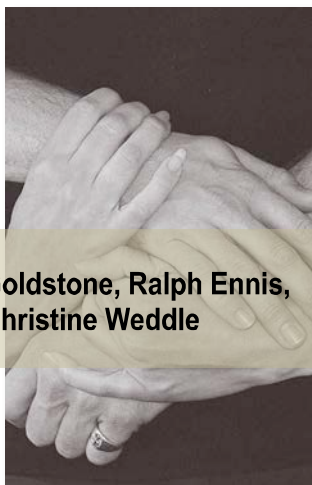


GOD: Can I Like Him?

topical mini-studies - version 2



By Judy Gomoll, Rebecca Goldstone, Ralph Ennis,
Dennis Stokes and Christine Weddle

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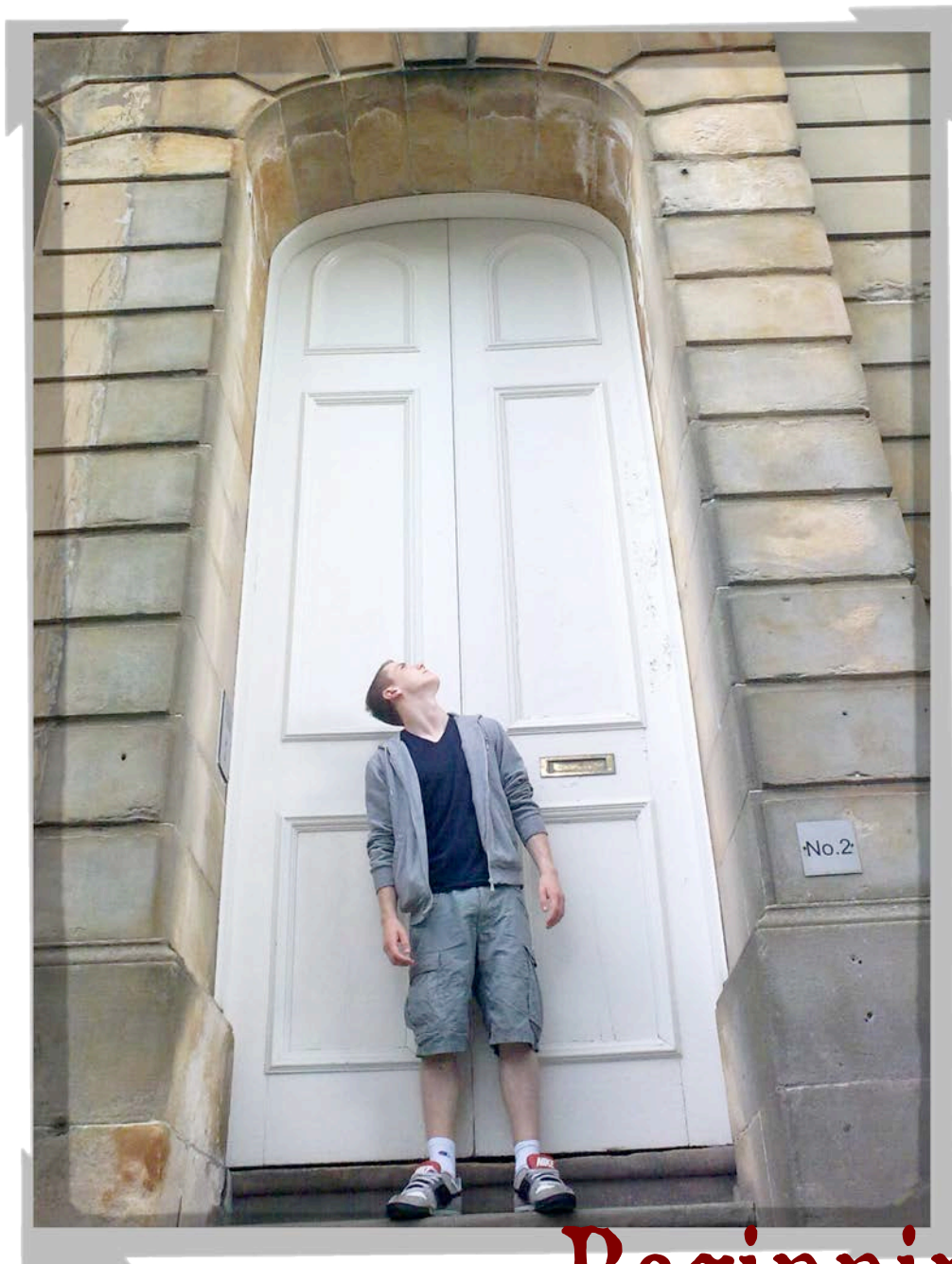
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* CREDITS: Randy Raysbrook is a university professor interested in student culture. He spent a year studying students at a particular university by randomly interviewing them. He invited them to write their responses to one question in a large leather journal he carried with him. The question was: "If you could write a note to God and tell Him anything you want...and he would read it, what would you say?" The quotes in this book followed by someone's first name (and usually an age) came from this journal.

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Beginnings

Who?

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR GOD . . . OR A CONCERN ABOUT GOD?

SOME CURIOSITY?

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED GOING DEEPER WITH GOD?

If you've thought about these things, or you're interested in exploring your emotional connections with God, you've come to the right place.

You may wonder, "WHICH GOD IS THIS THAT I'M CONSIDERING?" or "DOES GOD EVEN EXIST?"

Or maybe you've known God for a while. But now you'd like to be closer and more connected to Him, and yet you still have questions. You may wish you could experience Him more in the center of your life and less out there on the fringe. Is that where you are?

Maybe you're secretly wondering if God is disappointed with you. Or you may harbor a grudge or have some unresolved issues with Him. You may feel disappointed with God. Even angry. What then?

Though we were all created in God's image, our culture turns that idea upside down. People start casting God into whatever image they have of the religious people they know or see in the media. Sometimes our image of God gets scary.

THIS STUDY IS FOR ALL OF YOU—THE CURIOUS, THE CONNECTED, THE DISAPPOINTED. Anyone who wonders, "Can I even like God—much less grow to love or trust Him?" Yes, we're actually asking that question out loud!

Why?

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE ANYWAY—WHETHER YOU LIKE GOD OR NOT?

For one thing, your view of God determines how quickly you'll run into His presence—or if you will run the other way. Let's say you're experiencing pain, sadness, or confusion. If you expect God to be scowling at you (as in angry, aloof, judgmental)—you're just not going to head in His direction, are you? Simple fact: we won't run to someone we don't think understands us . . . or to someone we don't like.

And so we might miss out on the best invitation we've ever gotten. *Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.* (Hebrews 4:16, NLT)

The promise of God is that every time we run to Him, we'll meet Someone . . .

- . . . who gets it.
- . . . who has felt what we feel.
- . . . who's been tempted as we are.
- . . . who's faced what we face.

HE BECAME LIKE US TO BE WITH US, AND TO PERSUADE US THAT HE REALLY DOES UNDERSTAND.

How?

The approach is simple. If we could not just hear from others, but also let God tell us what He's like, what might He say? These studies offer you a safe, thought-provoking place to process your current ideas about what God is like . . . and your feelings about Him. You'll look at images and read quotes. But most of all, you'll get to discover from the Bible what God Himself says He's really like!

YOU CAN COVER EACH TOPIC IN ANY ORDER.

However, we invite you to begin with pages 5-7. This will be a great starting point.

WE ALSO ENCOURAGE YOU TO DO TWO THINGS.

First, wherever you start, jot down some notes in the space provided. You may even want to draw or write a song or poem to express yourself.

Second, if you are doing any of these studies on your own, consider discussing these questions with a friend or two.

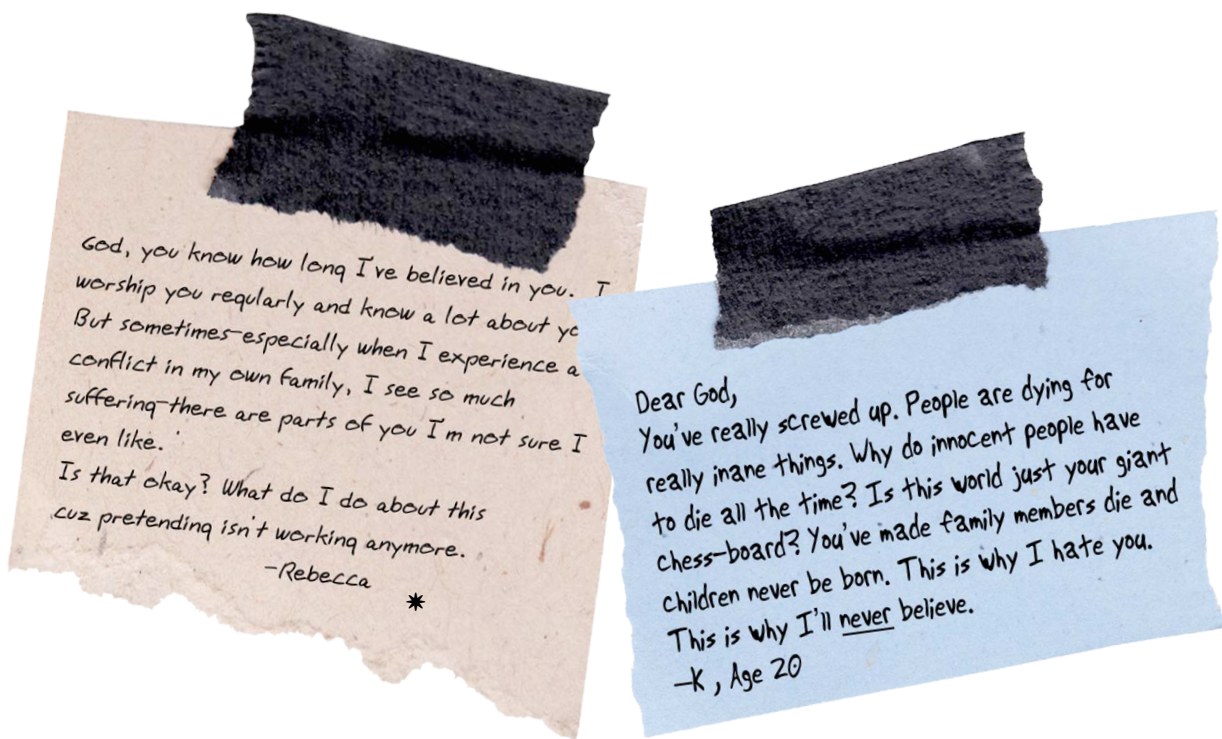
These studies won't transform your view of God overnight—or answer all your questions about Him. But at least you'll be giving the God of the Bible a chance to make Himself known to you in a fresh way . . . or maybe for the very first time.

Welcome to *GOD: Can I Like Him?*

(Leaders/Facilitators: you will also benefit from the information on pages 105-106.)

Exploring YOUR View of GOD

If you could ask God any question, or say anything to Him you wanted to, what would that be? Write it here.



God, you know how long I've believed in you. I worship you regularly and know a lot about you. But sometimes—especially when I experience a conflict in my own family, I see so much suffering—there are parts of you I'm not sure I even like. Is that okay? What do I do about this cuz pretending isn't working anymore.

-Rebecca

*

Dear God,
You've really screwed up. People are dying for really insane things. Why do innocent people have to die all the time? Is this world just your giant chess-board? You've made family members die and children never be born. This is why I hate you. This is why I'll never believe.

-K, Age 20

REBECCA AND "K" WERE ASKED THE SAME QUESTION YOU JUST ANSWERED.

TO WHAT EXTENT, IF ANY, CAN YOU RELATE TO THEM?

How do you think about God? What or how do you feel when you think about God?

Here's just a sample of one way to talk to God. Underline or highlight the statements or questions that might express how you might talk to God.

God, as I have lived my life, I've thought about You—different things at different times. Often, You seem so mysterious to me. Some people think that You have some amazing abilities and characteristics. These abilities may allow You to know everything about me. That in and of itself makes me extremely vulnerable, and You know I don't like to be that vulnerable. I suspect that if You know me better than I know myself then I wonder if You don't like me any more than I like myself. And that can be scary! Sometimes I wonder if I even like You.

So I guess if I'm going to like You, I need to believe that You like me. Today, that is a stretch. Sometimes I do and sometimes I don't.

How can I be sure You are there if I've never seen You? If You're all that powerful, why don't you step in and stop all the raping, genocide, and abuse of kids? If You are there, how can I know what difference it can make? Sometimes I feel suspicious of You. I mean, God—if I'm going to make progress as I think about You, I need some HELP. I want some real basis for HOPE.

We'll look at more responses like these as we move through these studies.

HERE'S A GOOD PROJECT TO WORK ON:

IMAGES. In the next few days, search for any picture or image that depicts what you think God is like. You could go on-line or cut out something from a magazine, for instance. Or you could draw something. Attach it to the next page.

My View of God



In our forming world, God spoke—and it was so. . . . He composed the symphony others merely echo and painted the portrait others reflect. He engineered the first architectural structures, called mountains and trees; programmed the first computer, called the brain; and invented the first miracle drug, called the immune system. They all started in His imagination, an imagination that has enabled our own. . . . We compose, paint, invent, write, and plan only because He did it first.

