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Title: *What Kind of God #2 - "God is Omni"*

Speaker: Jonathan Thiede

In case we haven't met, my name is Jonathan Thiede, and I serve on the adult ministry team here at Orchard Hill Church. It's an honor and a pleasure to be speaking to you today as we continue in our series, "What kind of God and in this series?" The purpose is to sort of examine what God says about himself and how that should impact us.

Obviously, according to that video, there are many ways that people understand God. We want to understand how God has revealed himself. Kurt kicked off the series last week by talking about God as triune in nature, that He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And I wish the concepts would get easier. But today it's going to once again be familiar and foreign to us.

That's the way it is when we look at God's nature. We hear about these words all the time, but what do they really mean? So today we're going to be looking at what is often called God's Omni characteristics, that he is Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent. Just like carnivores eat meat and herbivores eat plants, omnivores eat both. As you can see, it's a simple concept. Omni just means all. These words mean that God is all-powerful, omnipotent. He is all-knowing, omniscient. He is all-presence, omnipresent. But apart from these words being sort of out of date, I think there's another bigger reason that these concepts can be difficult to understand, that is, as technology has increased, our sense of wonder has decreased.

Let me give you an example. My family has a small farm in Indiana, and a few weeks ago I had the pleasure of taking my wife out there for the very first time. As we were planning the trip, I realized I didn't have the address. So, I did what we all do, I went to Google. I typed out the words family farm when I realized I'm not very smart, because for a moment, I was totally thrown off that there was any information that would not be available on the Internet.

Do you ever do that? You Google something. It's not there. You Google it a little more specifically. It is hard to come to grasp with the fact there would be nothing on the Internet that wouldn't come up. It's a technology, and specifically the Internet has given us this sense of endless possibilities. When there's no question that can't be answered, we sort of lose our questioning altogether.

Why would I think about a God who is all knowing, when I carry around a device that is all knowing? Why would I think about a God who is present everywhere, all at once, when in 2 seconds I can Facetime someone on the other end of the world? You see what I'm getting at? When we feel omni, we lose our sense of awe in the one who is omni.

This can lead to anxiety, a lack of stability in our hearts. If our world, our experiences, all that has, we lose our sense of omni. We'll start to feel weak. There are moments that are common to human experience, moments that we all face, that we realize that as much as we might feel infinite, we are finite. Moments that remind us that as much as we might feel powerful, we are weak. Moments that help us realize as much as we might feel omni, we are limited.

When I was in student ministry, I tried hard to boil down certain truths so that students could understand them. I would often use this question, "How do you know that everything is going to be okay?" The students responded, "Because we know that God is powerful and he loves us." That question really drives to the question that this series really, provides for us, the concept many of our issues can be solved by an understanding of who God is.

Though we understand God, we understand ourselves. When we understand ourselves, it helps us make sense of this world that we live in. A.W. Tozer once famously said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." It's this idea that what we believe about God has ripple effects that change everything in our lives.

The question I used to give my students is the same question I want to pose to you today. At the end of the day, "How do you know that everything is going to be okay?" Do you have a faith in God that settles you when everything is falling apart? It's my hope that if you remember nothing else from today, you remember, the things we know about God settle the things we don't know about everything else.

We'll begin by looking at these three omni attributes as they presented to us in Psalm 139 and elsewhere in the Bible, how God reveals himself in his Word. And then we'll ask the question, "Is the way that God has revealed himself good for me?"

Let's take a brief prayer as we dive in. Father, we come to you humbly. We know no other way to come to you as we think of these words. We confess that these are not words that we use every day. These are not words that most of us even grasp. And so, God, we pray that you would teach us today. We don't come here arrogantly, assuming that we can figure it all out. But we come to you recognizing that we need the wisdom that comes from above. We need your guidance as we look in your scriptures, as we investigate what you have said. God, we pray that you would teach us today, not only teach us head knowledge, but allow us to go out and be changed by your revelation. We love you. In your son's name. We pray. Amen.

One of the most impactful books I read in college was called Scary Close by Donald Miller. He talks about how we all live with this fear of intimacy. How we all feel if someone really saw the real us. If we took off our mask and behaved how we really are, people might not like what they see. This makes friendship difficult. I remember reading this and feeling seen. When you're a kid, making friends is easy. But what no one tells you when you're a kid is that one day you're going to grow up, and as an adult, having a friend, a true friend that you can take the mask off with is really rare.

It's hard to reveal yourself, to feel safe enough to come out of hiding. That's why I'm constantly amazed that God doesn't hide from us. Think about it, God is the only person in the universe that has the ability, the means to shut everyone else out. Yet he is constantly inviting everyone in. The Bible is often called God's revelation because in it he is revealing himself to all of humanity.

