

If I were to ask you to think of one word to describe God, what would it be? I'm sure many of us would say things like: friend, creator, counselor, comforter, protector, strong... and the list goes on and on. There are many names of God found in scripture like Yahweh and Jehovah which mean Lord, Adonai which means master, or El Shaddai that means the All Sufficient One. They all are character descriptions of our God. When we think of all these descriptions and names of God, they all have one thing in common: they paint a picture of a God who reveals His character to us and desires to be known by us. Today, I want to share what I have personally learned about God's desire for relationship, to be known, and His jealousy for us.

When I reflect on what God has done in my life in the last four years at Augustana, it is very hard for me to pinpoint one specific thing to share that He has done. If I were to rewind back four years and describe God like I just asked all of you to do, I wouldn't have come up with a lot of descriptions. I spent my childhood growing up in a strong Christian community. I was raised with wonderful Christian parents in a Christian home. I prayed at dinnertime and bedtime, went to church, went to youth group, went on retreats and mission trips, however, once I entered college, I found I was on my own. I didn't have mom and dad waking me up for church. I was no longer in a community where everyone called themselves a Christian. I struggled finding a church I felt at home in. I sat in my Religion 110 class during discussion struggling to answer my professor when he asked me, "Well, *why* do you believe that?" The only answer I could give was, "Because I grew up with that!" I found the faith I thought I had in high school sinking slowly into complacency and confusion. I also found myself struggling with unhappiness with who I was and where I was going in life.

It wasn't until my sophomore year that I decided enough was enough. I needed to make a decision. I wanted to be happy again. I was convicted one day by a Christian friend when she

said, “You can't continue on saying 'this is what I believe because I was raised this way'. That isn't going to fly. You need to be able to *know and explain why* you believe what you believe!” During that year, I finally found a church here in Sioux Falls that I've called my home for the last two years. I began to find other Christians to encourage me. I began to feel the beginning of a hunger for more of God. It was during this time that I realized God wanted me to know Him more intimately and personally than just claiming Him as my religion. Since then, two years have passed, and in that time God has revealed to me not only who He is, but who I am in Him.

Most of us know that in scripture Christ is depicted as the Bridegroom and His church—WE—are the bride. This concept for some, myself included, can be difficult to truly understand. I find it difficult at times to picture Jesus as my husband. For the guys in the room it might seem strange to picture yourself as a bride of Christ. Unfortunately, I don't have much of a male perspective on this, but from the men that I have talked to, they picture the warrior aspect of a bridegroom—a intimate and brotherly kind of love that fights for one another.

There are some examples of this found in scripture. When I read this, I encourage you to insert yourself into the verses instead of the word “bride”:

Isaiah 62:5 “*..as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.*”

And Revelation 19:7-8 “*Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given to her to wear.*”

Jesus is our bridegroom and we are to prepare ourselves for Him like a bride. But what does this this kind of relationship with Him look like?

While I was trying to grasp this idea myself a few months ago, God reminded me to think about the general characteristics of relationships and marriage to answer this question. When

you're in a relationship with another person you know them. You know their voice, who they are, what is on their heart, and what is important to them. When you are in love, you want to spend all your time with that person. You enjoy being with them and in their presence. You continually seek to learn more about who they are. Your love grows as you learn more about who that person is. You would give your life for that person, because you have no doubt that they would do the same for you.

The same is true with God. The more time we spend with Him, the easier we recognize His voice. We know when He is speaking because *we know Him*. We have conversations with Him. We know what is on His heart because we take the time to find out through scripture, prayer, and listening to what He is speaking to us. He pursues us like a lover and we respond to His pursuit. The more we get to know Him, the more we desire to spend time with Him in His presence. As time goes on, our relationship grows deeper. We can't live without His place in our life. We would lay down our lives for Him. We come to a point where we truly *love Him*.

Like any relationship, we are going to mess up and make mistakes, but we will never find our relationship in the same place it was before. We want to seek to arrive at a place we desire above all else to know Him, see Him, be with Him, and be like Him. Andrea read from Mark 12:29-30 when Jesus told the most important commandment: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”*

Loving God develops through knowing Him. John Piper says in his book What Jesus Demands of the World, *“To love God we must know Him. If we do not know anything about God, there is nothing in our mind to awaken love. If love doesn't come from knowing God there is no point in calling it love for God...”* This quote is somewhat overwhelming, but the way I see it personally is this: I can not love someone that I've never met before or don't know anything

about. If I were to be told I was going to marry someone without knowing anything about him, how could I love him? I would want to know what he was like, what others say about him, how he treats others....and more.

Not only does God want a relationship, and to be known, He is also jealous for us. In scripture God uses the word *Qanna* to describe Himself as a jealous God. The passage read from Exodus remind us that God's name is Jealous.

Jealousy is usually seen as a negative emotion, and it is, when it is worldly. There is a difference between a godly jealousy and a worldly jealousy. Worldly jealousy is being jealous *of* someone; godly jealousy is being jealous *for* someone. God is jealous *for* us. His jealousy has our best interests in mind. He is jealous for us to be committed to Him. The idea of God being jealous for me is exciting because it reminds me that God isn't like man.... He will fight for me, and he will never change His mind about me. He has my very best interests in mind in everything He does even when I don't understand. He is jealous to see His will carried out in my life. God's jealousy shouldn't be intimidating, it should make us excited about how much *he cares!*

One of my favorite verses that paints a picture of God's love and jealousy is found in Song of Songs 8:6-7:

“Place Me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away.”

God isn't only jealous, His love burns like fire. It is intense. I love the line in that verse about love burning like a blazing fire. In scripture God is described as an all consuming fire. In Psalm

50:3 it says *Our God comes and will not be silent; a fire devours before Him and all around Him a tempest rages*. Our God is powerful! His love is powerful! A fire comes with Him and because fire consumes, God wants to consume all of our lives. Fire has no limits when it burns, and if God's love burns like fire, it has no limits once it enters our hearts.

God promises in Jeremiah 29:13 that we will find Him when we seek Him with all our hearts. God meets us where we are at. From the story I shared earlier from my own life, I have realized that my relationship with God is a process that doesn't end. I will never know everything about God, but I think that is what is so beautiful about Him. I can't pretend that I've perfected any of these things that I have just talked about, but my hope and prayer today is that I could give you a small picture of this part of God's character. ...Next time you are asked to describe God, I hope that His desire for relationship, to be known, and His jealousy for us will be a part of your description of who He is.