—Kurt Bruner and Jim Ware, *Finding God in the Land of Narnia*



What do you think or feel about God when looking at the image and reading the quote on the previous page? Explain.

IN WHAT WAYS ARE YOU UNIQUE OR CREATIVE?

HOW MIGHT GOD'S CREATIVITY PLAY A PART IN YOUR UNIQUENESS OR CREATIVITY?

Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb. I thank you, High God—you're breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvelously made! I worship in adoration—what a creation!

—Psalm 139:13-14 (MSG)

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. —Colossians 1:15-16

. . . But now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. God promised everything to the Son as an inheritance, and through the Son he made the universe and everything in it. The Son reflects God's own glory, and everything about him represents God exactly. He sustains the universe by the mighty power of his command. —Hebrews 1: 2-3 (NLT)

What was and is Jesus' part in creating?

WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD FROM OTHERS ABOUT GOD BEING CREATOR? What questions do you still have?



your response

God, of all the splendor you've created, the many odors of nature, of life,
what are you most proud of, what do you love looking at most? What odor is your
favorite? -Camille, age 18

What do you like . . . and dislike . . . about how God created you and the life He's given you?

What would you like to say to God about how He created you and the world around you?

Talk with Him about that. (Remember, “talking” can also mean writing or drawing.

Whatever way you prefer to express yourself.)



OPTIONAL - GOING DEEPER

Read some or all of these passages to go a bit deeper on God as Creator. On a separate paper you may want to write 2-3 sentences TO God (not about Him), telling Him what the passage says to you about Him, and how you feel about Him.

Genesis 1:1, 25-27; Nehemiah 9:5-6; Psalm 148:3-5; John 1:3-4; I Corinthians 8:6



Knowable

Experiencing God's presence and hearing His voice is for those of us who are overlooked and underappreciated. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords makes Himself available to all of us, even beggars—no, especially beggars—when we are hungry for him. —Priscilla Shirer, *He Speaks to Me*

reflecting

Dear God, My main question for you would be why haven't you just made yourself known? You could save a lot of hassling questions as to the validity of your existence if you just appeared somewhere. -Erin, Age 20

Hey, God, Would it be at all possible for you to make yourself seen every once in a while so that we could clear up all of this "conflicting religion" stuff? Otherwise, don't be too hard on yourself; you're doing pretty good. Thanks for everything. -Best, Drew, Age 20

On a scale of 1-5 (1 is "not at all" and 5 is "a lot!"), how much do you want to know and experience God? Are you satisfied with how well you know God now? Explain.

From these verses, describe several ways God makes Himself known.

. . . "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had known who I am, then you would have known who my Father is. From now on you know him and have seen him! . . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!" -John 14:6-9 (NLT)

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world...
-Psalm 19:1-4

For the truth about God is known to them [all humanity] instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts. From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God. –Romans 1:19-20 (NLT)

Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now. –1 Corinthians 13:12 (NLT)

What makes you think that God wants you to know Him personally?

HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT GOD TO KNOW YOU . . .

WHO YOU REALLY ARE?

EXPLAIN.

For most of my life I have struggled to find God, to know God, to love God. . . . During all this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me. The question is not, "How am I to know God?" but ... "How am I to let myself be known by God?" God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home. . . . I am beginning to see how radically the character of my spiritual journey will change when I no longer think of God as hiding out and making it as difficult as possible for me to find him, but, instead, as the one who is looking for me while I am doing the hiding.

–Henry Nouwen, *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*



your response

Can you accept that you are valuable enough to God to look for you and really know you? Explain.

If God is so knowable, why is He also so mysterious? And how come people have such conflicting views of who He is and what He's like?

Spend a few minutes sitting in God's presence.

Hang in there a little longer than you usually do.

**Ask Him to help you embrace one thing about
Who He is that He wants you to know today.**

GOING DEEPER: Psalm 46:10, Isaiah 45:18-19, Jeremiah
9:24, Jeremiah 31:33-34, Hebrews 1:1,
John 1:14, John 17:3, Acts 17:27



Good

As a wise, skilled pharmacist mixes medicine, our heavenly Father wisely mixes exactly the right measure of bitter things and sweet, to do us good. Too much joy would intoxicate us. Too much misery would drive us to despair. Too much sorrow would crush us. Too much suffering would break our spirits. Too much pleasure would ruin us. Too much defeat would discourage us. Too much success would puff us up. Too much failure would keep us from doing anything. Too much criticism would harden us. Too much praise would exalt us. Our great God knows exactly what we need. His Providence is wisely designed and sovereignly sent for our good! –Don Fortner, *Basic Biblical Doctrines*

reflecting

First of all I hate that you made me this way. I feel like a bunch of leftover scraps—a black child who came out of a white woman's stomach . . . a woman with claws. A cripple with ambitions of ruling the world. DAMN YOU! I should have died in that hospital room at two months, or when I got hit by a car three times. If you had any sense, you'd take my guardians off the overtime. But in spite of my best efforts, alive I am. So where do we go from here? I'd ask to be the hero that I've always dreamed of. But knowing you, I'll end up filthy, half mad, and scribbling gibberish on greasy napkins. You ARE INSANE! Unfortunately, you're all I've got right now and I still fear death. —Cynthia, Age 21 and still using a wheel chair

What thoughts or feelings does the image on the previous page stir up in you about God?

Maybe you've heard the common prayer: "God is great. God is good. . ." From these verses, what's so good about God?

The Lord is good. When trouble comes, he is the place to go! And he knows everyone who trusts in him! —Nahum 1:7 (TLB)

Your goodness is so great! You have stored up great blessings for those who honor you. You have done so much for those who come to you for protection, blessing them before the watching world. —Psalm 31:19 (NLT)

Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who trust in him! —Psalm 34:8 (NLT)

Can God be good if He still makes us uncomfortable? Can God be good if He doesn't make us uncomfortable? Explain.



DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE GOD IS GOOD? If so, explain. If not, explain what's not good about Him.

Try to remember something that happened to you in the past that felt bad at the time. Now that you look back on it, has any good come out of it?

Talk with God about the way He sometimes turns bad things into good . . . turning "ashes to beauty" in our lives.

Write down your thoughts.

GOING DEEPER: Psalm 25:8, Romans 2:4, Revelation 15:4



Suffers

Wounds are one of God's deepest forms of intimacy. The weight of the world's sickness and sin was braided into a whip and brought down on Jesus' back. It was woven into a thorny crown and pushed on His head. It was shaped into rough wood and pressed hard on His thin body. It was forged into cold metal and driven through the soft spot on His hands. —Mark Buchanan, *Your God Is Too Safe*

We find our deepest struggles embedded in the suffering face of Jesus.

—Paula Rinehart, *Better Than My Dreams*



As you look at the image on the previous page and read the quotes, do you think God suffers? Why or why not?

Do you think God deserves to suffer? Explain.

According to these verses, why was it necessary for Jesus to suffer?

He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand. One look at him and people turned away. We looked down on him thought he was scum. But the fact is, it was our pains he carried—our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins! —Isaiah 53:3-5 (MSG)

In all their suffering he also suffered, and he personally rescued them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them. He lifted them up and carried them through all the years. —Isaiah 63:9 (NLT)

Then Jesus began to tell them that he, the Son of Man, would suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the leaders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, and three days later he would rise again.

–Mark 8:31 (NLT)

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. –Hebrews 5:7-8

Imagine a news reporter interviewing God and asking Him this question:

“So tell us about two or three times You have really suffered.”

What situations might this reporter describe?

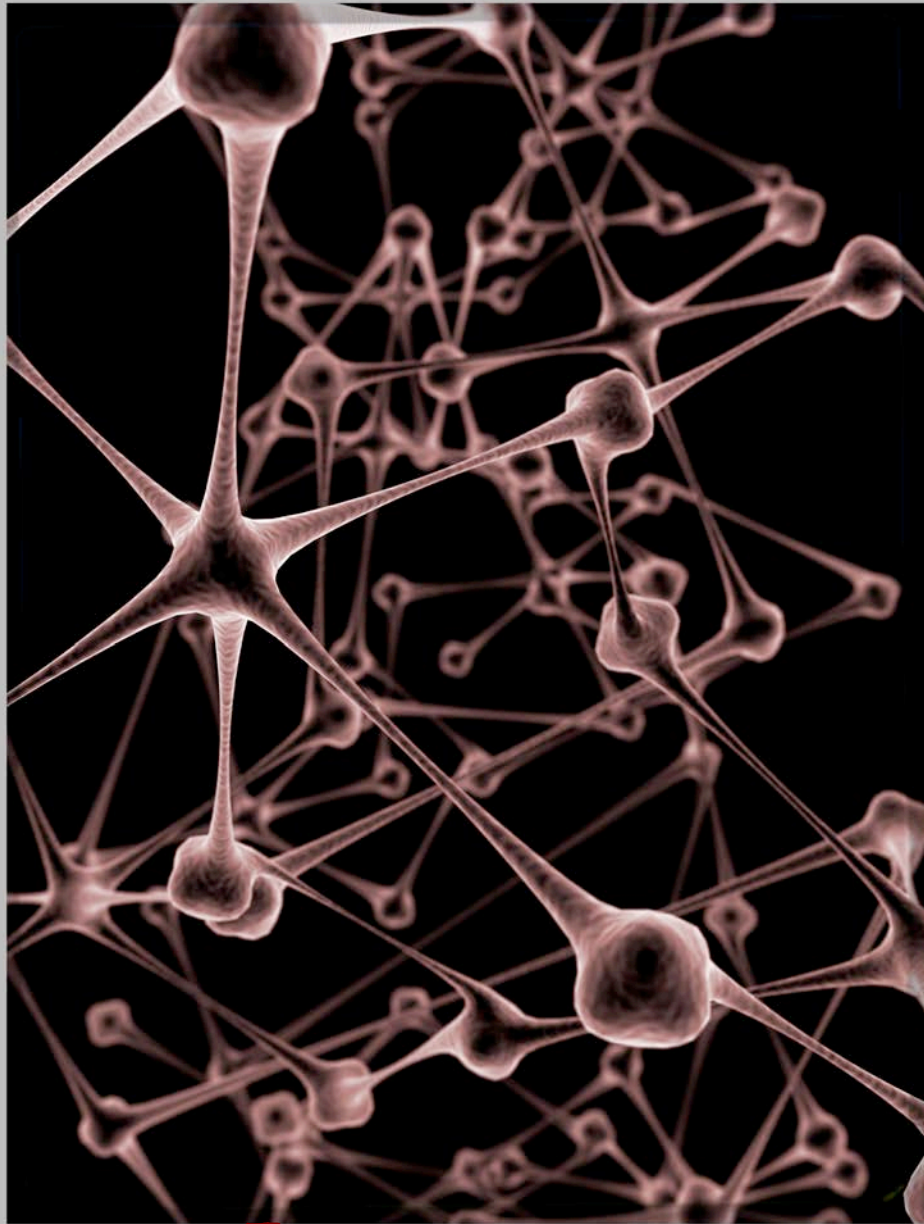


We're used to talking with God about our own suffering—not His suffering.

When you consider that God suffers deep pain, how does that make you feel?

Talk with God for a while about that.

GOING DEEPER: Exodus 3:7-9; Romans 8:17, Philippians 3:10-11



Incomprehensible and Mysterious

If God were small enough to be understood, He would not be big enough to be worshipped.

—Author Unknown

reflecting

Previously, you explored God being knowable, and here He says He's mysterious and incomprehensible. Is that a contradiction? Why or why not?

Can we completely understand our Sovereign God? We live every moment of our lives as finite beings, bound by time and space, limited in our knowledge and abilities. As such, attempting to conceive of One who is sovereign and infinite is like trying to hold the ocean in a teacup. Yet our Father invites us to drink as much as we can.

—Sue Edwards, *Daddy's Girls*

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! —Romans 11:33

God's wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of his purposes. . . . —what God determined as the way to bring out his best in us, long before we ever arrived on the scene. The experts of our day haven't a clue about what this eternal plan is. If they had, they wouldn't have killed the Master of the God-designed life on a cross. That's why we have this Scripture text:

No one's ever seen or heard anything like this,

Never so much as imagined anything quite like it—

What God has arranged for those who love him. —1 Corinthians 2:7-9 (MSG)

This mystery has been kept in the dark for a long time, but now it's out in the open. God wanted everyone, not just Jews, to know this rich and glorious secret inside and out, regardless of their background, regardless of their religious standing. The mystery in a nutshell is just this: Christ is in you, therefore you can look forward to sharing in God's glory. It's that simple. That is the substance of our message.

—Colossians 1:26-27 (MSG)

DO YOU LIKE OR DISLIKE THAT YOU WILL NEVER “SOLVE” THE MYSTERY OF GOD?

WHY?

Have you ever been bored with God? If you could “figure Him out,” would that make Him more interesting? Explain why or why not.