From beginning to end, we open the Bible, to see God primarily saying three words, "Here I Am." That's what I want you to see as we look through Psalm 139. God chooses to be intimately personal in all His ways. God chooses to be intimately personal in all His ways, and

his first way is found in Psalm 139:1-6, God is powerfully knowledgeable. He's powerfully knowledgeable. It's here we're talking about the omniscience of God, the all-knowingness of God.

I was helped this week by a scholar named John Frame, who is from Pittsburgh. He writes all about the doctrine of God. Pretty good for 'Yinzer', right? He says that when we think of omniscience, we often think that simply God knows everything, like he's in a math class and there's no problem he couldn't solve. He's just some sort of calculator. That is true, but John Frame goes further and says that God not only knows everything, but he is actually the standard of truth in all the universe. What this means is there is nothing he does not know. All math, all science, all religion, all philosophy, all art, all of it has its origin in God.

You might say, "That's a neat thought, but why does it matter? How does it relate to me?" It's a fair question, because if God did not choose to be a personal revealing God, it wouldn't matter. If God did not choose to reveal himself to us, in His Word, nothing would matter. We wouldn't be here today. We would have no way of knowing that God exists. But because God is personal, this truth has a tremendous impact on us. That is what we see here in the author, David, as he reflects on this all-knowing God. Beginning in Psalm 139:1, David says, "You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I arise, you perceive my thoughts from afar."

This is showing that God knows you. He not only just knows you, but he also knows you with extreme detail. He doesn't just know you as far as your birth certificate, you were born one day and then he leaves. No, he knows you with extreme detail. He knows when you sit and when you rise. The implication here is that if God knows about the small things, if God knows you to such a small detail, surely, he knows about the big ones.

From the beginning, his omniscience plays out. Not only does God know what you're going to do, he also knows how you're going to do it. He knows why you're going to do it. He not only knows that you're going to stand, but he also knows what kinds of things you will stand for. He knows your ways, your heart, your passions, your values, and what kinds of things you care about.

He's the master engineer of your unique operating system. Isn't it amazing that God not only knows mankind? He not only knows human history, but he knows you. He not only knows you as you know yourself, but in these verses, we find that he knows us better than other people know us, better than we know ourselves.

God not only knows that you cheated on the exam. He knows why. He knows what tempted you, what motivated you. He not only knows what kind of person you're going to marry; he knows what you see in them. I don't know about you, but when I think about this, it's kind of overwhelming. It is frankly hard to tell if it's a good thing or a bad thing.

God's ways are just overwhelming to think about. And that's exactly what David tells us in 139:6, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain." When we really look at God, we really consider his ways and believe in his ways. We must recognize God, "I am one way, but you are another." David is saying, "God, when I think about you, what you know about me, I'm overwhelmed. This knowledge is too great, too wonderful."

It's like watching a good movie, getting to the end, and then thinking back at the beginning. You are overwhelmed by what you saw, as you think back to the beginning, you realize the depth of the plot: in the characters, in the wisdom and skill it must have taken for the author to weave all these things into something so beautiful.

In a word, it's worship. When we see something beautiful, we have a worshipful experience, and this is the only way to approach God. When we see Him for who he really is we cannot help but bow down in awe and say, "God, I know some things, but in light of you, I know nothing." God is powerfully knowledgeable.

Is there anything we see in this passage that God is intimately present? He is intimately present. He is omnipresent. What this simply means according to John Frame, "God is always present in all His creation." The word God's creation is there, and his very presence is, as well. This is where God seems so paradoxical. If you consider this, he is this gigantic, overwhelming force. The Bible calls him an all-consuming fire to the fact that there's this tension all throughout the Old Testament in Exodus, and in Leviticus. The people of Israel see God for who he is, they see him without a mask. What do they say to Moses? "Don't let us see God again. We can't handle that. We'll talk to you, Moses. But we can't be in God's presence." So, there is this tension that builds all about the Bible that God wants to be with His people. But how can he be with His people without burning them?

The Gospel is that God has chosen a way in His infinite wisdom to be present with us in a way that warms us without burning us. He is powerful, yes, but he is personal. Reflecting on this, David says in 139:7-8, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you were there." David is basically saying, "God, I can't get away from you. I couldn't escape you even if I wanted to. You continue to pursue me in good and in bad." He continues in 139:11-12, "If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to you.'"

Earlier, I said, we have these moments that are common in human experience, where we realize our weakness, we realize our frailty. This reminds me of a story in the Bible of a woman named Hagar. It is a sad story. In Genesis 16, we find that she's been kicked out of her husband's home and in her society, this would mean that she's pretty much left to die.

