Imagine the following scenario. You live on the main street in your town. There is a large pot hole in the front of your house. And for the last four months the city or county officials have ignored your requests to have it fixed. Finally, in an act of utter frustration you call the White House. You are so furious that when the operator answers you demand to talk to the President. To your amazement the President gets on the line. You stammer a bit, but you manage to explain your problem. The president doesn’t say anything. You are so flustered that you hang up the phone. You don’t expect anything to be done anyway.

But the next morning you look out the window. There is a fleet of green trucks on your street. The army Corps of Engineers is busy at working repair your road. The President of the United States took your request seriously and sent in the troops to help. This is what it means to have your prayers answered. Except that God is infintely more powerful than the President of the United States. God can do a lot more than fill potholes for you. And believe it or not it is a lot easier to get God on the line than the President. God is sitting by the phone waiting for you to call.

The problem is that most of us don’t know how to go about calling God. Either we don’t quite understand who we are calling, what number to dial, or what to say, if we by some chance got through. So we don’t try. We don’t call. We don’t understand that God is waiting for us. God wants a relationship with us. This is the reason for this program, “Walking Humbly.”

In part one we looked at nine different ways that God reaches out to us. We explored the spiritual journey that every person is invited to walk. Our journey towards God involves at least five things:

- being open to God’s grace;
• reaching out to others;
• listening to God’s Word;
• praying to God;
• experiencing highs & lows.

This week we are going to consider the God to whom we pray. In the earliest times people understood and related to the supernatural as they encountered it in and through nature. They personified nature and the cosmos. When it rained, it was because the rain God willed it. If it rained too much and there was a danger of flooding, people would try to bribe the rain god with sacrifices to stop the rain. When there was a drought, it was because the rain god was angry, so people would make sacrifices to appease the angry God. The things in nature that brought life and death came to be understood as gods.

Beginning with the 12th chapter, the Book of Genesis tells us the stories of the patriarchs -- the first believers in the one, true God. We read of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Abraham is thought to have lived around 1800 b.c. The religion of the patriarchs was significantly different from other religions.
• The patriarchs entered into a personal relationship. The God with whom they related was not the rain or sun God, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
• Their religion was characterized by strong family ties. Whenever someone joined the family, the patriarch’s God became their God.
• Their God was not bound or restricted to a certain place or temple, but was with the patriarchs wherever they traveled.
• Finally, there God was a God who made promises to them. We read about the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-4: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” To possess a land, to become a great nation, and to be a blessing to all the
peoples of the earth was the covenant that God made with them.

After God freed the Hebrew slaves from Egypt, God entered into a covenant with them at Mount Sinai: “I will be your God and you will be my people.” God gave them the law to live by and the people agreed to do so. By the time these people took possession of the promised land, the God of the Hebrews stood unique compared to the gods of surrounding religions.

- The name YHWH is not a name at all, but a rare verb form that characterizes God as having an actual, effective, and active existence. To know the name of someone or something was to have power over it. Unlike the neighboring Gods who could be manipulated or controlled by humans, YHWH was a sovereign God over whom people had no power.
- YHWH was the God who was the God of history. God intervened to set God’s people free from slavery in Egypt. Israel’s neighbors saw their gods operating in nature. To be sure YHWH was the Lord of nature, but God’s historical involvement was important.
- Like the patriarchs, they believed that God had taken the initiative in establishing a close relationship with them.
- For Israel there was to be only one God. YHWH is the only God of Israel and demands total loyalty. At first, Israel acknowledged the existence of other gods. Later, they became monotheists, believing that YHWH was the only God.
- YHWH was also unique in forbidding the Hebrews to worship in the form of an image in likeness.
- Finally, God is a God of moral purpose who makes ethical demands. God in not only interested in a man or a woman’s relationship with God, but also with a person’s relationship with others. Consider, for example, the ten commandments.

The story is told about an atheist who saw a boy walking one Sunday morning & asked him where he was going all dressed up.
“To church, sir,” came the reply.

“And what will you do there?” the unbeliever questioned.

The child answered, “Worship God with others.”

“Tell me this: is your God a great God or a little God.”

“He is both, sir.”

“How can he be both?” the atheist pressed.

The child wisely answered, “God is so great that the universe cannot contain God and so little that God can live in my heart.”

