBREWS 13:8

"...the Father...with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

JAMES 1:17

So, as God has always been righteous, so He remains righteous. As He has always been triune, so He remains triune. As He has always been an eternal spirit, so shall he always be. As He has always been faithful, full of love and goodness, so His people will always know Him as faithful, loving and good. Even in the incarnation of Christ, His divine being remained the same eternal I AM who does not change, for the Bible teaches that His divinity was united with humanity, not changed into humanity (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:3).

Now the real challenge to God's immutability comes with the question of whether He is unchangeable in His purpose and will. The common question is, "Does God change His mind?" You read several passages that seem to indicate that, yes, God does change His mind. For instance, "...the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Samuel 15:35). The Hebrew word translated *regretted* (*repented* in the King James Version) seems to indicate that God made an error in judgment and took steps to correct His mistake. But then in the very same passage you also read, "...He is not a man that He should change His mind" (1 Samuel 15:29).

What is going on here? Is the Bible contradicting itself? In order to answer this question, let's go back first and answer the earlier question, "Does God change His mind?" Perhaps it would be helpful if the question was restated with some additional details, "Does God make plans, and then change His plans in response to some unforeseen

turn of events?" Now you can see that the key to the question is in the phrase "unforeseen turn of events." But you must ask how anything could ever happen that an all-knowing God would not anticipate? And how could anything ever happen that an all-powerful God did not fully control? Some may argue that God knows and controls an event by looking into the future, seeing how an event will unfold, and then adjusting His plans accordingly. But that would mean there is some prior point in time when God neither understands, nor is in control of that event. This cannot be. On the contrary, God always knows all things and always controls all things. The future is never in question for Him. For God there are no unforeseen events because *through His power and knowledge He controls all events*. Events always work out exactly as He designed and every detail perfectly conforms to His foreordaining will. As Job simply said, "...who can turn Him back? What He desires, that He does" (Job 23:13).

So we have to conclude that God never changes His purpose in response to some unforeseen event. In simple terms, God does not change His mind.

But if this is so, how then should we interpret those verses that seem to indicate that He does change His mind? The key to resolving this apparent contradiction is in understanding that God communicates in human terms and phrases for the common man and woman. Therefore, He uses various figurative forms of speech so that everyone can understand His will and respond appropriately. The Bible speaks of God as having arms, hands, feet, nostrils, eyes, and even wings. Yet, we understand that these are anthropomorphisms, figurative phrases that attribute human qualities to God in order to convey His nature, will and actions in a way that anyone can relate to. Passages that seem to indicate that God is changing His mind are examples of anthropomorphic speech. In the case of 1 Samuel 15:35, since God had perfect knowledge and complete control of all the events that led to Saul's ascent to the throne, the word *regretted* should be understood as expressing God's human-like grief over Saul's disobedience and the change in the way God would deal with Saul as a result. It is not meant to communicate that God made an error which must now be corrected with a change of plans.

So, Scripture is not contradicting itself in regards to the immutability of God's purposes. In fact, since Scripture has one divine author, every part of Scripture harmonizes with the rest. Scripture never contradicts itself because the author never contradicts Himself. If one part of Scripture seems confusing, there will always be another portion that explains things more clearly. If one part seems in conflict with another, it is a sign that we have wrongly understood one or both parts. Therefore, when reading the Bible it is important that you apply this principle of interpretation: let Scripture interpret Scripture. That is why you study several **IN BIBLE** passages each week, so that you can compare Scripture with Scripture in order to avoid misinterpreting an isolated text.

Now, since God's person and purposes do not change, it follows that His promises must not change either. And in fact, this is just what is taught in Hebrews 6:17-18.

"So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath,¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us."

Notice that His purpose to save those who trust in Christ is guaranteed by both the unchangeable character of His purpose, and by the promise, or *oath*, He willingly swore. Notice also that God gave us this twofold proof of His promise to encourage us to cling to Him in hope. Thus, His promise serves as an anchor for our souls (6:19) in the midst of a troubled world.

Consider a few of the promises He offers you. He promises peace of mind when you focus your attention on Him (Isaiah 26:3). He promises forgiveness of sins when you confess them to Him (1 John 1:9). He promises freedom from bondages of all kinds when you center your life in His word (John 8:32). He promises eternal life when you trust in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31). These and all of God's promises will never fail. He gave them for the hope and comfort of His people in ages past and in time to come. So, in your own spiritual journey, take comfort today that God has graciously guaranteed His promises to you. Let your vision of who God is become bigger and bigger in your mind so that your heart may be filled with love and awe for your infinite, eternal and immutable God.

EQUIPPING

How do you think the doctrine of God's immutability impacts your relationship with Him? Try to name at least 3 ways that God's unchanging person, purposes or promises apply to your spiritual journey.

What do you think: does God change His mind or not? Explain your answer.

Have you ever felt like God's promises haven't made a difference in your life? Have your own experiences caused you to doubt the immutability of God's promises? If so, take a few minutes to review Hebrews 6:17-19 and journal about your experiences.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Before your Journey Group meeting, use the questions below to examine your life in light of the truth you explored this week.

How should your life reflect the immutability of God to the lost world?

Does your life reflect the immutability of God? Why or why not?

Is there an area of your spiritual journey where you struggle to believe God's promises?

Were you filled with the Spirit this week? *[Recall that being filled with the Spirit means surrendering control of your life to the Holy Spirit, and repenting whenever you become aware that you have taken back control.]*

Do you care about the eternal destiny of other people? Explain your answer.

Describe your most satisfying recent experience in personal worship.

Did you complete the Mission assignment this week?

MISSION

► SERVING

Your Mission assignments for this week are to continue building a daily habit of praying for those on your prayer list, and to continue your participation in planning for your upcoming group service project.

Have you found your heart and mind growing in anticipation, or dread, of your group's project?
Use the space below to write about how your thinking has developed over the past several weeks.

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Now ask God to motivate and empower you with the gospel of love that He demonstrated to you in Christ. Ask Him to make you a conduit of His love to the least and the lost.

SUPPLICATION

"Then He said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend, and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; ⁶for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; ⁷and from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children [b]and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs."

LUKE 11:5-8 (NASB)

God loves to hear from you. Don't be shy. Be bold. Jesus taught us to be persistent in prayer.

My prayer request regarding the truth for this week:

My prayer request regarding a situation in my life:

My prayer request regarding living a missional life:

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Prayer requests from others in my group:

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"Some people think God does not like to be troubled with our constant coming and asking. The way to trouble God is to not come at all."

D. L. MOODY