What's worse, she is a pregnant mom with no way to provide for herself or her baby. She's cast out, ashamed, disappointed, and hurt. What does God do? What would you do? Would you send a pastor or a priest or someone from church to go encourage them? Would you send them a good man, a better man who won't throw her out? Well, that might be what we would do.

But instead of sending someone, God does the unthinkable. It is a bit provocative when you think about that. God himself, the maker of the heavens and the earth, visits Hagar in her distress, and he himself visits her with a simple message. I see you and I'm for you. What a truth. What a revelation.

Think about all the hierarchies that we deal with in life. Imagine getting 5 minutes with the CEO of your company. Yet that is not the way God is. God doesn't send someone else. God

doesn't send an intern. No. God deals with us. God is present with us. Just like Hagar, he says, "I see you and I'm for you."

Maybe some of you can relate. Maybe you feel that your story has become so unthinkably dark, so dark that God couldn't possibly still be present. You think back to your faith in the past, you say maybe he was present with me at one time, but there's no way he's still here. Maybe you wake up next to someone you no longer recognize, and you think this marriage is just beyond saving. Maybe you think back to your childhood. You feel shame because you think, man, the version of me as a kid would not be proud of who I've become. Maybe you come to Church week by week, and you see other people. Maybe even in your small group, you say, "I see God's presence with you, but there's no way he is present here."

Hagar reminds us that God specializes in the dark times. To him, darkness is not dark at all. He comes to you even today, with the same encouragement, "I see you and I'm for you. Though you are like a child that is afraid of the dark. I am here." David reminds us that to God, the darkness is nothing, but He himself is the light in our dark world. God is intimately present with His people; God is powerfully knowledgeable. He is intimately present.

Finally, we see in the Bible that God is firmly in control. He is firmly in control. He is omnipotent. When we think about this, we normally just think of God being all powerful. But again, John Frame is hopeful here, he says that God is not just powerful, but he is in control of himself. He is in control of himself, and therefore he's in control of all things. You see, when we think of power, we often think of someone who is out of control.

My first semester in college, I took this class called Greek and Roman mythology. I thought it would be an easy A. It turned out to be the hardest class I ever took in college. The professor was just so passionate about the subject. What I learned was that the Greek gods are very different from the God of the Bible. The Greek gods are the definition of out of control. If you want to know what Zeus is like, think of the most toxic frat boy that you went to college with, and that is basically Zeus and all his buddies.

But John Frame's definition helps remind us that God is more in control of himself than anyone who has ever existed. He's more in control of himself than anyone, that God the Father is not tempted and tried, but he is firmly in control of himself and therefore his creation.

I think the most obvious place we see this is in the Book of Job. After hearing Job's complaint, God asks him a series of questions. He reminds Job that God is the one who fashions the stars in the sky, that God is the one who planned the cosmos and placed the planets in their proper place. He reminds Job that he's the only one who can design every animal in the animal kingdom to design it in such a way where life can exist. He reminds him that he alone controls the destiny not only of individual men and women, but all the human race.

My wife makes fun of me because I'm probably the only millennial on the planet who would rather order food over the phone than go on a website. I don't even know why I do it. I think I just have this anxiety over; I do want to drive 20 minutes to find out they don't have my order.

I just need some sort of human confirmation that they got the order. I'm going to pick it up. It's good. It's the definition of a first world problem.

As silly as this is, I think a lot of us have this anxiety with God. We hear about his responsibilities, and we sort of lose sight of that interpersonal relationship that we're supposed to have. We start to fear that maybe our order is going to get lost. We pray and we pray, and we pray, and we don't get an answer. And we think maybe things just got lost on his desk. But what an encouragement to know that God is in control of all things. It is not in his nature to lose anything. We see the wisdom in the power of God come together and it encourages us that it not in God's nature to let anything fall through the cracks. God isn't like your disorganized coworker who has files scattered all over his desk. No, God has everything and every person in their proper place. So, wherever you are, whatever season you're walking through, you can know that if these things are true about God, that it is purposeful. Yes, God is powerful, but He is personally powerful.

Your situation does not overwhelm him or catch him off guard. He knows you, is present with you and is in control of you. The omniscient shepherd knows you. He knows his sheep. The omnipresent shepherd stays with the sheep, and the omnipotent shepherd will never lose his sheep.

I mentioned earlier that sometimes we see God's ways, but we are unsure if they're good or not. One person might see God's omniscience and feel comforted, but another person might say, "I don't know if I'm comfortable with God knowing everything about me." One person might see God's omnipresence and be comforted, but another person might say, "I don't know if I'm comfortable with a God that I can't get away from." The question really is this, "Are God's ways good for me?"