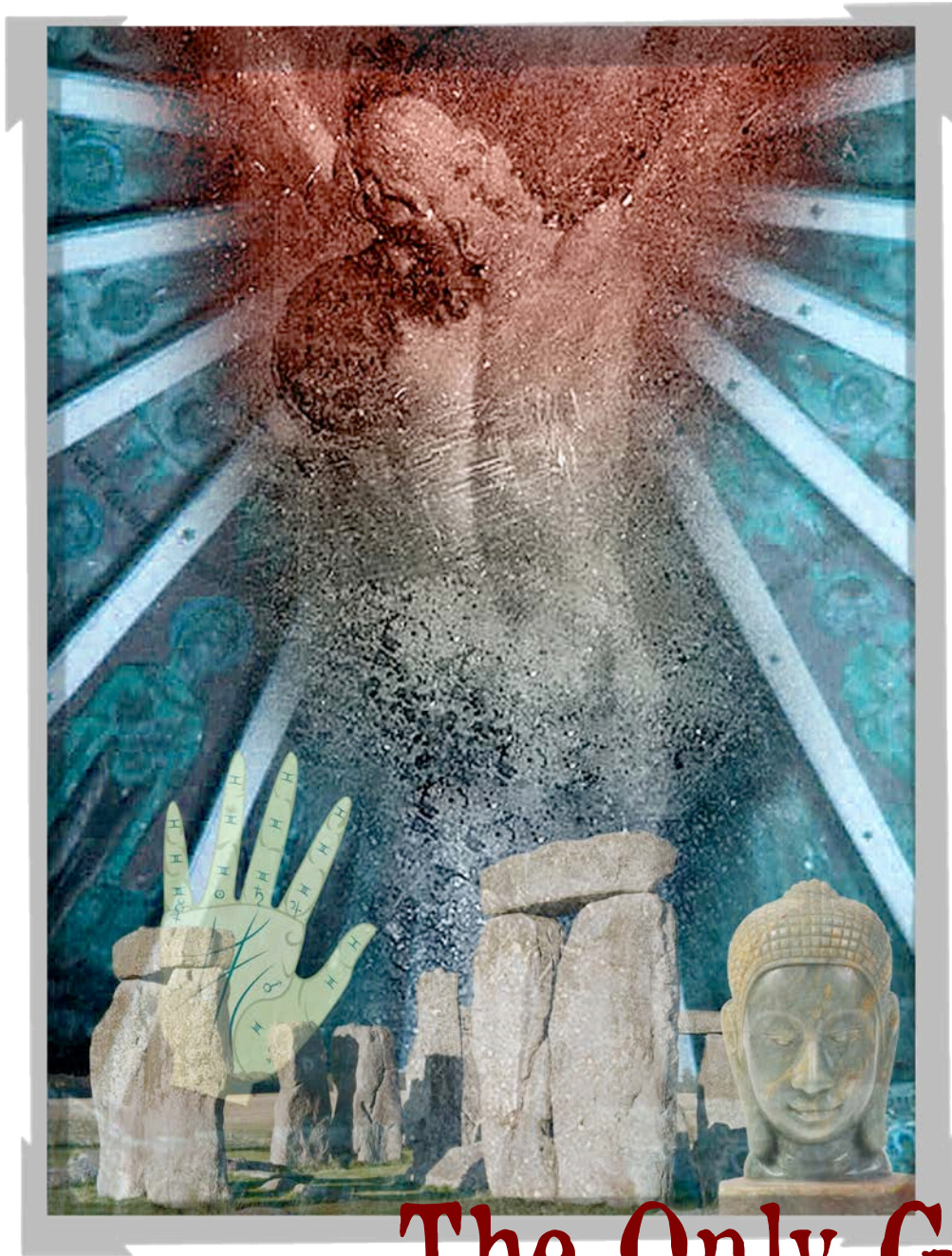
. . . . Mystery is essential to adventure. More than that, mystery is the heart of the universe and the God who made it. –John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*

If you could ask any question or say anything to God about Him being mysterious and incomprehensible, what would that be? Express it here.

Do you believe God has something unimaginable arranged for you (1 Corinthians 2:7-9)?

Spend time asking God to encourage you about His mysteriously good and incomprehensible plan for you and for the world.

GOING DEEPER: Isaiah 40:13-14, Colossians 4:3, 1 Timothy 3:16



The Only God

"How could there be just one true faith?" asked Blair, a twenty-four-year-old woman living in Manhattan. "It's arrogant to say your religion is superior and try to convert everyone else to it. Surely all religions are equally good and valid for meeting the needs of their particular followers."

—Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*

reflecting

Why does there have to be just one God? Why is it that religion has to be a way of life? Is it so hard to have more than one belief? When in all actuality it is all the same, just different cultures with different ways of life that distort the message of God to meet what is best for them. If you are God and so great, you should be able to accept everyone regardless of their religion or beliefs.

—Angela, Age 18

What do the images on the previous page suggest to you about the God of the Bible?

Is it easy or difficult for you to like a God who says He is the only God? Explain.

Why do you think people around the world worship so many gods other than God?

From these verses, how do you think God feels about that?

"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed — I, and not some foreign god among you." —Isaiah 43:10-12

I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things. –Isaiah 45:5-7

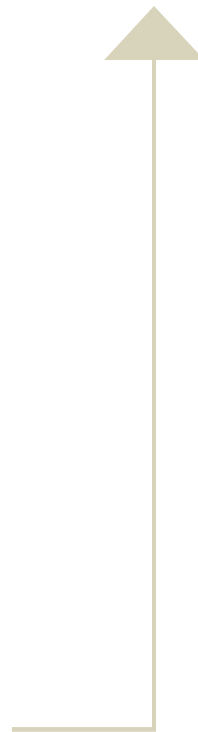
GOD, your God, is the God of all gods, he's the Master of all masters, a God immense and powerful and awesome . . . –Deuteronomy 10:17

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." –John 14:6

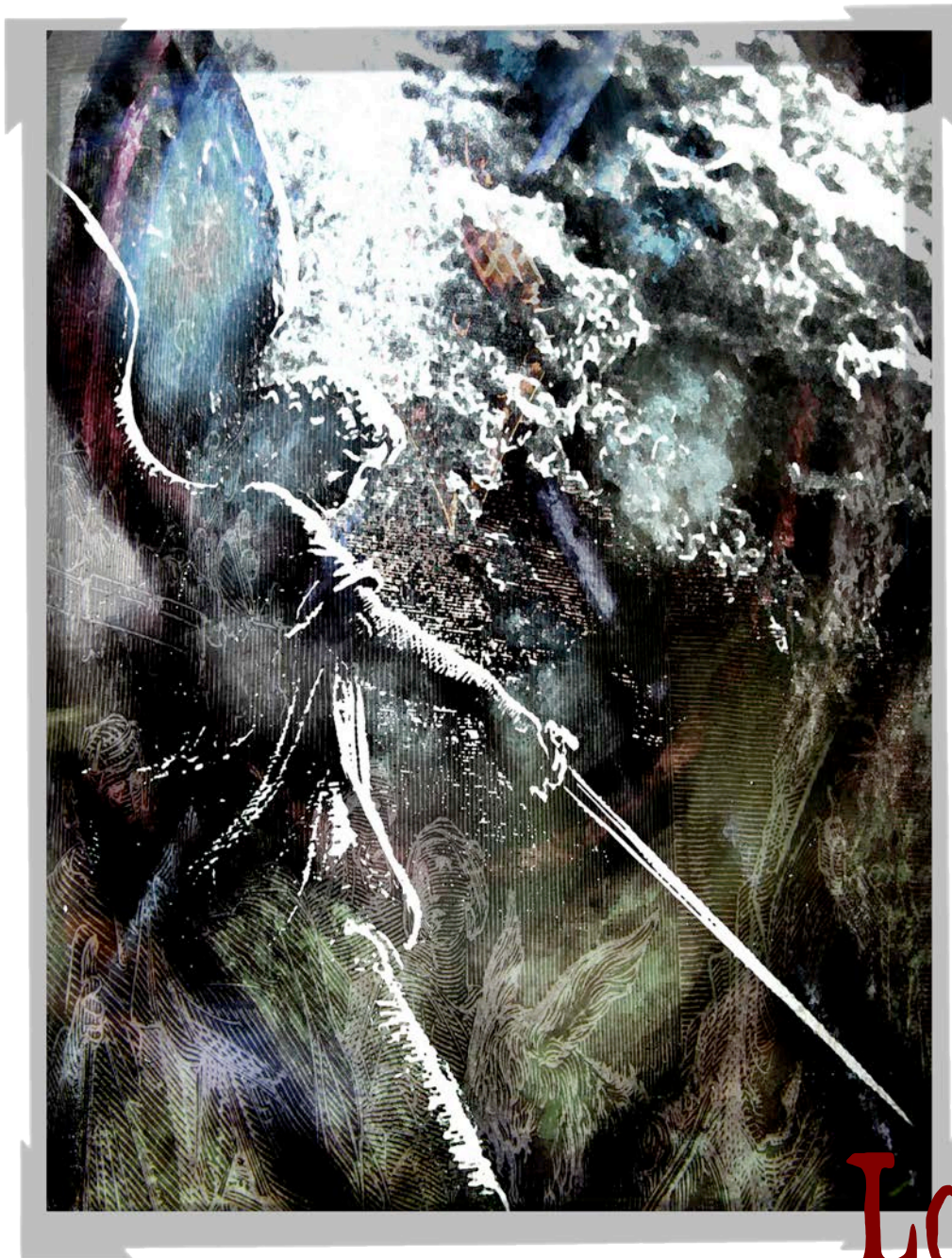


your response

Re-write John 14:6 in your own words. (See above.)



GOING DEEPER: Deuteronomy 32:39, Psalm 136:2; Isaiah 44:8



Lord

God is not mocked. He is not trapped or cornered or coerced. Even on the way to Calvary he had legions of angels at his disposal. “No one takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own accord”—of his own good pleasure, for the joy that was set before him. At the one point in the history of the universe where God looked trapped, he was in charge, doing precisely what he pleased—dying to justify the ungodly like you and me. —John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*¹

¹ John Piper. *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*, (Portland, OR: Multnomah Books; Rev Exp edition, June 26, 2000), p. 66



From John Piper's quote, what surprises you about the way God used His authority?

Could you see yourself coming under the influence of a God like that? Why or why not?

What else does the image on the previous page suggest to you about the Most High God?

Today the word "lord" may be used negatively—slumlord, drug lord, lording it over someone. But in the Bible it is a title of supreme authority, worthy of your honor and respect. How would you describe your current "respect level" for God?

For you, O Lord, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods. —Psalm 97:9

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." —Matthew 28: 18

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. —Philippians 2:9-11

As Lord, God has authority over all He has created. If God were not the ultimate authority in the universe, who or what would be? Would you like that world better or not? Explain.

How does it feel to be below the Most High—dangerous, protective, competitive, or something else? Explain.



As our Sovereign, He has the right to rule our lives, but submitting to Him is different than submitting to an earthly father. God alone is the perfect blend of tough and tender. His infinite care brings about a righteous jealousy that guards our paths and protects us from danger. And He's fair—not only now but also in the future. —Sue Edwards, *Daddy's Girls*

Write the most outrageous thing you want to say about God's authority. Don't worry. It's okay.

Spend a few minutes talking with God about His authority and His lordship in your life.

What do you think He is saying back to you?

GOING DEEPER: Isaiah 55:8-9; 1 Corinthians 1:25; John 10:17-18



Holy

Holiness is what we mean when we say that God is totally other, totally different, higher, and more good and pure than those two words can even convey. God is other, but he created us for relationship with him and to be like him, which means we are called to be better than our best, to likewise desire goodness and purity and be agents of the best in others as well as ourselves. –Christopher and Tanya Morton

Thunder and lightning are coming from the throne [of God], telling us that this is a place of majesty and awesome glory. Around the throne are representatives of the animal kingdom and the world of humanity; the whole creation is worshipping God for all he's worth. The animals are singing a song of God's eternal holiness:

"Holy, holy, holy, The Lord God the Almighty,

Who was and is and is to come." [Revelation 4:8]

The animals and birds know their maker and praise him in a language humans wouldn't normally understand. But in the heavenly dimension all becomes clear. They know that their creator is all-powerful. They know that he is eternal. And they know that he is holy.

—Tom Wright, *Simply Christian*



Look at the image and read the quotes. Now list other words or thoughts about what it means to be "holy."

How do you feel about people who have a "holier than thou" attitude? Do you feel the same way about God's holiness? Explain.

One meaning of holiness is moral purity or the absence of evil. If God weren't morally pure or free of all evil, how might life be different or what consequences would that have?

Who else among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is glorious in holiness like you—so awesome in splendor, performing such wonders? —Exodus 15:11 (NLT)

Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed. —Revelation 15:4

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” —1 Peter 1:15,16

Why do you think God wants us to be holy? How do you feel about God asking us to be holy as He is?



your response

If God were not holy, would you like Him more—or less? Explain.

If you were really convinced that God is holy, how would you respond?

If you could ask God one question about His holiness, what would that be?

