1. **Suppose someone asked you to describe what God is like. What four words would you first use to describe him?**

2. Romans 1:19-20 indicates that nature plainly reveals the existence of God and gives us a basic understanding of him. How have you experienced this? How have you seen people distort or suppress this knowledge?

**Dialogues Together**

**General Revelation:** knowledge about God perceived through creation (Psalm 19:1-6, Romans 1:19-20).

3. What “invisible qualities” of God can we discern through what he has made?

4. What qualities of God can we discern by observing human thought, values, and passions (such as a passion for justice)?

**Special Revelation:** knowledge of God attained by revelation from God (1 Corinthians 1:21, John 1:18) through Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16).

5. What have you learned about God through Scripture that you never could have discovered through nature?

6. What do God’s actions in Scripture reveal about him? What specific actions come to mind and what do they show?

7. Communicable attributes are qualities of God with a human comparison, such as justice and compassion. What are some others?

8. Incommunicable attributes are qualities with no human comparison, such as God being all-powerful and everywhere. What are some others?

**Jesus Christ:** God’s nature and attributes are fully displayed in Jesus (John 1:1,14).

9. Read Colossians 1:15-20. What does this passage say about how Jesus uniquely reveals God to us? How complete and authoritative is that revelation? How has Jesus altered your understanding of who God is?

10. Read Hebrews 1:1-3. What does Jesus reveal about God that wasn’t previously known through the Old Testament?

11. Read John 3:16. What does Jesus’s sacrificial death for us reveal about God?

12. Through Jesus, God’s nature as a Trinity of persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is brought to light. What does God’s triune nature tell us about him?

13. There is a big difference between knowing about God and trusting him. What obstacles to trusting him do you experience? An attribute you struggle to understand or relate to? A past experience that causes doubt or reluctance to place faith in him? What from this study begins to address that obstacle?

**Thoughts, Take-Aways**

Explore God’s nature and attributes, as revealed through creation (general revelation) and Scripture (special revelation), and fully displayed in Jesus Christ.
GOING DEEPER

BY RICK JAMES

Background content for the discipler to read before the lesson and disciples to read after.

Humanity has long wrestled with questions of existence: who we are, why we’re here, how we got here. At the core of these wonderings are questions about God: does he exist? What is he like? How can we know and describe him?

Christianity offers two categories of answers, or, better, two sources of knowledge. We can infer some of what God is like through what he’s made; this is called general revelation. But, as this only takes us so far, we need special revelation, God disclosing himself to us. This comes through Scripture, God’s Word, and through Jesus, the Word made flesh (John 1:14).

GENERAL REVELATION

By observing creation we can infer qualities about its Creator (Psalm 19:1-6, Romans 1:19-20). Through experience, observation and intuition, people can discern some of God’s more obvious characteristics, as it’s somewhat self-evident that the being who made the cosmos must be powerful, intelligent, eternal, etc. Reflection on these characteristics can naturally lead to a conclusion that the Creator of all we see and know must be the greatest possible being. Upon that central premise we can identify some of God’s attributes (a word theologians use when referring to qualities or characteristics of God):

- God is entirely self-sufficient, not dependent on anything or anyone (he is necessary)
- God has no limitations on his goodness (omnibenevolence), knowledge (omniscience), or power (omnipotence)
- God is not limited by space (omnipresent, transcendent, immaterial) or time (eternal)
- God is one, he has no parts (simple)

Another reference point from which we receive general revelation is ourselves. According to Genesis 1:27, human beings are uniquely created to reflect God’s image. Given this fact, reflection on human capacities of mind and morality suggest additional qualities of God: mercy, justice, compassion, rationality, wisdom, love, and so on. Our capacities and expressions of these qualities are by no means the same as God’s, but they do inform our understanding of what he must be like.

General revelation is limited and vague, but it invites pursuit of a deeper, more personal knowledge of God. This can only come through special revelation—we need God to make himself known if we are to truly know what he’s like. Thankfully, he desires to be known, to be seen rightly and worshipped appropriately in response, so he’s chosen to reveal himself through Scripture and his Son, Jesus Christ. This self-declaration of God is an act of grace; it’s not something we deserve or that God is obligated to give.