So, for the remainder of our time, I'd like to show you that God's omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence are good for you. They form this basis, that they are not just theological concepts. They form the basis of a relationship. It would not be possible to have a relationship with God if he were not the way that he is. I want you to see that God's ways make sense of God's promises. God's ways make sense of God's promises.

If you had a friend who just doesn't really know what they want, specifically in a relationship. They seem to always be dating someone, always with someone, but they don't really like the person they are with. It is a headache to be friends with this kind of person because they are always complaining about their boyfriend or girlfriend. At some point you just lose it. You just get frustrated. You say if you don't like them that much, then why are you with them? And the truth is, many people are in relationships because they like the idea of a person. But when that idea puts on flesh and bones, they lose interest.

Do you like the idea of dating someone who's mysterious? But they get frustrated when they feel like they can't really get to know them. They like the idea of being with someone who's good with their money, but they hate when they get nickel and dimed on their own purchases. Two things are true; they both want a relationship with this person, but at the same time they find they really don't.

I feel like that's how we are with God. Sometimes we grow up in church, many of us, and it's become this routine in our lives, and it's so routine that we've never really taken a beat and asked the tough question about my worship of God, I claim to love him, but do I even like him?

If we are honest with God, sometimes I think we'd like him to be smaller. We like a small God. We would rather have a God who only knows what I want him to know. A God who is only present when I'm feeling lonely. A God who works things out for my good but doesn't necessarily tell me what to do. But it's important also to ask, "What would my own life actually be like if God were this way?"

Because I think the longer, we think about it in our minds, the surer we will be that the God of the Bible is actually the best-case scenario. Not only is there not a better God in the universe, but there's also no better God imaginable. While our heart might want a God who only knows what I want Him to know, the longer we think about it, we realize that a God who doesn't know me can't truly love me. Isn't that why David gets so emotional writing this psalm? He is not just overwhelmed about God's knowledge. He is not just having a theological moment, an academic moment, but he is saying, "God, you know me. You know everything about me. You know my ways, my heart. You know why I did this? You know how I got in this circumstance. And you still love me." David isn't merely overwhelmed by the knowledge of God, but the love of God.

Considering his personal awareness of David's ways. I was listening to an old sermon this week by Tim Keller, where he pointed out that this is the story of the woman at the well. Jesus has this interaction with this woman in John chapter four, and people are coming up to her and asking her, you know, what's going on with you and what does she say? "Come see a man who told me everything I ever did." Is she just amazed that Jesus knows all these things about her? Of course not. It's because for the first time, she experienced the love of a man who, when she took off her mask, he did not run away. When she put her barriers down, he knew everything about her and still loved her. When she revealed her darkest secrets, he did not run away from her, but in fact ran toward her.

Friends, this is who God is. I want you to know that today. We live our whole lives trying to bury our past. But God is there. He says, I know your past and I love you anyway. True love is seen in a God who knows you and loves you.

That is the first reason God's omni attributes are good for us. The second reason is that God must be omni in order for His promises to make any sense. The Office is a TV show famously known for cringe humor. For some people this is a positive and other people can't really sit through it. I've been going through it recently and recently got into an episode called Scott's Torts, which is a famously cringe worthy episode. Spoiler alert: The main character, Michael Scott makes this promise to a bunch of kids that he is going to pay for their college in ten years. Ten years go by, Michael has less money than he started with, and so he made this promise that he is unable to fulfill. He writes a check with his mouth that he's unable to cash. This is, in a sense, illustrative of why God must be omni, because if God isn't omnipotent, then God becomes Michael Scott and we just become the kids that he makes all these promises to.

Think about how many promises God makes in the Bible, not just to specific people, but to all humanity. If you read his Isaiah 41:10, which says "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." So clearly, if God is not omnipotent, if he doesn't have the power to carry these promises out, then he's just someone who makes empty promises. If he can't uphold us, can't strengthen us, then we have every right to fear.

You see, the security of the promise hangs on the power of the person to keep their promises. I can tell you that I can get your child into Harvard. But don't believe me, I don't have the power to do that. Thankfully, our God is not full of empty promises. Our God is a promise keeper and as we've seen, his ways are not only powerful but personal.

The first reason has to do with his love. The second has to do with his promises. And now the third and most important, has to do with his sacrifice. We started our time with a quote, so it's only fitting to go back to it. Tozer said, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." It sounds good, right?

