

God's name is a four letter word. What you see up on the screen today is called the Tetragrammaton – the four letter word that represents the holy, personal, intimate name of God Himself. Does God have a personal name like Rick, Jane or Joe? Yes, He does and that name is Yahweh. What's in a name? I've begun a series of messages on several of God's names in the Bible because God's names reveal His character, point to our needs and give us additional ways to worship and praise Him.

Yahweh – we're pretty sure that's how to pronounce it. You may know that the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. Hebrew is typically written with only the consonants not the vowels. If you know the language, the context of the passage usually confirms what word is being used even if the consonants alone don't make it clear. It wasn't until the middle ages that Hebrew scribes began adding the vowels to the Old Testament Hebrew text as they made hand written copies. We know that they deliberately inserted the wrong vowels for God's personal name. They took another name for God – *Adonai* – and inserted those vowels into the four letter Tetragrammaton. What came out is a name for God you might recognize – *Jehovah*. If you enjoy using the King James Version of the Bible, you'll see that word "Jehovah" everywhere. But "Jehovah" is actually an artificial name for God. Most scholars agree the correct pronunciation is Yahweh. Why on earth did these scribes deliberately mess up God's personal name? It was out of a sincere – if somewhat misguided – desire to protect the sanctity of God's name. They were very concerned about blaspheming God by using His name inappropriately themselves or by allowing others to use it disrespectfully.

Yahweh is used over 6000 times in the Old Testament – the most widely used name for God by far. All of the Old Testament names for God are rich in significance. What does "Yahweh" mean? You may recall that Moses – before he became a great Old Testament leader of the Jewish people - was watching sheep out in the desert and God appeared and spoke to Him out of a desert bush that was on fire but miraculously didn't burn up. God wants Moses to go back to Egypt and lead His people out of slavery. Moses is convinced God is asking the wrong man. Let's read part of that conversation. What name is God to be remembered by? Yahweh. All sorts of interesting studies have been done on the meaning of that name. It probably has something to do with the Hebrew verb "to be." It has many nuances, but most scholars agree that it points to the self-existence of God in some profound way. It can literally be translated "I am" or "I am who I am." It underlines the fact that no one created God and no one will ever put God out of existence. Yahweh can also mean "I am being what I am being" or "I am the One who always is." Think with me today about three important aspects of this name for God – Yahweh – and their significance for your life and mine.

YAHWEH: THE ONE WHO IS ALWAYS PRESENT

Yahweh is eternally present. Quite simply, He is always present everywhere. God is right here this morning while also being everywhere else it is possible to be at the same time. When you leave today, God will go with you and He'll also still be right here. God

is not bound by either time or space. There's no part of the universe that has more or less of God at any given time. Every nook and cranny of the universe has as much of God as anywhere else. Now I know that's hard to grasp, but the personal implications are even more important.

First, God desires to be with and actually is present with you at all times. Here's what God said about the Jewish people in the Old Testament: "... they will know that I am the LORD (YAHWEH) their God. I am the one who brought them out of the land of Egypt so that I could live among them. I am the LORD (YAHWEH) their God." (Exodus 29:46). What was true of the Jewish people in the Old Testament is just as true for followers of Jesus today. That, in and of itself, is an amazing thought. The God of the entire Universe knows you in an experiential, personal way and wants that to be a growing, permanent, eternal relationship. But, there is an even greater implication.

Second, you can live every day with the utmost confidence despite life's inevitable struggles, disappointments, failures and heartaches. On what basis? God's eternal presence provides blessing. The Bible says, "The LORD (YAHWEH) replied, 'I will personally go with you, Moses, and I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you.'" (Exodus 33:14 NLT) God isn't saying that everything that happens to you is going to be great, but that He has a good purpose in everything that happens along life's journey. In the midst of it all His presence will give peace and perspective - rest. Moreover, God's eternal presence provides dignity. Apply what God said to Israel to you: "I will live among you, and I will not despise you. I will walk among you; I will be your God, and you will be my people. I am the LORD (YAHWEH) your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so you would no longer be their slaves. I broke the yoke of slavery from your neck so you can walk with your heads held high.'" (Leviticus 26:11-13 NLT) God, through His Son, Jesus, broke the yoke of slavery to sin from your neck, so you, too, can walk with your head held high. The next time you feel rejected or marginalized, remember that God's presence in and of itself conveys upon you an eternal dignity.