GOING DEEPER: Leviticus 10:3, Numbers 20:12-13; Ezra 9:15, Isaiah 6:3, Revelation 4:8



All-Powerful

God's voice is powerful, and He wants you to call upon Him expecting to see His greatness revealed. He alone has the authority to accomplish what we need. As you come to recognize the power of God's voice, you will be more willing to seek it, wait for it, and obey it. His voice has the power to keep you from sinking in even the worst of life's storms. —Priscilla Shirer, *Discerning the Voice of God*



What does the image on the previous page say to you?

What are three things that come to mind when you think of power or of powerful people?

What do you like or dislike about how God uses His power?

Yes, the Sovereign LORD is coming in all his glorious power. He will rule with awesome strength. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes. He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.

—Isaiah 40:10-11 (NLT)

Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you . . . O great and powerful God, whose name is the Lord Almighty, great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds . . . —Jeremiah 32:17-19

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. —Romans 1:20

How do you see God's power connecting with His compassion?



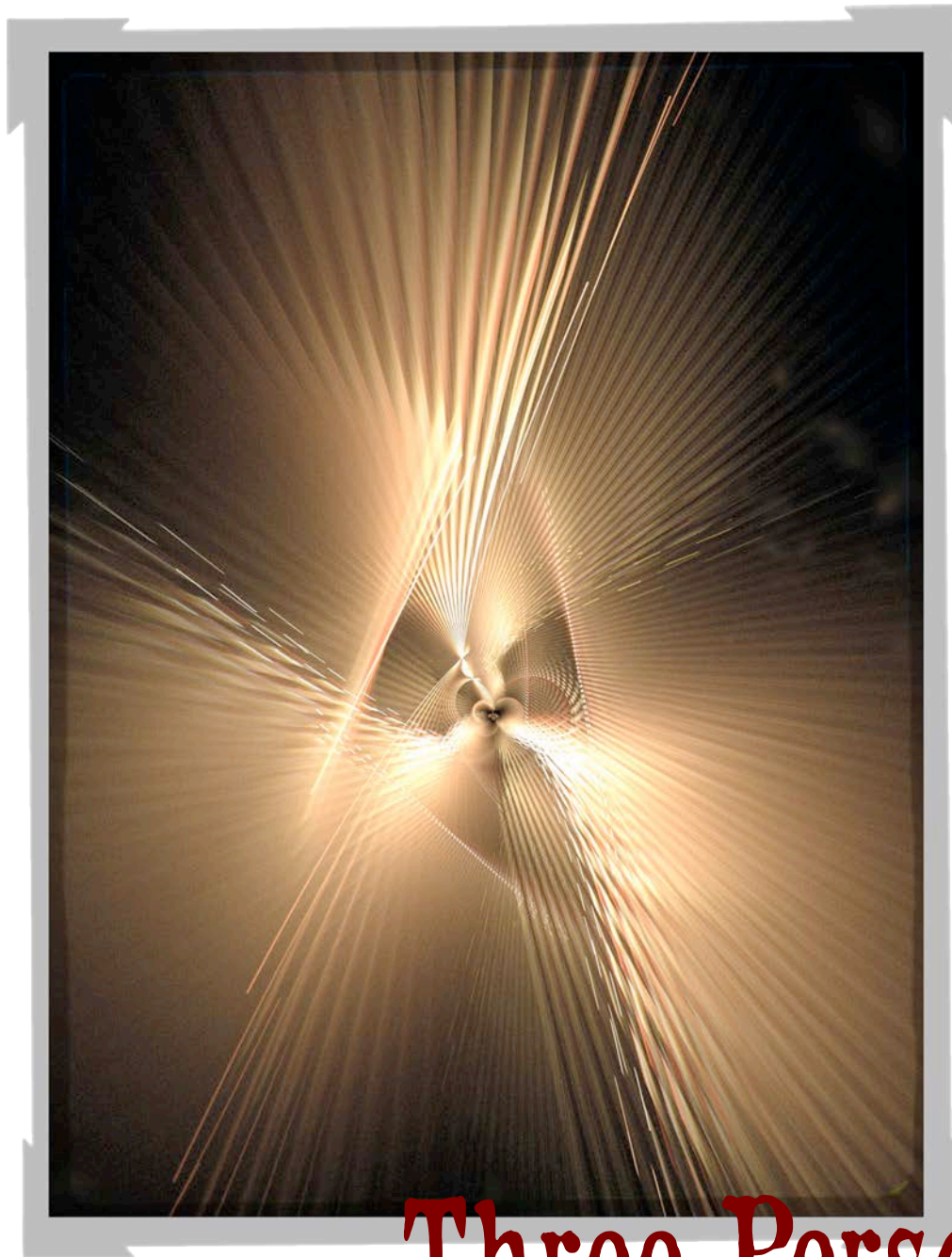
Dear God, with all the power that you have, why does so much suffering in the world exist? —Age 22

WHERE IN YOUR LIFE DO YOU WISH YOU HAD MORE POWER OR LESS POWER?

DO YOU BELIEVE GOD'S POWER CAN INFLUENCE THAT? IF SO, HOW?

EITHER WAY, TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO TALK WITH HIM ABOUT THAT. WRITE YOUR PRAYER.

GOING DEEPER: Isaiah 40:10-31, 18, Daniel 4:35, Jeremiah 10:12-13,
Revelation 19:1, Nahum 1:3, John 10:16-18; John 10:29, Jude 24-25



Three Persons

A beautiful bond of true affection, delight, and desire to bless flow unceasingly between the Father, Son, and Spirit....Three who are one God were drawing me to participate in the web of love they had been sharing with each other since eternity past....The love the Trinity shares—a love that is a place of rest, a place of celebration—has forever been real and full. The triune God was inviting me to enter, to be a part of their love. —Sally Breedlove, *Choosing Rest*

reflecting

Which Person of the Trinity are you most comfortable with—the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Which Person are you least comfortable with? Explain.

GOD IS THREE PERSONS IN ONE. How might these different aspects help us relate to God better? Explain.

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. . . . And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

—John 14:9-11, 16-17

All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I [Jesus] said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. —John 16:15

But then God our Savior showed us his kindness and love. He saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us because of what Jesus Christ our Savior did. —Titus 3:4-6 (NLT)

God, being Three Persons in One illustrates both unity and community as they love and cooperate totally with each other. How could this be a model for us as we love and cooperate with each other?

When you think about God's Holy Spirit living inside you 24/7—right with your own spirit—how does that make you feel?



IF YOU COULD SAY ONE THING OR ASK ONE QUESTION TO EACH PERSON OF THE TRINITY, WHAT WOULD THAT BE?

GOD THE FATHER

GOD THE SON

God the Holy Spirit

GOING DEEPER: Genesis 1:26, John 1:1-4; John 14:2-7



Father

Today I wonder why it is God refers to Himself as "Father" at all. This, to me, in light of the earthly representation of the role, seems a marketing mistake. Why would God want to call Himself Father when so many fathers abandon their children? As a child, the title Father God offered an ambiguous haze with which to interact. I understood what a father did as well as I understood the task of a shepherd. All the vocabulary about God seemed to come from ancient history, before video games, palm pilots, and the internet. —Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz*

"Father" is the most significant name of the God of the Bible. It is the name that sets Christianity apart from all the other religions of the world. Other religions invite us to worship their gods, allahs, creators, or metaphysical forces, but Christianity invites us to believe in a Son and to enter into an intimate family relationship with a loving Father. Jesus, the Son of God, came so that we could meet His Father, be adopted into the family of God, and relate to the almighty God of the universe in an intimate, personal, concrete way as sons and daughters.
–Mary A. Kassian, taken from *Biblical Womanhood in the Home* by Nancy Leigh DeMoss

reflecting

Look at the image on the previous page and then think about your own life experience. How does God calling Himself "Father" make you feel?

Which of the two quotes above do you relate to more when you think about God as Father? Explain.

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.
–Psalm 68:5

"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! –Matthew 7:9-11

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! –1 John 3:1

Rewrite 1 John 3:1 in your own words to express how you have experienced your earthly father. For example:

"How painful was the criticism my dad heaped on me, that I was called lazy and worthless."

"How fun was the love my father gave me, that we had such adventures and made good memories together."

YOUR PARAPHRASE:

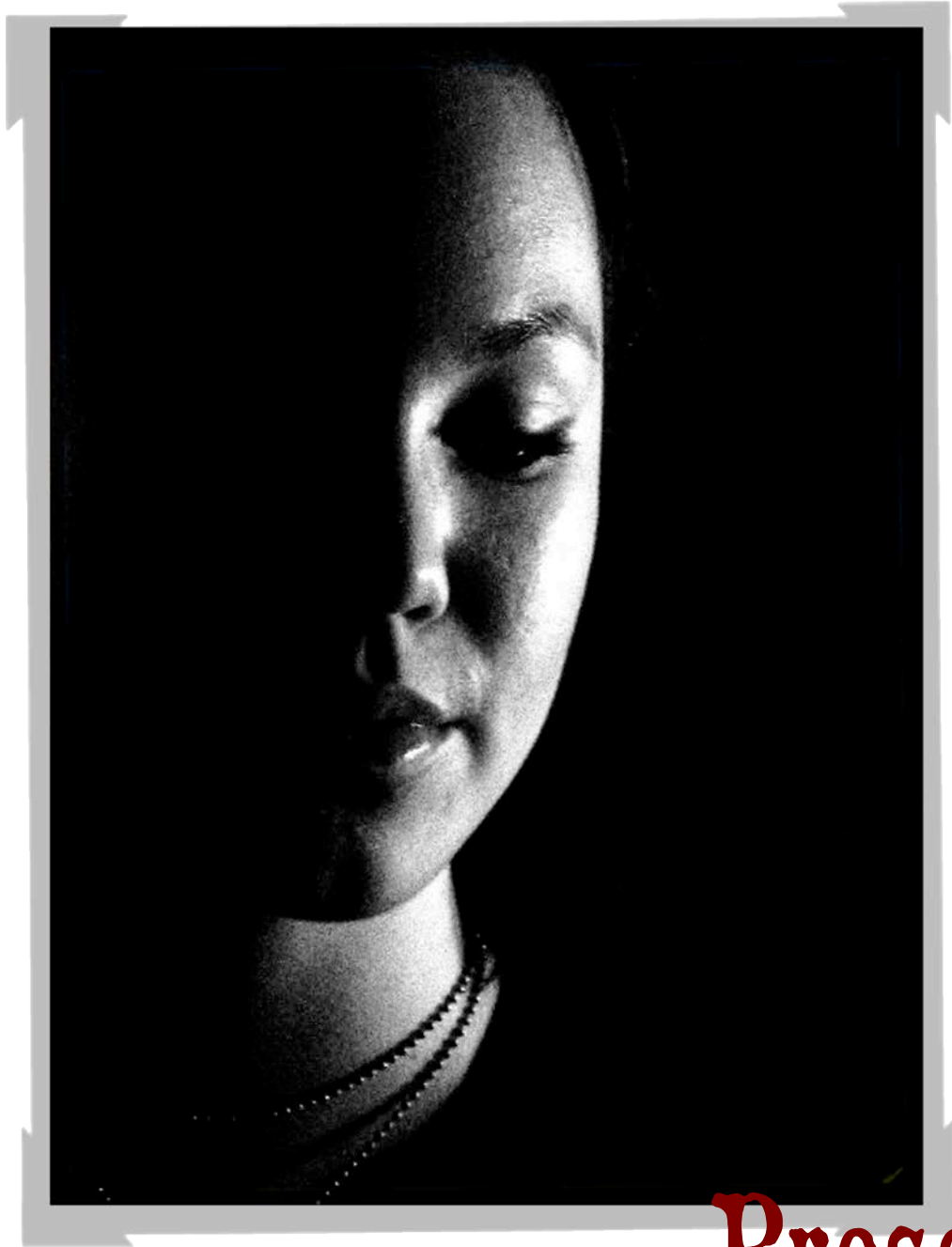
REREAD MATTHEW 7:9-11, how do you feel about what God your Father has given you so far in life?



How much do you know and like your earthly father (or stepfather)? What's one way your experiences with your Dad have shaped how you feel about your heavenly Father?

If you could send God a Father's Day card, what would you say in it?

GOING DEEPER: Psalm 103:13-14, Matthew 6:9-10, Romans 8:14-16; 2 Corinthians 6:16,18



Present

We understand that God would meet us in our grief or fears; He is a compassionate Father and we are His children. But David says His tenderness and knowledge of us extend beyond painful circumstances and explainable events; He is in the darkness with us. To Him it is not night there, yet He endures with us as we wait out the darkness. Still, the question that plagues us when it is dark is, How can we know He is here?

—Sally Breedlove, *Choosing Rest*

reflecting

If I could write a note to God, I would tell him I don't understand how things work and why things happen. I would also tell him that I'm doing the best I can right now. I'm not ready to come to him, and I'm okay with living without him at this point in my life. I've tried talking to him, and I've never felt him with me. I know I'm not perfect, and I hope it's true that he can appreciate my flaws. I'm young and disheveled, but I'll come around one day. Don't give up on me yet. —Jordan, age 19

What would change in your heart if you could believe that God is always there, waiting for you and with you in your darkest places or pain or fear?