But what if I told you that someone named C.S. Lewis strongly disagreed with that? I was heartbroken, too, because I like both authors. But it's true, not long after Tozer said this, Lewis responded in his book Weight of Glory. He says, "How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of him is of no importance, except in so far as it is related to how he thinks of us." It is at this point; I'd like to say sorry for leading you astray at the beginning with that quote. But I think C.S. Lewis is absolutely right.

As important as it is to think correctly about God, that's why we're doing this series. If God did not choose to love us, it would be in vain. God's power, knowledge and presence are important, but without being fueled by his love they are just facts. We love because he first loved us.

So, the million-dollar question that we started with, "How do you know that everything is going to be okay?" Even at the beginning, we knew that it all depends on God's power and God's love. So now that we've talked about God's power, the next question is this, "How can you be sure that God loves you? How can you be sure that God loves you if it all hangs on God's love? How can I be sure of it?" For that we look no further than the cross, for God so loved the world that He gave his only son.

It's a familiar verse, but these words take on a whole new meaning in the light of what we've talked about today. First, for God the Father, is the omniscient God who has all this knowledge. He is all the knowledge, all the truth in the universe. But what does he do with it? He doesn't just build a library. He doesn't just bask in his own knowledge, but he uses this knowledge for our good.

The Gospel is a story of God, who in his wisdom created this plan from eternity past that might make it so that he might send his only son to die for humanity. He put in a plan that was so airtight that no one could thwart it. Isn't that what we talk about at Christmas time? Herod commissioned that all children under the age of two would die. It was drama, right? Because Jesus is under two at the time. But God in his wisdom can work around these things. There's

no one who can support the plan of God, but the omniscient. God is also the omnipotent God, the brilliant God who forms the plan is also the powerful God who can carry the plan out. The God of knowledge and God of power is also the God of love, who, in a moment's notice could have wiped out humanity and started again. But in love. We know that he chose instead to write a different story, one where the bad people get to experience what it means to be known and loved.

John 3:16 also reminds us that the omnipresent God humbled himself and became presence. Wrap your head around that. The God who knew no limits became limited for you. Philippians 2:6 says, "Jesus being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant and being found in appearance as a man. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross!" The king left his throne and traded it for a cross. He did it all for you.

You see, the good news of Christianity is not merely about who God is, but what God has done on your behalf and what He has done all comes down to sacrifice, to be omni, but to give up being omni, to willingly suffer, face embarrassment and even die. It was all for you at the cross God traded in his omnipresence for your presence at the cross. God traded in his omniscience so that you might know him at the cross. God traded in his omnipotence so that you might experience what it means to be saved in our hearts. The only proper response to this is to say with the hymn writer I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene in wonder how he could love me a sinner condemned, unclean.

Do you believe that today? Do you stand amazed that this God is not just powerful but personal? Do you believe that the God who knows everything about you loves you deeper than you could ever imagine? Do you believe that an Omni God left his throne suffered and even died for you? If the answer is yes, if you truly believe that in your heart, I think you'll find that God's ways will start to change you.

The things you know about God will begin to settle the things you don't know about everything else. You say, if God is truly as powerful and truly this loving, there's really nothing that can happen in my life that will totally unsettle me. There might be moments where there's a crisis of faith, but there's nothing in my life that can totally deject me. There will always be hope in my life. Your prayers can now be injected with a dose of faith. So, you can say, God, I don't know why this happened, but you know, and I trust you. God. I don't know what or where my future holds, but I know that you're already there working it out for my good. God, I don't know how this is going to happen, but I trust that as my Father, you're not only able to bring it about, but you want this for my good.

Maybe you're here today and you're struggling. You just feel like, when one thing starts going well, everything else starts going wrong. You're trying to reconcile a relationship that just feels beyond repair. You're trying to break into a career field, but you just keep being told no.

As we close, it's come back to the question that is deep in your heart. "How do you know that things are going to be okay?" Because you know that like Hagar, God sees you and is for you.

Like the woman at the well, you know that God knows everything about you and loves you anyway. If God is for us, who can be against us?

Let's pray. Father, we are overwhelmed by who you are. God, we are reflecting today, and we pray that we would not do so. Trivially that if you really are who you say you are, that if you really are this great, if you are this all-consuming fire, that that we would come to you with humility and reverence. God, we are just so glad that you are a God of love. We're just so grateful that we are allowed to enter this divine dance with you that you know everything about us instead of wiping us out. You know everything about us. But instead of running away from us, instead of moving on to someone else, God, you pursue a relationship with us. God, I just pray for all of us that that we were going to respond accordingly, that we would reflect on what a good and gracious God you are, but also what a powerful God you are, and that that would change our circumstances for the better because we love you.

In your son's name.

We pray. Amen.