SPECIAL REVELATION

Scripture gives us personal knowledge of God not detectable through nature. It also clarifies, corrects and refines the knowledge that comes through general revelation. It goes far beyond just identifying God’s attributes, though. God’s words and actions show how his attributes are expressed, experienced and in harmony with one another. For example, through Jesus’s death on the cross, we see God’s love and justice at the same time. Scripture also shows God’s response to a host of human activity: his dealings with his servants, enemies, and covenant people. This relational dynamic allows us to see God personally as savior, redeemer, comforter, protector, etc. This knowledge fills out the content of our faith.

Communicable and Incommunicable Attributes

Theologians generally divide God’s attributes into two categories. Communicable attributes are qualities of God with a human comparison, such as justice and compassion. Incommunicable attributes are those found only in God, such as his being all-powerful and omnipresent. While there isn’t total agreement on the list, there is broad consensus.

As to God’s major communicable attributes, we note that humans are uniquely wired toward truth, knowledge and understanding; toward love, relationship and loyalty;
toward purity, goodness and wholeness; toward justice, compassion and mercy; toward beauty, peace and free will. All these qualities (and this list is not exhaustive) find their ultimate expression in God—he is all-loving, perfectly just, completely pure, and so on.

Many of God’s primary incommunicable attributes are those we identified in our discussion of general revelation: he is omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, transcendent, and so on. These attributes have no human comparison—even the greatest of people cannot create a universe or be everywhere at once.

**SPECIAL REVELATION: JESUS**

John calls Jesus the Word of God (John 1:1)—not implying that Jesus and the Bible are equivalent, but that Jesus is the full and ultimate revelation of God’s nature. Later in the same chapter, John says “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). This is called the **incarnation**: God becoming a human being.

Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15); “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Hebrews 1:3). If we want to understand what God is like, we turn to Jesus, in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Colossians 1:19).

Everything about God becomes clearer in and through Jesus, but we’ll touch briefly on three things:

- John 1:17 says, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” God is unchanging. While he remains the same in both Old and New Testaments, Jesus manifests his grace and truth more fully.

- John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” The radical, unthinkable act of sacrificing his Son, his very essence to whom he is eternally bonded, is the ultimate display of God’s love. Through it he showed that love in its purest, fullest form is found in him.

- Through Jesus, God’s nature as Trinity (one God eternally existing in three persons) comes to light. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Though hints can be detected in the Old Testament, before Jesus, this truth of God’s nature was a mystery.

The New Testament makes abundantly clear that the only way to know God personally is through Jesus Christ.

**ADD A LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

Take a walk in the park, visit a local zoo, or simply find a quiet spot outdoors. Read Psalm 19:1-6 and consider the following questions: How many different plants and animals do you observe? What do you notice about the sky and what’s in it? Imagine you had no knowledge of God, no Bible, no tradition passed down—what might you deduce about God through the “day to day speech” you just observed? What does this tell you about what God is like? How certain would you be that your inferences are true? What about God would still be unclear?

List out as many communicable and incommunicable attributes as you can. Compare this list to a reliable source listing and describing God’s attributes (a good one, from the Josh McDowell Ministry, is found at [https://www.josh.org/resources/spiritual-growth/attributes-of-god/](https://www.josh.org/resources/spiritual-growth/attributes-of-god/)). You might choose a few to study over the next week, or go through the video study from Josh McDowell on the topic.

**ADD A LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

The Trinity may be a topic that creates confusion, particularly if your disciple has never considered it before. The early Church wrestled with it for several centuries, finally agreeing on this as its fundamental doctrine: God is one God eternally existing in three persons. Each person (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) possesses all the attributes of deity and characteristics of personality. They aren’t three parts of God, three different forms God takes, or three gods (all common misinterpretations that pepper the history of the church). In a sense, God exists as a community within himself: perfect oneness in diversity of personhood. Because of the complexity and mystery still present, many common analogies used to explain the Trinity (shamrock, the three states of water, etc.) end up falling short in some way.