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 are here. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. —Psalm 139: 7-10

Lord, through all the generations you have been our home! Before the mountains were created, before you made the earth and the world, you are God, without beginning or end. —Psalm 90:1,2 (NLT)

I am absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us. —Romans 8:38 (MSG)

If God is always with you, are there times when you would prefer Him not to look? Explain.

When have you felt the absence of God? What did you want from God when He seemed withdrawn?



WHAT ARE YOU DOING OR WHERE ARE YOU WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE GOD'S PRESENCE MOST STRONGLY?

Do you feel more at home or more out of place in God's presence? Explain.

Hildebert of Lavardin lived in the Middle Ages.

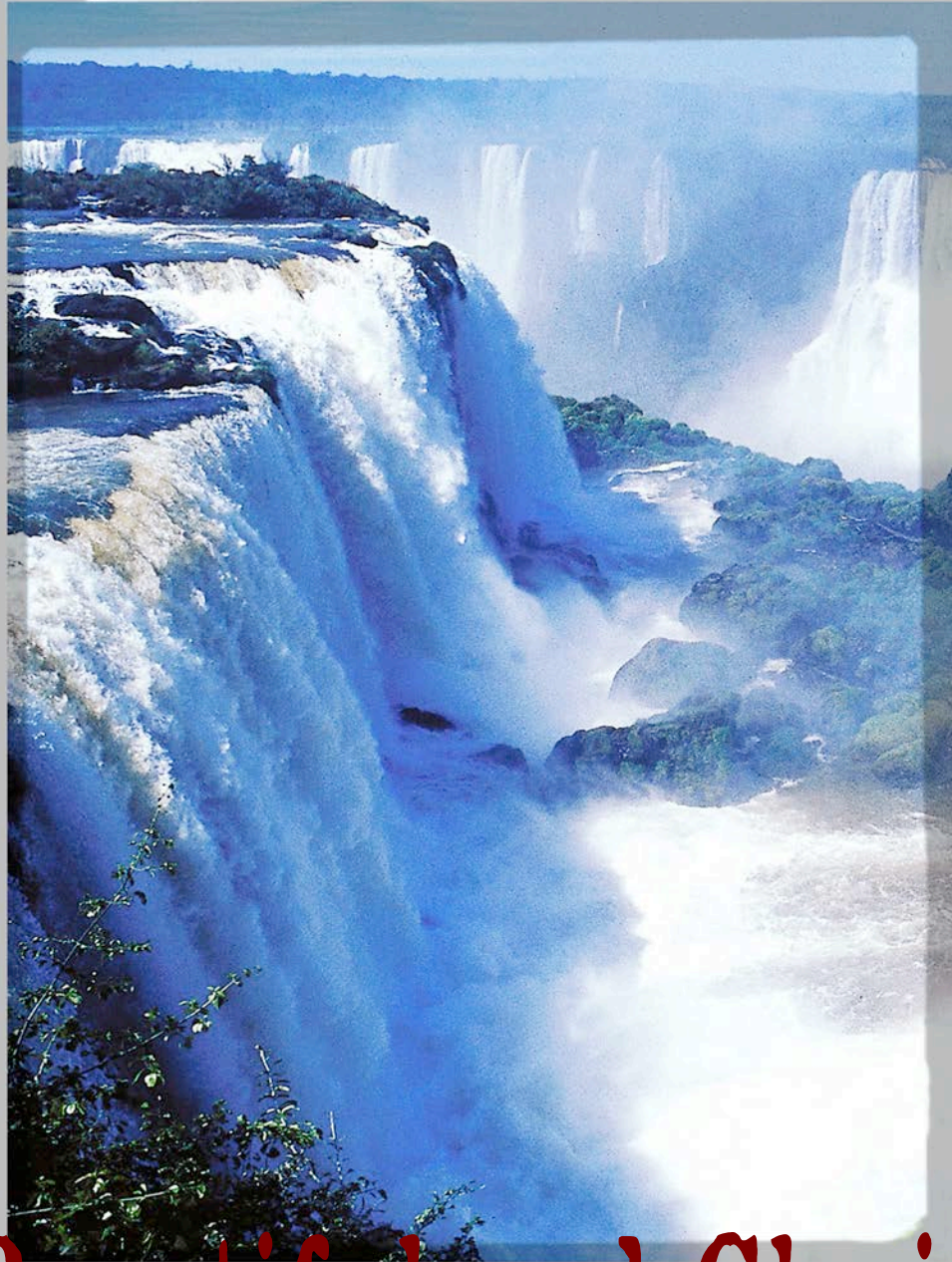
Read this prayer he wrote about where God is.

Then write your own prayer about God's presence:

"God is over all things, under all things; outside all; within but not enclosed; without but not excluded; above but not raised up; below but not depressed; wholly above, presiding; wholly beneath, sustaining; wholly within, filling."

YOUR PRAYER:

GOING DEEPER: Proverbs 15:3, Genesis 28:15, Isaiah 43:1-2,
Jeremiah 16:7, Hebrews 4:13, Hebrews 13:5-6



Beautiful and Glorious

Day pours forth "speech" of that message to all that will listen in the day, speaking with blindingly bright sun and blue sky and clouds, and untold shapes and colors of all things visible. Night pours forth their "knowledge" of the same message to all who will listen at night, speaking with great dark voids and summer moons and countless stars and strange sounds and cool breezes and northern lights. Day and night are saying one thing; God is glorious! God is glorious! God is glorious!

—John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*



HOW DO YOU FEEL IN THE PRESENCE OF BEAUTY OR UGLINESS?

Are there things about God that feel ugly to you? Explain.

Which of these words (if any) do you connect with when you think of God:

SPLENDOR, MAJESTY, JOY, STRENGTH, BEAUTY, MAGNIFICENCE, AWE.

EXPLAIN.

Sometimes in our selfishness, we can try to hog all the glory. How does that compare with what Jesus does with His glory?

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. . . . Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. –John 17:22-24

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. –1 Chronicles 29:11

Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. –Psalm 29:2

The quote on page 55 refers to Psalm 19:1-3.

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.

WHAT DO YOU THINK THESE VERSES ARE TRYING TO TELL US ABOUT GOD?



MARK ON THIS CONTINUUM HOW YOU SEE GOD, AND EXPLAIN.



Spend some time thinking about the beauty of God's person (not just the beauty of His creation).

On the next page write or draw several things that come to your mind.

Then talk with Him awhile about anything you find beautiful (or not so beautiful) about Him.



Loving

God wants us to adore Him, dance with Him, eat, drink, and sing with Him in the experience of His awesome, glorious love. The mystery of His desire is that an eternal, infinite, holy, and utterly self-fulfilling Being wants us—and he is willing to go to any lengths whatsoever to disrupt, arouse, and stop us from pursuing any lover other than Himself . . . Through His unfathomable desire for us and His paradoxical methods of wooing us, He reveals His goodness. —Allender & Longman, *The Cry of the Soul*

My father was the type who couldn't express love—only approval or disapproval. Once I got a B on a report card, and he said, "What's this?" I said, "Why don't you say anything about all the A's?" He said, "I expect that." The good news is that he trained me to be extremely capable, so I'm very successful—I can take care of myself. The downside is that I'm a driven workaholic. I can't make a mistake, and I feel as if I'm always walking on eggshells. One false move and it's all undone. I feel as if I'm only as good as my last accomplishment.

—Judy, from Sue Edwards, *Daddy's Girls*

reflecting

What (if anything) from Judy's story about her earthly father connects with you about God?

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT NEEDING LOVE FROM OTHER PEOPLE? . . . FROM GOD?

Do you think God is disappointed in you? Explain.

The LORD is merciful and gracious; he is slow to get angry and full of unfailing love. He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. He has not punished us for all our sins, nor does he deal with us as we deserve. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our rebellious acts as far away from us as the east is from the west. The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. —Psalm 103:8-14 (NLT)

The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.” –Jeremiah 31:3

How would you describe God’s love to an eight-year-old child? . . . to a thirty-year-old rape victim?

WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD LOVES ABOUT YOU?

DOES GOD LOVE YOU MORE THAN YOU LOVE YOURSELF? EXPLAIN.

If you were completely convinced that God loves you, what are three things that might change in your life?



your response

THIS PASSAGE HAS BEEN PERSONALIZED BY SIMPLY CHANGING THE WORDS “WE ...US” TO “I...ME...MY.”

TAKE SOME TIME TO READ THIS PASSAGE OUT LOUD, MORE THAN ONCE, LETTING THE TRUTH OF HIS LOVE SINK INTO YOUR HEART.

WRITE A SHORT RESPONSE BELOW.

Let me love others, for love comes from God. . . . This is how God showed his love to me: He sent his one and only Son into the world that I might live through him. This is love: not that I loved God, but that he loved me and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for my sins. . . . There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. When I fear, I am not made perfect in love. I love because he first loved me. –1 John 4:7, 9-10, 18-19

How might your own problems or fear interfere with receiving God’s love? (1 John 4:18)

GOING DEEPER: Nehemiah 9:17; John 3:16, 1 John 4:7-19



Jealous

. . . holy jealousy is at the very core of who God is. Within the depths of his being burns an inextinguishable fire of love called jealousy. His jealousy is a blazing passion to protect a love relationship that is eternally precious to Him and to defend it when it is broken. —S.J. Hill, *The Burning Desire*



As you look at the image on the previous page, what or who comes to mind? Explain.

Unlike the jealousy of warped husbands or foolish boyfriends, God's jealousy is His zeal to preserve something or someone precious. Human jealousy is often self-focused and destructive whereas our Heavenly Father's jealousy is protective and constructive.

–Sue Edwards,
Daddy's Girls

Recount a specific experience of someone being jealous OF you?
What was that like for you? Why?

How is it different to have a person be jealous FOR you? Why?

Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. –Exodus 34:14

This is what the LORD Almighty says: "I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her." –Zechariah 8:2

I [Apostle Paul] am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. –2 Corinthians 11:2,3

HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF YOUR GIRLFRIEND OR BOYFRIEND OR HUSBAND OR WIFE WERE NOT JEALOUS FOR YOU?

What unhealthy distractions might be taking you in the wrong direction or competing with God for your devotion and attention? Or what dangerous influences might be arousing His jealousy for you? How might God, in His jealousy, want to protect you?

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT GOD BEING JEALOUS FOR YOU AND FIGHTING FOR YOUR HEART?



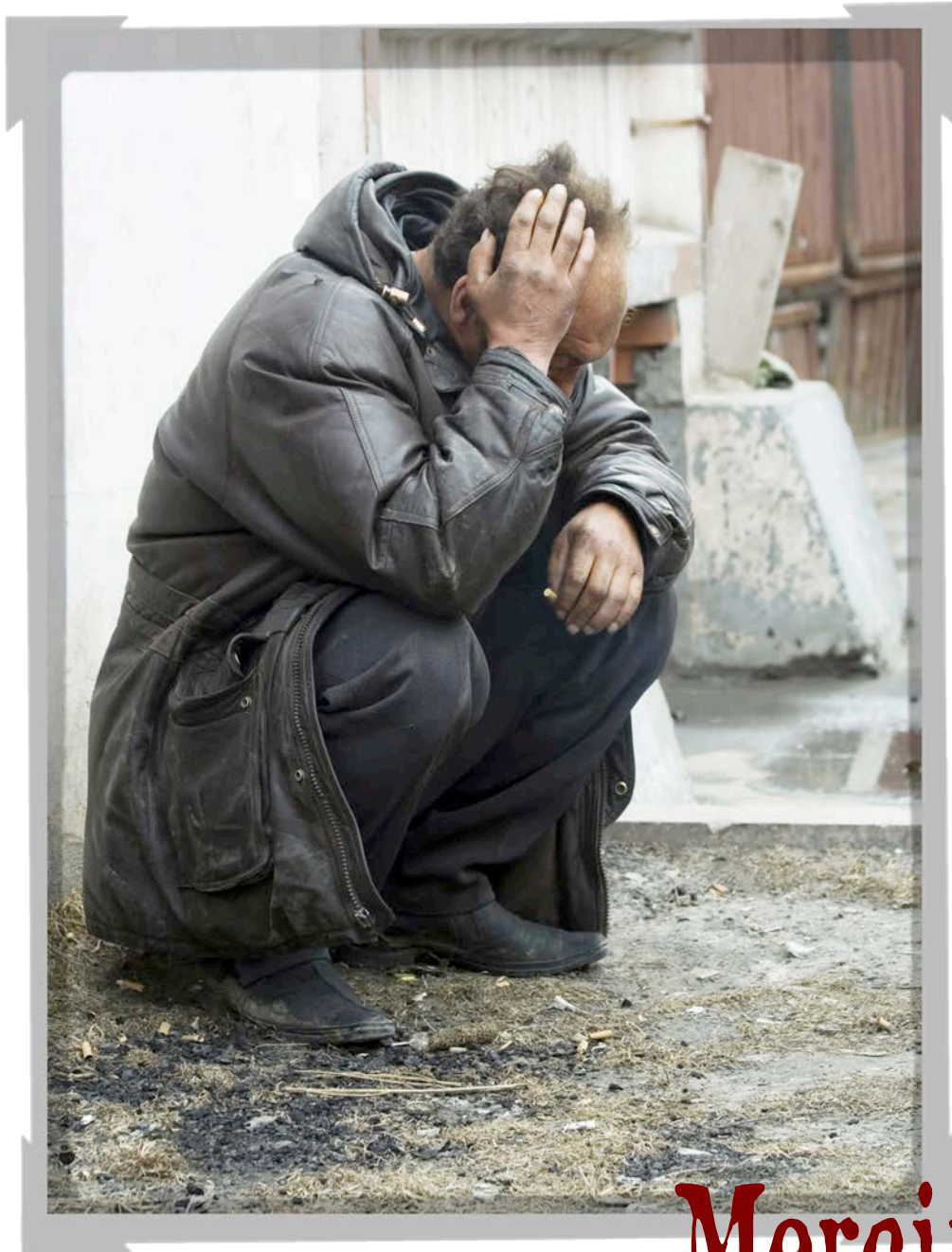
God is a romantic at heart, and he has his own bride to fight for. He is a jealous lover, and his jealousy is for the hearts of his people and for their freedom. –John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*

Remember or imagine a period of time when you basically ignored God and gave your attention and affections elsewhere.