God's eternal presence provides courage. Tomorrow – why, the very next minute – is unknown to you. But because God is eternally present, He's already living in the next minute, the next hour, the next day. He's already living in what will be 100 years from now or 100 million years from now. Yahweh sees the beginning of time and the end of time all at the same time. Someone has said, "God dwells in eternity but time dwells in God. He has already lived all of our tomorrows as He has lived all our yesterdays. For him nothing that will happen has already happened." There are those moments when fear grips your heart for a variety of reasons. You feel alone, insecure, and at the mercy of nameless enemies. It's just then that you need to remind yourself of Yahweh's character and take courage: "'Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD (YAHWEH), your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.'" (Isaiah 43:1-3 NLT) Yahweh is the One who is always present in your life. Here's a second truth.

YAHWEH: THE ONE WHO NEVER CHANGES

When Yahweh says to Moses - "...Say this to the people of Israel: Yahweh, the God of your ancestors—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you." This is my eternal name, my name to remember for all generations." (Exodus 3:15 NLT) - He is reminding Moses that He's the One who never changes. All that Yahweh was to Abraham, He will be to Moses. It was about a 400 year span between Abraham and Moses. So what? Yahweh never changes. The implication for you and me is clear. All that Yahweh was to Moses, all that Yahweh was to David, all that Yahweh was to Paul, all that Yahweh was to Peter, all that Yahweh was to past Christian leaders like John Wesley, Hudson Taylor or Adoniram Judson, all that Yahweh is today to present Christian leaders like Billy Graham or Rick Warren, Yahweh is to you and to me. Yahweh is now what He has always been and He'll be like that tomorrow and forever. One reason we know that Jesus is God is that we're told He never changes. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." (Hebrews 13:8 NLT) Because Jesus is God, He doesn't ever change.

Why is that good news today? Yahweh's life doesn't change. He doesn't get older or lose His abilities. He's perfect which means God doesn't develop or mature. Because He's perfect, He can't change for the better or for the worse. Yahweh's character never changes. The Bible states that clearly. "...Yahweh! The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty..." (Exodus 34:6-7 NLT) Yahweh's definition of what's true and good never changes. Human beings change their definition of what's true and good all the time, but God never does.

Recent surveys of Americans reveal that we are making up our own moral codes. Only 13% of our population believes that all ten of the Ten Commandments are still true and good. Nearly a third of all married Americans have had an affair. A fifth of our nation's children have lost their virginity by age 13. One in five American women say she's been date raped. For \$10 million, 7% of Americans would kill a stranger. A few years ago, Disney released a restored version of its classic animated movie, Pinocchio. A movie reviewer for the Colorado Springs Gazette Telegraph wrote, "Pinocchio rigidly enforces the finger wagging behavioral codes of the [19]40s: Good boys don't tell lies. Good boys go to school. Good boys resist temptation and listen to their consciences." He called it "a catalog of 1940's prejudices." Honesty, dependability, self-control and having a clean conscience were once virtues, then they became values, and now, apparently, they're prejudices. Despite what people do, Yahweh never changes his definition of what's true and good.

Yahweh's interaction with human beings never changes. Other people change in their attitudes towards you and me all the time. Yahweh always loves you. People have infinite and intrinsic value to Yahweh. That's why He always listens to your prayers. I didn't say He always answers them the way you want them answered, but He always listens and He will answer His way. Yahweh doesn't have office hours. He never takes

a day off. His eyes never glaze over with boredom when you bring your needs and concerns to Him. Yahweh is never moody, fussy and preoccupied. Yahweh is never interested in you one day and then disinterested the next. Because Yahweh is always holy, He will never excuse your sin. He will always call you to repentance. Because Yahweh is full of love, He will always act in love when it comes to you. Because Yahweh is full of grace, He can be nothing short of gracious in His dealings with you. Because Yahweh is full of truth, He can't deceive you. Because Yahweh is full of joy, He always invites you into joy even though getting there will cause you pain sometimes.

At the end of the day, Yahweh alone is worthy of your absolute trust. We live in a world of change. So much changes in our lives and often with change comes sadness, loss and anxiety. Sometimes we become estranged and separated from people we love. Our economic condition or health can change for the worse. As we grow older, the number of changes seem to escalate. We human beings have a tendency to trust in everything else but Yahweh. But the longer you live, the more you're driven back to God and God alone. No one and nothing is as dependable as He is. No one and nothing is as faithful as He is. The longer we live the more we experience the truth of that Bible verse we learned as a child: "Trust in the LORD (YAHWEH) with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take." (Proverbs 3:5-6 NLT) Simple? Yes, and the longer you live, the only approach to life and living that makes any sense at all! Precisely because Yahweh is the One who never changes, only He's worthy of your absolute trust and devotion. Here's a final thought as we reflect on the significance of the name "Yahweh."