I saw a book once with the title *Your God Is Too Small*. The God of the Hebrews was certainly not too small. God was the one who created the universe. God alone was God of heaven and earth. The Hebrews never put their God on equal footing with gods of their neighbors. God was always a *transcendent* God, whose name was too holy to be mentioned and whose image was too sacred to be portrayed. In fact, the Bible says that if anyone looked upon God directly they would die.

If there was a danger in the Hebrew’s awe of God, it lay in removing God to far from earthly life and reducing his rule to a series of laws. But, to be fair to the Jews, God was also someone who was very lose to them. The story of the first man and woman in the garden speaks of God walking with them. Then there is the wonderful story of Abraham pestering God to spare Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction.

As we consider the nature of God, we can recognize two different aspects in the Judeo-Christian tradition. They are reflected in that story I shared with you. Our God is both
transcendent -- so great that the universe cannot contain God -- and immanent -- so small that God can live in our hearts.

In the first part of this series I spoke about revelation. I said that God was infinite, without limits, and eternal. That is what we mean by saying that God is transcendent. God transcends all of creation because God created everything. Because God is infinite, we who are finite cannot perceive God totally as God is. God must reveal Godself through people, ideas, and things we can perceive and understand.

Because God is so totally other than us, when we speak about God we must use images and metaphors. It is important to remember that we are using “God language.” This means that when we talk about God, we aren’t describing God so much as characterizing God. Thus, when we speak of God the Father, we are not saying that God is a man with arms and hands, legs and feet. But we are saying that in the way that God deals with us God is like a Father.

Some of the images of God found in the Bible include these:

(a) Creator (g) father
(b) King (h) mother
(c) Judge (i) holy one
(d) Shepherd (j) potter
(e) Redeemer (k) warrior
(f) Host (l) lover

Usually when theologians talk about the transcendence of God they use impressive words. To say that God is omniscient is to say that God knows everything. There are no secrets kept from God. We can keep secrets from ourselves, but not God. To say that God is omnipotent is to say that God is all powerful. In dealing
with the problem of evil in the world, some deal with it by saying that God is \textit{not} all powerful. But, why would we pray to a God who doesn’t have the power to help us?

The father of Jesus was not a distant God. God was a God concerned about the everyday needs of God’s people. Jesus taught that not even a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed by God. Therefore, how much more is God concerned with us! Jesus taught that we are to be on intimate terms with God since we can call God “Father.” Jesus does so 172 times in the gospels.

The God to whom we pray is revealed again and again by both the Old and New Testaments as a God who desires to have a relationship with people. God is a God who desires to share God’s very life with us. Listen to these words of Scripture:

“I have loved you with an everlasting love, so I am constant in my affection for you.” (Jer. 31:3)

“But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the water, I will be with you; in the rivers you shall not drown. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; the flames shall not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.” (Is 43:1-3a)

“Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget I will never forget you. See, upon the palm of my hand I have written your name.” (Is. 49:15-16)
“I myself will pasture my sheep.
   I will show them where to rest --
   it is the Lord God who speaks.
I shall look for the lost one, bring back the stray,
   bandage the wounded, & make the weak strong.
I shall be a true shepherd.”” (Ez. 34:11-16)

“When Israel was a child I loved him,
   out of Egypt I called my son.
The more I called them, the farther they went from me...
Yet it was I who taught Eprhaim to walk,
   who took them into my arms.
I drew them with human cords, with bands of love.
I fostered them like on who raises a child to his cheeks.
Yet, though I stooped to feed my child,
   they did not know I was their healer.” (Hos. 11:1-4)

“O come to the water, all you who are thirsty;
   though you have no money, come!
Why spend your money on what is not bread,
   your wages on what fails to satisfy?
Listen, listen to me and you will have
   good things to eat and rich food to enjoy.
Pay attention, come to me;
   listen and your soul will live.
With you I will make an everlasting covenant
   because of my sure and steadfast love.” (Is. 55:1-3)

Listen to these words of Jesus:
• “Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will
give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I
am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your-
selves. For my yoke is easy and my burden light.” (Mt. 11:28-30)
• “For God so loved the world that God gave his only Son, so that
everyone who believes in him might not die but might have
eternal life.”  
(John 3:16)

- “I came so they might have life and have it more abundantly.”  
(John 10:10b)

This is the God to whom we pray.  
We pray because we believe our God wants us to pray.  
We pray because we believe God answers our prayers.