

PROBING THE LIMITS

HEART OF THE MATTER - A WORD FROM KEN
 EXODUS 3:14, REVELATION 4:11

We use many terms freely even though we cannot grasp the enormity of the concept. We talk about the speed of light, for example. A mind bending thought. Here are a few more: gravitational pull. Stem cell research. We say we want to “change the DNA.” (It’s a euphemism for structural transformation). We know the literal definition – DNA is a molecule that is called the building block of life. But the complexity and scale of deoxyribonucleic acid pushes us right to the brink of our capacity to understand.

Job asks, “Can you fathom the mysteries of God?” And then a follow up – “Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?” History is filled with attempts to probe. There was a time when humans considered the earth to be flat and the sky to be a giant canopy. The sun and moon went into daily hiding. God was out there on the other side of the spherical tent. In time, technology produced more and more sophisticated tools. The universe got bigger and bigger. The canopy theory vanished. The solar system became clear, with its orbits and cycles. Then the galaxy. Then galaxies (plural). The deeper we explore with modern tools of astronomy, the larger the universe becomes. Is God still out there, ever more distant, on the other side of “the edge”? According to Job, that’s the wrong question.

Who can probe the limits of the Almighty? Job poses a powerful rhetorical question. He knew the answer. So do we. No one. None of us will ever find the limits. The harder we try, the larger God becomes.

That brings us to one more mind-bending attribute of God. It’s not one we conjured up in the think-tank; God reveals this characteristic about himself. It is an intellectually satisfying attribute, however. God, to be God, could not be anything other than this. Here it is:

God is self-existent. He was not created. He didn’t create out of a sense of need. He is self-sufficient. He transcends time and space. He is everywhere present. He fills up the universe, but he is not the universe. Whatever tools we use to measure size and mass and distance – he out-scores them all.

Time is a creation. Space is a creation. Matter is a creation. Life is a creation. Spirit is a creation. But God is not. “Who created God?” people ask with a smirk as though they have found the single question that brings theology crashing down in ruins. The answer is “no one.” Creation came from nothing (*ex nihilo*) - but the God who was before time.

God simply is. In our finite but potent language – he was. He is. He ever will be. God stunned Moses when he put it bluntly. “I AM.”

But occasionally, intentionally, this self-existing, self-sufficient God appeared in time and space. The Bible records some of those events. God

DISCUSSION GUIDE

AUTHENTIC INTERACTION · COMPELLING CONNECTION · IRRESISTIBLE EXPERIENCE
 LOVING ACCEPTANCE · EVANGELISTIC INFLUENCE

spoke to Abraham and Moses and Jacob; in unmistakable ways. But to catch even a glimpse of the power of his holiness, the spectacular white-hot brilliance of his essence – well, it would strike a man dead in his tracks. The Bible addresses these issues in plain language.

And it was two thousand years ago that God took an unimaginable and extraordinary step. He revealed himself in human flesh. In his son, Jesus.

And in it all, he finds inexpressible joy. As do we.

BACKGROUND – God is the only one qualified to tell us about himself. And he has. He has revealed his character and has portrayed himself in terms we can understand. That doesn’t mean that we’ve got the complete picture. We live in his creation. We are his creation. But he was not created. He simply exists. He has never acted out of some need, as we would. He is self-existent. He is self-sufficient.

Review Exodus 3:14, Revelation 4:11

Think it over...

1. Would God be God if he were created? Why does “self-existence” make him worthy of glory, honor and power (Revelation 4:11)?
2. What is so stunning about God’s statement to Moses at the burning bush – “I am that I am”? What is the connection for Jesus? (compare Exodus 3:14 with John 8:59)
3. Some people think that the more we know, the less we need the transcendent. Can an ever-more-sophisticated technology replace our understanding of God’s character? Why not?
4. A. W. Tozer suggests that failure to understand this attribute of God (self-existence) is the essence of our sin nature. How so?
5. What does this phrase tell us about God – “from everlasting to everlasting”? See Psalm 90:2.

Bring it home...

1. How is your worship related to your understanding of God’s self-existence?
2. Many people worship a god of their own making. Talk about the fundamental error in such thinking.
3. God chooses to save, to love, to delight. It doesn’t come from some psychological need for affirmation. Read Zephaniah 3:17-18. What’s your response?
4. If we really believed in this self-existent God, how will it affect our trust? If we really trust this God, what will be the implications?
5. Contemplate a God above time and space. A God who knows your name. Worship him.

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