

The Character of God

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There are many ways through which we discover and learn to know God. It is said that enduring difficulties and encountering tragedy sometimes triggers an awakening through which people often gain peace of mind or insight into life, their purpose in this world, as well as a renewed connection with God. For some this comes in the form of a terminal illness, tragic loss or having survived a life threatening situation. For others this process is not as dramatic, but rather finds them as God reveals His beauty in the crimson sunset, or a whisper on a sleepless night which instigates a gnawing feeling that something is not quite right, steering them to seek a deeper relationship with God.

For me it has come in different forms throughout my life – sometimes as a rare joyous experience where the world reveals to me a glimpse of the essence of God and other times in the form of challenges, hurt and loss. These times unfold as the struggle against the daily challenges, the struggle for sanity in the midst of chaos and the constant search for some sort of connection with that which is sacred. Like many people, I have fallen prey to disappointment, failure, rejection and heart-break. The beauty of these struggles is that, as difficult as it was to endure at the time, each such incident has intensified my desire to know, understand and experience God. In each of these experiences one becomes more intimately acquainted with the character of our Creator.

The character of God is diverse in nature. When one considers what the character and being of God comprises, it is apparent that God is both complex and simple. Often because we experience life and our connection with God differently, we have different perceptions of what God is like. William Young in his book *The Shack* presents God as an aged African-American woman. This fascinating novel challenges our ideas of what God is like in many ways. But nonetheless, whether one believes that God is male, female or neither of the two there are particular characteristics that remain consistent for all of us.

The perception that God is love is widespread. We have all experienced His loving and nurturing nature through the blessing and miracles that flow into our lives. God's love ensures we are provided for, comforts us and gives us the strength to journey through this life on the physical plain and fulfill the work set out for us to do. Our Creator embodies light, and is an expression of true goodness and wisdom. In the moments when we are distracted from what is important, or led astray, it is the glimpse of this light that illuminates the path back to God and back to destiny. Another characteristic of God is that He is omnipresent. God is present both within us and outside of us, is present in nature and present in all creation. Bearing this in mind, it is an indicator that we are never alone, because everything that we look at, touch, feel and experience channels our Heavenly Father, and therefore we will always be one with God. Our Creator is eternal. Great solace is found in knowing that although our lives, our experiences, and the people around us are impermanent and ever changing, when everything else stops or changes, God remains a

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constant in our lives. Just as God is eternal, so is His love. The magnificent beauty of our Divine Creator is transcendent. Being a purposeful Creator, everything in the Universe was created with an intelligence that is beyond our comprehension. There is a profound order in all existence. There is an unseen order in the space between two clouds and the spaces between each petal of a flower. This divine order exists in the way we play out our lives and in the manner in which a poet is inspired to string together words to create a unique work of art.

Some believe that God is vengeful, unforgiving, jealous and ruthless. I beg to differ, for my experiences continually reinforce that Our Creator is merciful. God exercises patience with us when we make mistakes, and is always willing to forgive us when we are ready to repent. I'm pretty convinced that God must have a wonderful sense of humour, and frequently partakes in the joys and laughter that comes with it.

Along with the characteristics that we are able to identify in God, are also the more complex ones that our limited human minds are unable to transcend and comprehend. Once, a good few years ago, while waiting for the bus home in Johannesburg city one evening, two homeless men who I often saw at the bus stop walked pass me. They seemed to be having an intense conversation. As they walked by, I heard one saying to the other – ***“It is a concept so broad, it’s broader than the horizons, too big for them to understand.”*** I was taken aback by the profound beauty of his words. Reflecting on these words now, I think they capture the true and honest essence of God.

Fiona Mountain, author of *Lady of the butterflies* wrote that in the 16th century, the process of metamorphosis was still a mystery, and was cause for much speculation. At the time it was believed that caterpillars were 'birthed' by leaves, by way of 'spontaneous generation'. In current times, thanks to scientific advancement, we have a clearer understanding of how metamorphosis transpires, but can you imagine how confusing and mysterious this process must have appeared to the unknowing minds back then. This story reminds me of our ability to understand God. God is the greatest mystery. He works and exists in ways that are completely beyond us.

We spend our whole lives unravelling and getting to know the Heavenly Father a little bit more each day. When we keep our hearts and eyes open, we are constantly presented with opportunities to enhance our relationship with God and through making use of these opportunities we deepen our understanding of the character of God.