If God had sent you an text message at that time, what might He have said about His feelings of being jilted?

How might He encourage you to come back to Him?

Write or draw a picture about that.



Merciful

We may find that we punish ourselves mercilessly for real or imagined sins, and even then we will not forgive ourselves. It takes a profound conversion to accept the belief that God is tender and loves us just as we are, not in spite of our sins and faults, but with them. . . . "At last," Jesus is saying, "finally there is someone who understands me and what I want to be for my people—a Savior of boundless compassion, unbearable forgiveness, infinite patience and healing love." —Brennan Manning, *A Stranger to Self-Hatred*



Did you ever get away with something when you knew you deserved punishment? How do you feel about receiving God's mercy, or would you rather receive His justice for you?

Does God's mercy seem weak to you ... or powerful ... or something else? Do you like that?

FOR WHAT (IF ANYTHING) DO YOU NEED TO COME BEFORE GOD'S THRONE OF MERCY RIGHT NOW (Hebrews 4:16)?

"Don't tear your clothing in your grief; instead, tear your hearts." Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful. He is not easily angered. He is filled with kindness and is eager not to punish you. –Joel 2:13 (NLT)

Where is another God like you, who pardons the sins of . . . his people? You cannot stay angry with your people forever, because you delight in showing mercy. Once again you will have compassion on us. You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean! –Micah 7:18-19 (NLT)

But then God our Savior showed us his kindness and love. He saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of his mercy. . . . –Titus 3:4-5 (NLT)

So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it. –Hebrews 4:16 (NLT)

What do you think or feel about God giving mercy to your enemies, rather than the punishment or judgment you think they deserve?



Read out loud this prayer of Catherine of Siena, who lived during the 1300's. Then say your own prayer.

Merciful Lord, it does not surprise me that you forget completely the sins of those who repent. I am not surprised that you remain faithful to those who hate and revile you. The mercy which pours forth from you fills the whole world. It was by your mercy that we were created, and by your mercy that you redeemed us by sending your Son . . . Your justice is constantly tempered with mercy. So you refuse to punish us as we deserve. O mad lover! It was not enough for you to take on our humanity; you had to die for us as well.

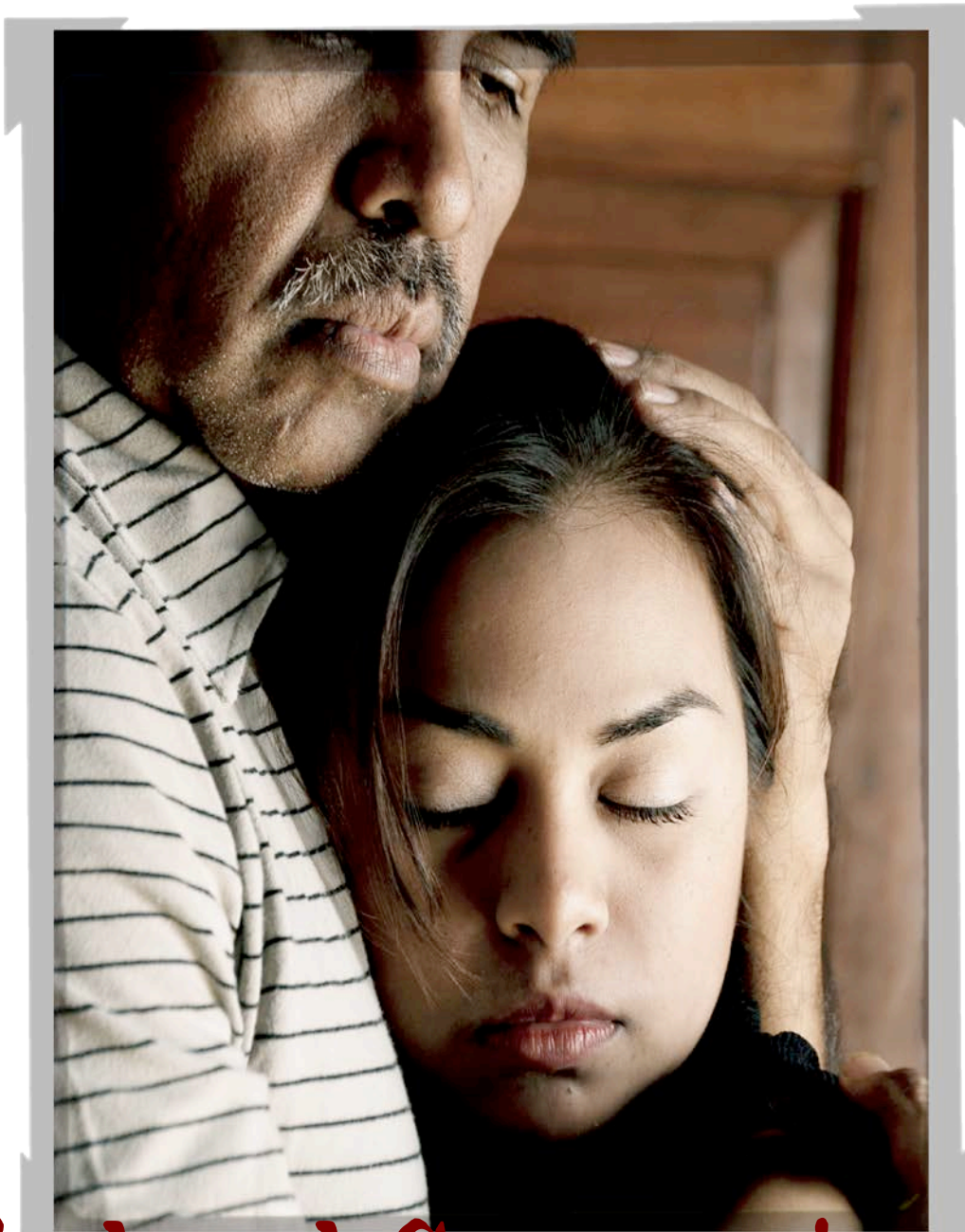
—Catherine of Siena

IN WHAT WAYS ARE YOU IMPATIENT WITH YOURSELF?

TAKE SOME TIME TO TALK WITH GOD OVER THAT SAME ISSUE.

WHAT PATIENT WORDS DOES HE HAVE FOR YOU ABOUT THAT?

GOING DEEPER: Daniel 9:7-9, Ephesians 2:4-5 1 Timothy 1:15-16; 2 Peter 3:8-9



Kind and Compassionate

God's compassion is described by Jesus not simply to show me how willing God is to feel for me, or to forgive me my sins and offer me new life and happiness, but to invite me to become like God and to show the same compassion to others as he is showing to me. —Henry Nouwen, *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*

The Hebrew word for compassion ... is not some sweet, feel-good pat on the back. It means to be kicked in the gut. God feels with you in a way no human being can begin to touch. He gets it. He entered your frame of reference, took on the limitations of your flesh, the weariness that settles in your spirit. —Paula Rinehart, *Better Than My Dreams*

reflecting

Dear God, Do you hear the silent cries of my heart when I don't pray and sometimes don't like you or I'm afraid of you? Do you really care about my family and their hearts and the continual sadness and desperation they live in?

—Cynde

How can you identify with the previous image either personally or regarding someone you know?

What do you expect from God in your weaknesses and faults—compassion or something else? Explain.

Read the following verses then circle all the words or phrases that the Bible uses to describe God.
Do you generally like people with those qualities? Explain.

Who redeems your life from the pit; who crowns you with loving-kindness and compassion . . . The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving-kindness. . . . Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. –Psalm 103:4, 8, 13 (NASB)

The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. –Psalm 145:8-9

Or did you think that because he's such a nice God, he'd let you off the hook? Better think this one through from the beginning. God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change. –Romans 2:4 (MSG)

Now go back and underline all the action words describing what God's kindness does for us.

Pick just one of those—the one you would most like to experience from Him.

Talk with Him awhile about why you picked it and what that would feel like to you.



your response

When God's love embraces your shame and regret, it always comes as a surprise. For He meets you, not with the wrath you expect, but with His undeserved kindness. —Paula Rinehart, *Sex and the Soul of A Woman*

Kindness and compassion aren't usually considered "manly" qualities these days. What is your view of kindness and compassion?

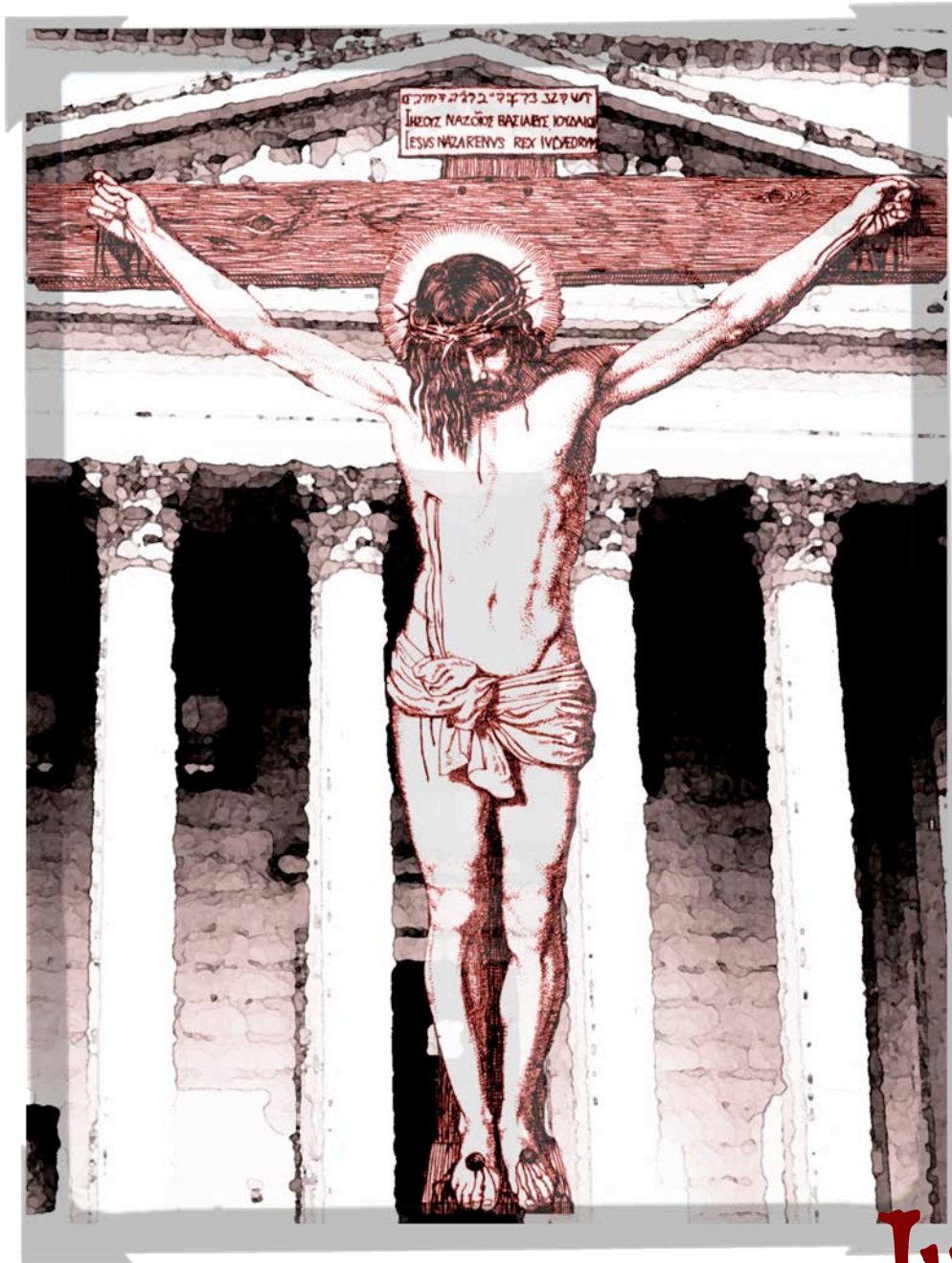
Are there people who have been kind to you? Did you like them? Are you a kind person to others ... to God?