YAHWEH: THE ONE WHO MEETS EVERY NEED

For the rest of this message series on God's names, we'll be considering names that are "Yahweh – Something". For instance, next week we'll be considering "Yahweh – Yir'eh" which means "The LORD will provide." Now, the name "Yahweh" can be translated as "the becoming One." That doesn't mean God is evolving into something He wasn't previously. Instead, it simply means that Yahweh is always becoming something necessary to you in terms of what you need and then meeting that need Himself. There isn't a single step in your spiritual journey that you will walk alone. There isn't a single phase of your spiritual experience that Yahweh will not be present. There isn't a single need that you'll become aware of that Yahweh can't provide whatever's necessary to meet that need. Yahweh is the One who meets every need.

In the Gospel of John, we discover that Jesus regularly referred to Himself as the I AM which is basically the same as calling Himself Yahweh. "That is why I said that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I AM who I claim to be, you will die in your sins.... When you have lifted up the Son of Man on the cross, then you will understand that I AM he.... I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!" (John 8:24, 28, 58 NLT) And just as the Old Testament provides many "Yahweh and Something" names for God, Jesus provides many "I AM and Something" descriptions to help us understand how He alone can meet every need in your life past, present and future. He sees your spiritual hunger and says "I AM the bread of life." He sees the spiritual

darkness that you live in and says, "I AM the light of the world." He sees that you're spiritually lost and says "I AM the good shepherd." He sees your need for direction and says, "I AM the way, the truth and the life." He sees your need for a kind of life that He alone can give you and says, "I AM the true vine." He even sees that you will die one day and says, "I AM the resurrection and the life." Jesus claimed to be Yahweh because He is Yahweh in the flesh – the very same One who meets every need.

Let me tell you a story about three brothers: Marcus, the oldest, then Nathan and then Simeon. When Nathan was three, his parents noticed some developmental lag. He didn't talk. He struggled learning to walk. Mom, who's a teacher, thought he should be tested. Nathan went through a program at the University of Illinois and it was found that he had significant learning difficulties. Mom and Dad were told that he would probably never function in a traditional classroom structure. Their shock and disappointment turned to resolve and they determined to help Nathan become all God created Him to be. Nothing more. Nothing less. As Nathan grew, his kind, gentle, gregarious spirit infected the entire family. The three brothers enjoyed each other. Normal brotherly spats between them were infrequent.

But the year Nathan entered 3rd grade, he learned something important. Mom and Dad were doing some household chores when Dad heard a commotion out in the backyard. All three boys were on the verge of a full blown fight in the backyard. Dad ordered them indoors. All three of them sat on the floor in a semi-circle breathing hard with their faces red and sweaty. Dad broke the silence, "What is going on? For the last few days you guys have been at each other's throats. I want to know what's going on." Marcus, a 6th grader at the time, spoke first, "Dad, it's Nate. I don't know what's wrong with him; but for the last week every time I say or do anything, he jumps on me." Simeon, the 1st grader, raised his hand like he was in class and then pointed at Nathan with the other hand, "That's right, Dad. It's not us. It's Nate." Dad looked at Nathan who was a red faced, arms-folded cauldron of indignation and anger. "Nathan, what's going on." Nathan shrugged but didn't answer. "Nathan, I want an answer and I want it now."

Finally, Nathan spoke. "I go to special reading class every day. And every day there is this boy. He is a 4th grader. He wait for me outside my room and he walk alongside me. He make fun of me and he laugh at my reading book. And he tell everyone in the playground that I am dumb. And he make me feel really bad in my heart." And then slow, silent tears began to fall from Nathan's eyes. But not just from his eyes, but also from his two brothers' and from his father's eyes as well. After a while, big brother Marcus asked his younger brother, Nathan, one simple but profound question in a quiet, firm voice: "Who's the guy?" Marcus could have suggested a strategy the next time the problem arose. He could have counseled Nathan to go to the principal. He could have said it didn't matter what people think. Instead, Marcus chose to get personally involved and address the issue himself. For the next several weeks, Marcus and Nathan walked together to special reading class. 6th graders are usually a lot bigger than 4th graders. And the playground isn't such a scary place when you have a 6th grader watching out for you or an older and bigger brother ready to stick up for you.

What's the name of the guy that makes you feel really bad in your heart? Loneliness... Abuse... Insecurity... Rejection... Alcohol... Bankruptcy... Pornography... Racism... Debt... Divorce. Every day he's right there. And every day as you try and live your life, he comes alongside of you, scoffing and laughing at your failures. He taunts and teases and tells you that you're dumb. He's skilled at making you feel really bad in your heart. You have an Older Brother, too. His Name is Jesus... Yahweh... the great I AM. And He, too, chose to get personally involved and address the issue Himself at a place called Calvary. And today – and indeed every day – He looks at you with love and tears and asks quietly and firmly, "Who's the guy?" Let Him walk with you. Let Him live His life in and through you. He's always present. He never changes. He meets every need.