

Satan Keeps God at Arm's Length (Do You?)

When Moses writes out the first chapters of Genesis he uses two different names for God. In Genesis 1, Moses consistently refers to God as “God” (Elohim), a powerful but more impersonal name that emphasizes God as creator. In Genesis 2, Moses consistently refers to God as “LORD God” (YHWH Elohim), a more personal, relational name.

But in Genesis 3, things change. In that chapter, Moses switches back and forth between those two names. Sometimes he writes “God” and sometimes he writes “LORD God.” Why? It gets clear when we notice on whom Moses is focusing.

Chapter 3 – Where Names Highlight Character

In this third chapter, when Moses writes about God, he *always* uses God’s personal name: “LORD God.” (See Genesis 3:1a, 3:8, 3:9, 3:13, 3:14, 3:21, 3:22, and 3:23.) Whatever God is doing, to whomever God is speaking, Moses consistently refers to God personally. He’s making a point: God is a personal, relational being.

In a chilling chapter 3 contrast, when Moses writes about Satan, he carefully records that Satan *never* uses God’s personal name but always refers to God impersonally. By the time the evil one is finished with Eve, she’s referring to God impersonally as well.

By this seemingly small (but highly significant) name change, Moses makes glaringly clear that, in contrast to God, Satan has a cold, impersonal heart. (See Genesis 3:1b, 3:3, and three occurrences in Genesis 3:5.) Never in this chapter does Moses have Satan utter God’s personal name. Not even once. Moses is making a point: Satan is an impersonal being.

Satan treats God impersonally because he wants to hurt Him. The evil one must have known that the God who created him still loved him; surely he knew that his rebellion broke God’s heart. Now, in this garden scene, Satan not only uses God’s impersonal name to stab at God’s heart, he also uses this name to imply to Eve that God doesn’t care about *her*. Satan portrays God as an impersonal God who ignores her needs.

Satan not only keeps God at arm’s length, he convinces Eve and Adam to do the same. They end up caring more for their own agenda than they do for their relationship with God. All impersonal relationships follow that self-centered pattern.

How Do You Relate to God? Personally or Impersonally?

In impersonal relationships, we’re more concerned about our own agenda than we are about how we’re impacting others. Personal relationships are quite different.

In personal relationships, we care about others. We rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. In Romans 12:15, Paul calls us to do just that. Paul wants us to imitate our God (the personal God who cares enough to weep and to rejoice with us). Jesus makes that caring visible: He weeps at Lazarus’s grave. He joins rejoicing wedding celebrants in Cana. (I wouldn’t be at all surprised if He also dances along with the other guests.)

That's how God treats us. How about you? Have you thought about how you treat God? Do you rejoice when God rejoices and weep when He weeps? Perhaps you've not considered how you treat God. I encourage you to do so. Caring about how we impact God helps us do God's will. When I stay aware that my rebellions cause Him pain, it guards my choices – I don't want to hurt Him. When I remember that my yielding myself to Him brings Him joy, it guides me as well – I like to make Him glad.

God treats me with the same care – He weeps with me when I weep, rejoices with me when I rejoice, and, yes, I think He dances with me when I dance.

*We have a personal, relational God.
Are you aware that your choices impact His heart?*

When we're someone's intimate, we notice how we impact them. We notice and we care. Do you care how you impact God? Or do you keep God at arm's length?

A Few Questions

- Do you think God is interested or disinterested in your daily life?
- Do you think that your choices impact God's heart?
- How do you think God responds to what you do?
- Do you think He responds at all?
- Do you want a personal relationship with God? Why or why not?
- Do you prefer to keep God at arm's length? Why or why not?

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