

Image is everything. It has been said that our perception is our reality. This is so true when it comes to faith in God. What we hear about or, more hazardously, see done in the name of God shapes our definitions and directly influences whether or not we will believe in or pursue a relationship with this God.

Q1: On the student response sheet, write/illustrate whatever comes to mind around the word “GOD.” Think of words, experiences, stories, and what you may have been taught about God growing up.

People will talk about how they do not believe in God, then you ask them to describe *this* God and we may find that we, too, do not believe in the one they described. Here are some examples of images people have of “God”:



- ⌘ **Drill Sergeant God-** a demanding, angry, and vicious God who speaks very loudly, maybe even using some hurtful words to describe us- like *sinners*
- ⌘ **Nagging Parent God-** we can never please him, he is always upset about something and places ridiculous expectations upon us
- ⌘ **Benevolent Grandpa God-** Doesn't really care much, simply sits around and acknowledges us every now and then, not really aware of anything, including our pain and suffering- he is out of touch with reality
- ⌘ **Mad Scientist God-** creatively pursuing new ways to test us and make us miserable
- ⌘ **Courtroom Judge God-** always aware of our violations/sins and eagerly awaiting to cast judgment upon us

Q2: What about these “images” of God seems odd? How do these “images” compare to the picture(s) you have of God in your mind?

The Bible uses all kinds of *metaphors* to describe God. A metaphor is a way of describing something or someone by using characteristics of something else. Metaphors can be very helpful, but they can also be very dangerous. What comes to mind if it is said that God is like...

- ...a rock
- ...a spirit
- ...a lion
- ...Justin Bieber
- ...Harry Potter
- ...a king
- ...a father

Metaphors are helpful in that they can give us a description of something that may not be easily defined or even literally seen. Yet sometimes metaphors can be difficult for us, as each of us may view the used metaphor differently depending on our experience with the rock (solid/strong vs. painful when thrown at your head), or the lion (powerful vs. dangerous, i.e. how do you think a deer would feel about a lion?), with a king (caretaker of the land vs. oppressive force), or even with a parental figure (supportive and strong vs. absent and too busy). Yet the Bible describes God in a wide variety of ways, often using metaphors.

Q3: What images or phrases are used to describe God in the following passages (there may be more than one in each passage)? What do you think of when that *metaphor* or image is used?

⊕ Genesis 1:1-2:4

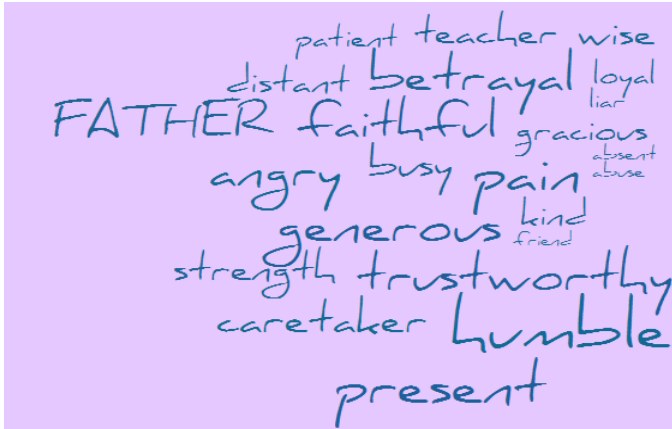
⊕ Exodus 3:1-12

⊕ Psalm 68:4-6

⊕ Psalm 86:1-7

⊕ Isaiah 66:12-13

⊕ Matthew 6:7-15



Jesus uses the word *father* throughout the Gospels to describe God. This image is very delicate, for some it is helpful and crystal clear as you may have strong a relationship with your father; for others this may bring up painful images of neglect and fear, selfishness and disloyalty, someone who never seems to care about or have time for you. Jesus’ use of *father* then becomes something that distances you from God instead of pulling you near; it causes you to become a skeptic versus a disciple. God as father may be one of the worst metaphors for you. Again, metaphors can vary in meaning depending on your experience.

So what does Jesus mean when he begins his prayer with Our Father in Heaven? It seems strange that Jesus would use an image that can be so easily tainted by the closest example we may have.

Re-Read Matthew 6:7-15

The image of God as Father for those Jesus originally spoke to would bring to mind the God who brought into existence the world, the human race, and all things for that matter. It was a helpful metaphor. Particularly, the image of Father would bring to mind the relationship God had with Israel- God’s *firstborn son*. With this in mind, God as Father would speak of a God who not only provides and cares for God’s people but also who has left an inheritance that is to be passed on from generation to generation. *Father* would speak of one of the deepest and most meaningful relationships they knew.

Then we think of God as Father in reference to Jesus. In the Bible the word Jesus used for Father was “Abba” – an Aramaic word – which was an informal, very intimate name for father. It would be kind of like a young child calling their father “daddy” or “papa” or even “dad” instead of using such a formal title. In using such a word, Jesus pointed to the intimate, meaningful relationship God desires with humanity. The Bible also talks of Jesus as the firstborn over *all* creation the perfect image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15-20). God as Father speaks not only of God’s identity, but also ours, children of our Heavenly Parent who share a common relationship with our brother Jesus. As God’s children, we are to imitate who God is in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Q4: What are some of the characteristics of Jesus that we are to imitate? The following passages may be helpful (pick one): Matthew 7:1-5; Mark 2:1-12; Philippians 2:1-13; Colossians 3:12-15; 1 John 4:7-21

God as Father, the Divine Parent, reminds us that we are a part of a larger community and are to invite others to join this pursuit of living into who God is and called us to be. God is not only *my* God, but *our* Father. In the Father we have a sense of belonging to something bigger than ourselves, we are not alone. God as *Father* reminds us that despite, or because of God’s position as Creator of all things, God longs to be in close relationship with people- even you and me.

Q5: Reflect on your own relationship with God. How does God as father help or hinder your own faith? Which of the metaphors in Q3 is most helpful for you? Spend some time in prayer, reflecting on the character of God.

Q1: On the other side of this sheet, write the word “GOD” and then use words, phrases, colors, or images that come to mind when you think of “God.” What have you been taught? What stories have you been told? What do you believe to be true about God?

Q2: What about these “images” of God seem odd? How do these “images” compare to the picture(s) you have of God in your mind?

Q3: How is God described in the following passages (there may be more than one in each passage)? What do you think of when that *metaphor* or image is used?

- ⊕ Genesis 1:1-2:4
- ⊕ Exodus 3:1-12
- ⊕ Psalm 68:4-6
- ⊕ Psalm 86:1-7
- ⊕ Isaiah 66:12-13
- ⊕ Matthew 6:7-15

Q4: What are some of the characteristics of Jesus that we are to imitate? The following passages may be helpful (pick one): Matthew 7:1-5; Mark 2:1-12; Philippians 2:1-13; Colossians 3:12-15; 1 John 4:7-21

Q5: Reflect on your own relationship with God. How does God as father help or hinder your own faith? Which metaphor in Q3 is most helpful for you? Spend some time in prayer.



The Apostle's Creed was adopted by the early church in efforts to convey what they believed about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church, and other elements of the faith. It is a *creed*, or confession of faith, which we still recite today. Throughout the year we will work on understanding this beautiful tradition within the community of Christian faith.

Read and begin to memorize the first portion of the Apostles Creeds which describes what the church believes about God.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
He descended into hell.
On the third day he rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty,
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.