GOING DEEPER: Psalm 111:4, Joel 2:13

Luke 13:34

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.

If you let Jesus "gather" you together "under his wings" in compassion., what do you think He might say to you?



Just

You come before the judgment seat of God full of rebellion and mistakes. Because of his justice he cannot dismiss your sin, but because of his love he cannot dismiss you. So, in an act which stunned the heavens, he punished himself on the cross for your sins. God's justice and love are equally honored. And you, God's creation, are forgiven. —Max Lucado, *Grace for the Moment*

To say that God is a God of justice is to say that he is a God who cares about the right exercise of power and authority. –Gary Haugen, *Good News about Injustice*

reflecting

What personal or global injustice do you really want God to make right? When would you expect this justice to occur?

Could you admire a God who doesn't care about justice? Why or why not?

Does everything have to be “the same” or “equal” in order for God to be just? Explain.

I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he. –Deuteronomy 32:3,4

. . . Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong. He repays a man for what he has done; he brings upon him what his conduct deserves. It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice . . . Can he who hates justice govern? Will you condemn the just and might One? Is he not the One who . . . shows no partiality to princes and does not favor the rich over the poor, for they are all the works of his hands? –Job 34:10-12, 17-19

Look at my servant [Christ], whom I strengthen. He is my chosen one, and I am pleased with him. I have put my Spirit upon him. He will reveal justice to the nations . . . He will not crush those who are weak or quench the smallest hope. He will bring full justice to all who have been wronged. He will not stop until truth and righteousness prevail through the earth . . . –Isaiah 42:1-4 (NLT)

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT GOD WHEN YOU EXPERIENCE INJUSTICE OR SEE OTHERS SUFFERING FROM INJUSTICE?

Do you think God plays favorites with the rich and powerful? Explain.

Why do you think God waits to deliver ultimate justice?

Before you answer, consider: What would immediate justice look like in this world?

What if God gave you exactly what you deserved? What would that be like for you?



your response

Read Psalm 146:5-10 (below) aloud to God, pausing on each line or two to reflect on what God reveals about Himself. Ask Him about how He deals with injustice. Also talk with Him about how His love and justice fit together. Write out your thoughts and questions.

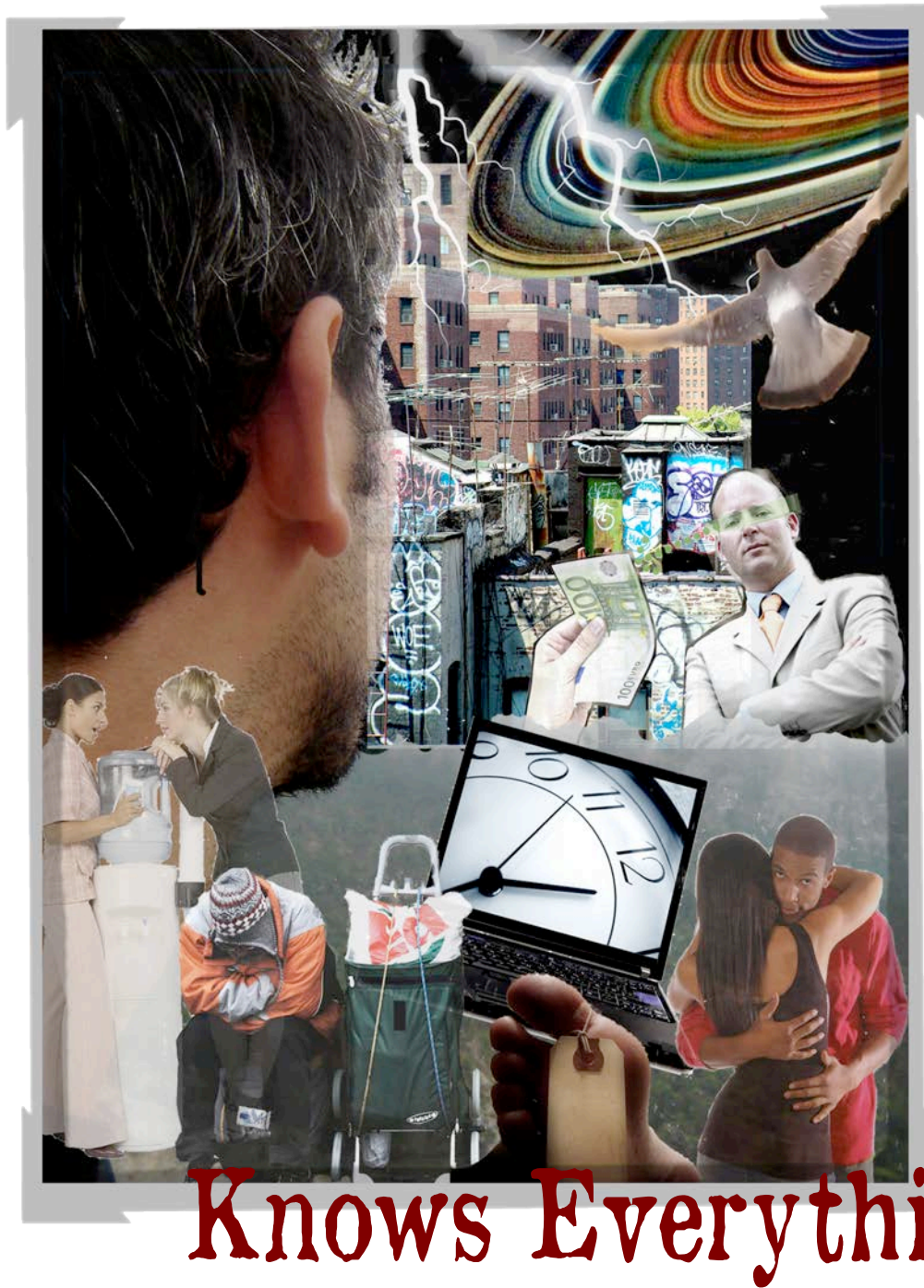
But happy are those who have the God of Israel as their helper,
whose hope is in the LORD their God.
He is the one who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and everything in them.
He is the one who keeps every promise forever,
who gives justice to the oppressed
and food to the hungry.

The LORD frees the prisoners.
The LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts the burdens of those bent beneath their loads.
The LORD loves the righteous.
The LORD protects the foreigners among us.
He cares for the orphans and widows,
but he frustrates the plans of the wicked.

The LORD will reign forever.
O Jerusalem, your God is King in every generation!
Praise the LORD!

—Psalm 146:5-10 (NLT)

GOING DEEPER: Zephaniah 3:3-4; Psalm 33:4-5; Psalm 98:9; Jeremiah 9:24



God not only knows whatsoever has happened in the past in every part of His vast domains, and He is not only thoroughly acquainted with everything that is now transpiring throughout the entire universe, but He is also perfectly cognizant of every event, from the least to the greatest, that ever will happen in the ages to come. God's knowledge of the future is as complete as is His knowledge of the past and the present, and that, because the future depends entirely upon Himself. —A.W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*

reflecting

Yo, God, I want to know, what is the game? Am I here to do my part and leave, or am I just a character in your large board game with your college buddies? Maybe this doesn't make sense, but then again if you are all-knowing, I shouldn't have to explain further. —James, Age 18

Which part(s) of this image or these quotes helps you identify how you see and experience God? Explain.

DOES IT DISTURB YOU OR COMFORT YOU THAT GOD KNOWS EVERYTHING—PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE? EXPLAIN.

From these verses, what are several things you notice about God's knowledge?

He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. —Psalm 147:5

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. . . . Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. —Psalm 139:1-2, 23

Nothing in all creation can hide from him. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes. This is the God to whom we must explain all that we have done.
—Hebrews 4:13 (NLT)

What if God really does know everything? Then what? . . .

What if God really doesn't know everything? Then what? . . .



Does God know more about you than you know about yourself?

How does it feel when someone knows that much about you?

Explain.

GOING DEEPER: Matthew 11:27; John 2:25; John 16:3; 1 Corinthians 1:19-25, Hebrews 4:12



Emotional

God feels anger, fear, jealousy, despair, contempt, and shame—and all of these emotions reveal something about His character. Most gloriously, each one points to the scandalous wonder of the Cross. . . . Our positive emotions, of course—joy, peace, pleasure, and others—have equal potential to teach us about the nature of God. Allender & Longman, *The Cry of the Soul*

Jesus was angry enough to purge the temple, hungry enough to eat raw grain, distraught enough to weep in public, fun loving enough to be called a drunkard, winsome enough to attract kids, weary enough to sleep in a storm-bounced boat, poor enough to sleep on dirt and borrow a coin for a sermon illustration, radical enough to get kicked out of town, responsible enough to care for his mother, tempted enough to know the smell of Satan, and fearful enough to sweat blood. —Max Lucado, *Next Door Savior*

reflecting

Look at the photo image again. Do you really believe God has all these types of emotions? Why or why not?

THE WORD “EMOTIONAL” HAS MANY MEANINGS:

- (1) being out of control or irrational,
- (2) feeling deeply from the heart.

Do you like emotions?

Which emotions do you consider to be safe, or unsafe? Why?

From the following verses, make a list of all the emotions you notice God experiencing. What one or two emotions do you think He feels most strongly?

I'll make a list of God's gracious dealings, all the things God has done that need praising. All the generous bounties of God, his great goodness to the family of Israel—compassion lavished, love extravagant. He said, "Without question these are my people, children who would never betray me." So he became their Savior. In all their troubles, he was troubled, too. He didn't send someone else to help them. He did it himself, in person. Out of his own love and pity he redeemed them. He rescued them and carried them a long for a long, long time. But they turned on him; they grieved his Holy Spirit. —Isaiah 63:7-10 (MSG)

He led me to a place of safety; he rescued me because he delights in me.
—Psalm 18:19

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? . . . My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not man—the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath. —Hosea 11:1, 8-9

Does relating to a God Who has strong emotions feel safe or unsafe to you? Would you rather relate to a God who is indifferent, stoic, impassive, or checked out? Why or why not?



your response

Have you experienced God's emotions in any way? Explain.

If you could ask God to change something about His emotional nature, what would you ask for?

GOING DEEPER: Genesis 6:5-6, John 14:27



Joyful

God leads a very interesting life, and . . . he is full of joy. Undoubtedly he is the most joyous being in the universe. The abundance of his love and generosity is inseparable from his infinite joy. All of the good and beautiful things from which we occasionally drink tiny droplets of soul-exhilarating joy, God continuously experiences in all their breadth and depth . . . We are enraptured by a well-done movie sequence or by a few bars from an opera or line from a poem. We treasure our great experiences for a lifetime, and we may have very few of them. But he is simply one great inexhaustible and eternal experience of all that is good and true and beautiful and right. . . . This is his life. –Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*



Can you imagine God being joyful—or doesn't that fit your image of Him? Explain.

Try to remember a recent time when you experienced a surge of joy. Describe that moment.

What do you think Jesus had to feel so joyful about?

. . . Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." —Nehemiah 8:10

The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

—Zephaniah 3:17

"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. . . I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them." —John 15:11 and 17:13

In light of all the suffering in the world, how can God be joyful?

Did you notice that Jesus invites us to spend eternity with a joyful God? How do you feel about sharing God's joy with Him forever?



How joyful are you today? If you feel somewhat joyful, what do you have to feel joyful about?

Does God have anything to do with your joy?

If you feel the lack of joy, talk with God about why that's where you are.

Write down your thoughts.

GOING DEEPER: Psalm 149:4; Matthew 25:23



Faithful

Those who know God know that he is bound by his own promises and integrity, not by our wishes. . . . God is never caught by surprise. God's promises are made in his infinite wisdom as part of his eternal plan and are backed by his matchless power. What God says, he does. God, because he is God, is a promise keeper. –Scott Hafemann, *The God of Promise and the Life of Faith*

Jesus is a friend who will never fail, the faithful one who will never be lacking in fidelity, even when people are unfaithful to him. —John F. O'Grady, *Models of Jesus*

Look at the image on the previous page again. How does this image speak to you about God and His faithfulness?

God's relationship with us and with our world is just that: a relationship. As with every relationship, there's a certain amount of unpredictability, and the ever-present likelihood that you'll get hurt. . . . But God does give [love] again and again and again, until he is literally bleeding from it all. God's willingness to risk is just astounding—far beyond what any of us would do were we in his position.

—John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*

WHEN HAVE YOU BEEN DISAPPOINTED BY A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP OR A BROKEN PROMISE?

DESCRIBE HOW THAT FELT.

Do you think God really does keep His promises? Explain.

If you can, give an example of when He kept a particular promise to you.

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands. –Deuteronomy 7:9

So in this way the Lord gave to Israel all the land he had promised to their ancestors, and they went in and conquered it and lived there. And the Lord gave them peace, just as he had promised, and no one could stand against them; the Lord helped them destroy all their enemies. Every good thing the Lord had promised them came true. –Joshua 21:43-45 (TLB)

Even when we are too weak to have any faith left, he remains faithful to us and will help us, for he cannot disown us who are part of himself, and he will always carry out his promises to us. –2 Timothy 2:13 (TLB)

In a world where so many relationships only last awhile and then break up, what does real “faithfulness” look like?

When have you experienced a faithful relationship? Describe how that felt to you.



your response

My parents divorced when I was five, and ever since, the world has never been a safe place. Divorce teaches you that one morning everything can be fine and by nighttime the earth can fall apart. It teaches you never to count on anyone, because they could always leave.

—Paula, from Sue Edwards, *Daddy's Girls*

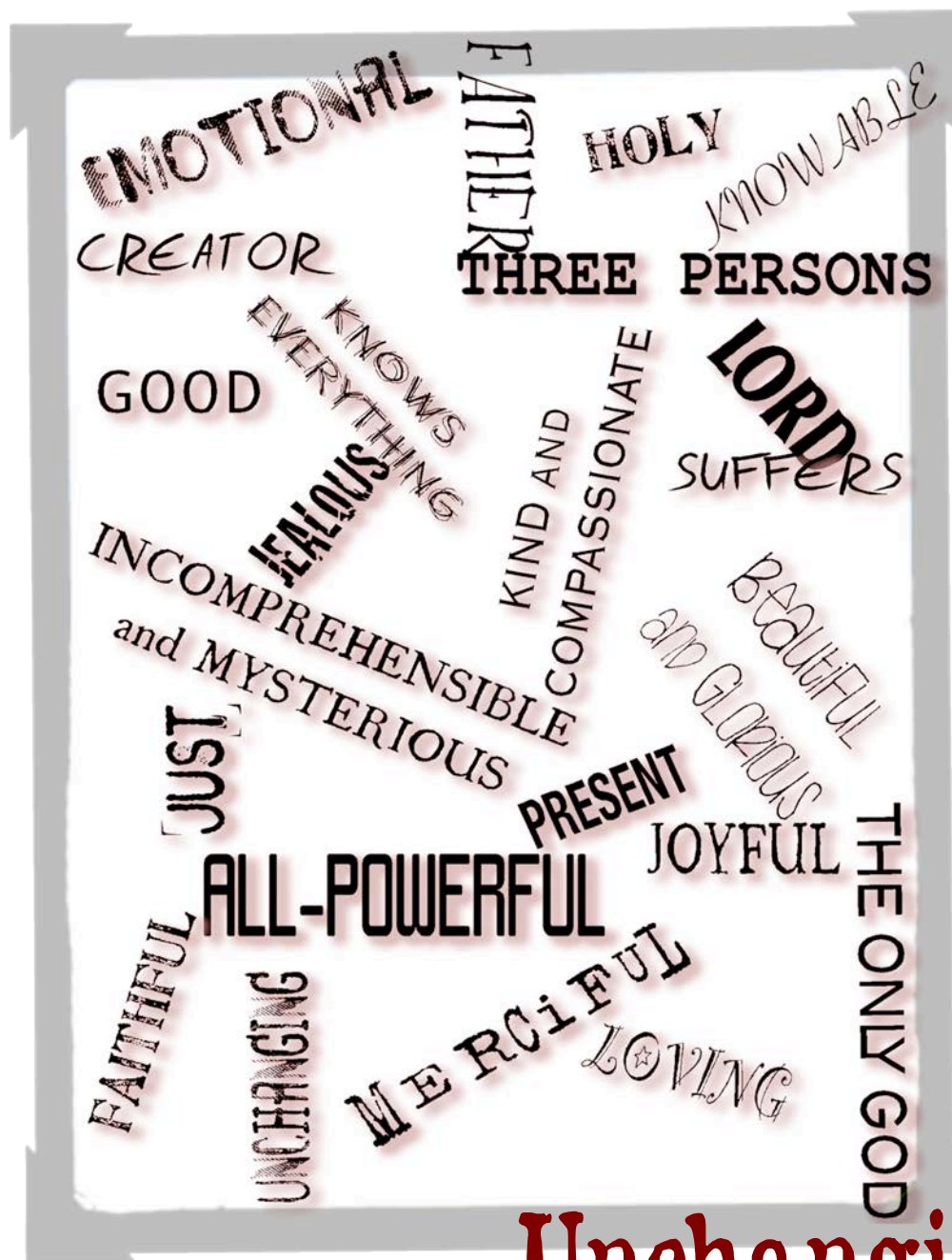
How (if at all) has someone else's unfaithfulness or broken promise affected you?

How hopeful and certain are you that important people in your life will be faithful to you?

. . . That God will be faithful to you?

Explain.

GOING DEEPER: Psalm 89:1; Psalm 119:90; Lamentations 3:22-24



Unchanging

Not only is God all of these things—ever-present, all-powerful, loving, beautiful, etc.—but He will always be these things and will never change to be the opposite of these things. And this is only a small part of who God is. We humans just can't fathom all His mysteries, or probe the limits of His nature, or comprehend Him by squeezing Him into the box of our finite minds, or do a makeover on those aspects of God that make us uncomfortable. He is who He is, and He will be who He is eternally. —CONNECT series



As you look at these words, what are your impressions of God?

Is “unchanging” a good thing to you? Do you want God to change or stay the same? Explain.

Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. –Hebrews 6:17

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. –Hebrews 13:8

God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?
–Numbers 23:19

How does it impact you to know that whatever is true about God will never change?

How do you think God can be both emotional and unchanging at the same time?



your response

God says that He will not change His ways or His Being. Does this discourage you from sharing your heart with Him or asking Him for things? Explain.

Do you really believe you can count on God?

If so, what are you sure you can count on Him for, and why?

GOING DEEPER: James 1:16-17

Now?

As you come to the end, let's take some time to put things together. First of all, turn back to page 95 and mark/circle the top 3-4 characteristics of the Triune God that stood out to you.

Where are you now with the feelings you have for God?

What questions do you still have?

READ ECCLESIASTES 2:22-25

So what do people get in this life for all their hard work and anxiety? Their days of labor are filled with pain and grief; even at night their minds cannot rest. It is all meaningless.

So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work. Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God. For who can eat or enjoy anything apart from him?

How do you think God can help you find meaning? Enjoy life more? Experience true rest?

As you have thought about whether you like God, perhaps the issue of how much you trust God also came up. The following is a prayer Jesus taught his followers. As you pray through it slowly, pay attention to how much you trust God to respond.

“ ‘Our Father in heaven,
 hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come,
 your will be done
 on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from the evil one.’
 –Matthew 6:9b-13

From your notes and drawings through this study, how could you now answer these questions?

If I liked God more, how could this give me hope?

If I liked God more, how could this help me?

Glance back to the image you chose for page 6 and the other images in this whole study. At this point in your journey, which one or two images resonate with how you see God? Explain.

What (if anything) might have changed as you have explored what God says about Himself? Explain that, too.

So?

God is not one or another of the attributes in this study. And He is incredibly more than the total of the attributes listed here. We can't cut and paste to make him into our idea of perfection. We can't say to God,

"I like your LOVE but not your HOLINESS.

I like your PRESENCE but not your LORDSHIP."

God isn't fragmented.

God is ... He is GOD.

And strange as it may seem, maybe His JEALOUS LOVE in a fallen world helps to make sense of the more difficult things that we seem to not like about God.

So the question remains,

do you like God? . . . do you like you in His presence?

We encourage you to talk these questions over with God honestly. If your honest response is that you still don't like God very much, He isn't shocked. Talk that over with Him, too.

* * * * *

As you continue to think about who God says He is, we encourage you to talk with your group or somebody else about what may or may not have changed in your understanding of who God is and how you relate to him.

We also invite you to engage in the Bible study, *GOD: Embracing His Outrageous Love*, one book in the CONNECT series. You can find more information on this study at www.navpress.com/landing/connect.aspx, and on page 107.

For Leaders

To help you find the right connections to your ministry or small group, here are some answers to key questions about GOD: Can I Like Him?

What?

So what are the GOD: Can I Like Him? topical mini-studies? They have. . .

- . . . depth — short sections yet with richness of Scripture
- . . . flexibility — appropriate for a small group setting or as a personal ministry tool with one or two others
- . . . the feel of a Quiet Time journal or devotional — space for writing and personal reflection

Think of it as a “hybrid” ministry tool—equally beneficial in several contexts.

Who?

Who in your ministry context might really get into this tool? Our field testers have told us that resources like this cover a range of needs, for example:

- Mature high school students love the open-ended questions, engaging images, and real-world blogs.
- Adult believers and seekers appreciate a fresh look at the heart and character of God, fleshed out with thought-provoking quotes.
- It helps people who know and love God draw even closer to Him.
- People, believers as well as non-believers, who have been disappointed and distant from God (or frankly dislike Him) feel invited to tell Him so and hear Him out at the same time!

And don't forget yourself! This might be a fresh wind under your wings along your spiritual journey!

Why?

Why were these studies created? Here are several reasons:

- First, because so many people don't know who God really is. It's no surprise to you that more and more people in our pluralistic culture have a diminished knowledge of God. With biblical literacy plummeting, many people just patch together a “God” made from snippets of Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age, secularism, and pop culture.
- Second, because many of us experience times when we just don't like God much. This is often an intermediate step to learning to love God. Even those well-grounded in a biblical worldview go through painful, dark times when suffering can confuse our view of God—especially His goodness. And, for most of us, it's difficult to love or trust or obey God when, deep inside, we're struggling with just plain liking Him.

How?

God, Can I Like Him? invites people to re-discover, or perhaps discover for the first time what appeal there is – what there is to truly like about our Triune God.

NOW FOR SOME PRACTICAL LEADING TIPS. Here are some ideas on HOW people on the front lines (like you) could use *GOD: Can I Like Him?* in your ministries.

- Small (and safe) groups: A small group of 4-8 adults, college students, or teens is ideal for processing these questions—as long as it's safe to admit to struggles and misconceptions. With a little preparation beforehand your group could discuss one or even two topics in an hour...three topics in 90 minutes. That makes it an excellent tool if you are on an 8-12 week schedule. If your group isn't inclined to do preparation, consider allowing the first 15 minutes for quiet preparation, followed by discussion.
- When leading this resource, just go through each question in order and allow for discussion. You may need to ask a few guiding questions within the discussion to keep it on track.
- One-on-One Discipling or Mentoring: If you are meeting with someone to help them grow spiritually, this is a great tool to surface unexplored ideas and issues with God. You can use it alone or alongside other discipling resources. Or go through one topic as a part of worship together.
- Family Devotions: Parents who want to find out what their kids really think about God could find this to be an eye-opening resource. Very open-ended questions get you and your kids (especially the older ones) thinking and opening up. Key verses help you direct them to foundational Scripture passages. And in the process, they can see God through your eyes and experiences, too.
- Individually: For a refreshing change-up to your Quiet Time routine...or to get you started in the habit of spending time with God...just go through this resource by yourself. Or, take it on a day of prayer, personal retreat, or relaxing vacation.

P.S. – and don't feel obligated to cover every topic and go in order in these situations. Doing the introductory section on "Exploring Your View of God" will help get you started. After that, feel free to skip around. Choose those topics that interest you the most. And consider talking with a friend about what you discover along the way.

GOD: Can I Like Him? VIDEOS:

To enhance and complement the *GOD: Can I Like Him?* studies we have developed two short videos. These videos reference the same topics from Parts 1 and 2 of this study. They can be used as an introduction to these studies and for group or personal meditation times. These videos are downloadable from YouTube at "navpressvideo." They come in both Quicktime and WindowsMedia versions.

While *GOD: Can I Like Him?* might look a little different from the resources or studies you're used to, it's really not difficult or complicated. If you can do 3 simple things, you'll be amazed at how people can open up, so:

- 1) Just be a brother/sister on the same journey (not a teacher—trainer—expert), willing to learn and set the pace in vulnerability and authenticity.
- 2) Create a relaxed, conversational atmosphere of grace where it's okay to discover, doubt, differ, and diverge. Create a process that accepts people who are "on the way" and welcomes doubts as a normal part of the growth, this can really help your group make significant progress!
- 3) Soak your own preparation in prayer so you can simply facilitate and enjoy seeing God reveal Himself to each of you.

Connect MORE!

CONNECT series Bible studies:

GOD: *Connecting with His Outrageous Love*

IDENTITY: *Becoming Who God Says I Am*

SOUL: *Embracing My Sexuality and Emotions*

RELATIONSHIPS: *Bringing Jesus into My World*

LIFE: *Thriving in a Complex World*

FREEDOM: *Breaking the Power of Shame*



Complementary Resources to the CONNECT series:

- *The New Me* topical mini-studies
- *Finding Mercy* topical mini-studies
- *Relationships* topical mini-studies
- *GOD: Can I Like Him?* topical mini-studies
- *Searching the Ordinary for Meanings...*a guide to experiencing richness of life
- *The Shame Exchange: Trading Shame for God's Mercy and Freedom*, Steve & Sally Breedlove and Ralph & Jennifer Ennis

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