

## Session 4: Who is God and how does God see us? (The 'Who' of Discipleship)

Head

Heart

Hands

**ENVISIONED**

*"Christians grow when we have a clear vision of God, ourselves, and everyday faith that has spiritual growth as an obvious and desirable consequence".*

**RELATIONAL**

*"Christians grow through committed relationships of safety, encouragement and challenge"*

### Session Summary

- Who we think God is – and how we think God sees us - can have a profound impact on who we think we are, our understanding of Christian discipleship, and how we enable others.
- It's therefore valuable for all of us to spend time reflecting on our 'gut' images of God, and our 'gut' images of ourselves. Where did those images come from? And how far do they help us draw closer to God revealed in Jesus Christ?
- Our knowledge of God tends to come from four sources: **Scripture**, the life and teachings of the Christian **traditions** we have been formed by, our personal **experience** of God, others and society, and our own ways of thinking and **reasoning** about the world (these four things also interact with each other).
- Whilst all of these can be helpful in forming our God- and self-images, our understanding of God and ourselves can also sometimes become twisted out of shape.
- For Christians our image of God (and how God sees us) must be shaped by the life, teaching and character of Jesus. When rooted in this, we have a secure base from which to see ourselves as God sees us.
- The session offers various tools and questions which could help individuals and groups explore this for themselves.

### Key Bible Passages

- Psalm 139
- John Chapter 14

## Key Points of the Session

- One of the most important questions we can ask as Christians is: who is God and what is God like?
- Our answer to that question will shape how we believe God sees us – and how we come to see ourselves as a result.
- ‘We tend by a secret law of the soul to move towards our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of... the Church’ (AW Tozer)
- Christianity isn’t mainly a philosophy, a programme or set of rules: our focus is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- We grow as disciples partly ‘when we have a clear vision of God, ourselves and everyday faith that has spiritual growth as an obvious and desirable consequence’ (CCX/Eido Research).
- If so, it’s important that our picture of God is a faithful one!
- We get our image of God from four things:
  - Scripture
  - The traditions, teaching and worship of the churches which have shaped us
  - Formative experiences (of God, other people, and wider society)
  - Other ideas – inc. our own thinking/reason
- All of those can be helpful – but we need to keep centred on God as revealed in Jesus, as described in the Bible: ‘whoever has seen me has seen the Father’ (John 14)
- From the Bible we learn that...
  - God is creator
  - God is love
  - Jesus shows us what God is like
  - God is bigger than we can imagine
  - God is knowable + faithful, and want to be in relationship with us, despite anything we do.
- Who are we? We...
  - Are made in God’s image
  - Are loved by God
  - Have ‘missed the mark’
  - Can be rescued
  - Have new life, community, + purpose in Christ
- If you find this easy to accept, that’s something to celebrate. But it’s good to be reminded of these things regularly.
- If it’s more challenging to you, be comforted: most Christians struggle with our God-image or self-image at times. Take it as an invitation deeper into God’s nature & love for you. Don’t rush it, and get support from trusted others!

## Questions and Space for your own notes...

When you hear the word ‘God’, what sort of image immediately comes into your mind?

Where do we get our view of God from? (inc. positive and any negative responses)

What else would you add to this picture of who God is... and how God sees us?

Which of these are you most naturally drawn to? And which ones (if any) feel more challenging?

## Tool/Practice 1: Names of God

Here is a selection of God's many biblical names and titles.

- Which of these names of God/characteristics of Jesus am I particularly drawn towards?
- Which ones feel more challenging to me?
- Are there any that I feel nudged/prompted to reflect on further?

### Old Testament

YHWH – 'I am who I am' (Ex 3.14)	El-Shaddai – God <b>Almighty</b> (Gen 17.1)	Adonai – <b>Lord/Master</b> (Gen 15.2)
Elohim – God is <b>creator</b> , (Gen 17.7)	<b>Deliverer</b> (Is 43.3)	<b>Redeemer</b> (Job 19.25)
Jehovah Jireh – 'The Lord will <b>Provide</b> ' (Gen 22.14)	Jehovah-Rapha – 'The Lord who <b>Heals</b> ' (Ex 15.22-26)	Jehovah-Nissi – 'The Lord is my <b>Banner</b> ' (ex 1.15)
Jehovah-Shalom – 'The Lord is <b>Peace</b> ' (Judges 6.24)	Jehovah-Tsidkenu – The Lord our <b>Righteousness</b> (Jer. 23.5-6)	Jehovah-Rohi – 'The Lord is my <b>Shepherd</b> ' (ps 23)
Jehovah-Sabaoth – 'The <b>Lord of Hosts</b> ' (Is. 1-24)	The Rock ('who is the <b>rock</b> except our God' (Ps 18.31)	El-Roi – 'The God who <b>sees</b> ' (Gen 16.13)
<b>Everlasting</b> God (Ps90.1-3)	<b>Shield</b> (Ps 3.3)	

### New Testament (some specifically relating to particular persons of the Trinity)

Abba – <b>Father/Daddy</b> (Mark 13.46)	<b>Alpha and Omega</b> (Rev 1.8)	<b>Author and Finisher of our Faith</b> (Heb 12.1-2)
<b>Builder of all things</b> Heb. 3-4)	<b>Chief Cornerstone</b> (Eph 2.20)	<b>Helper/Comforter</b> (John 14.16)
<b>Deliverer</b> (Rom 11.26)	<b>The Door/Gate</b> (John 10.9)	<b>Faithful and True</b> (Rev 19.11)
<b>Father of the Fatherless</b> (Ps 68.5)	<b>God of Love and Peace</b> (2 Cor 13.11)	<b>He in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge</b> (Col 2.3)
<b>Bread of Life</b> (John 6.35)	<b>The Way, the Truth and the Life</b> (John 14.6)	<b>Light of the World</b> (John 8.12)
The Resurrection and the Life (John 11.25)	The True Vine (John 15.5)	

Now spend some time exploring what the Bible says about how God sees us (see separate handout from Renovare's From the Inside Out course – free to duplicate).

- Which of these are you most drawn to?
- Which ones feel more challenging or uncomfortable to you?
- Are there any which you feel prompted to explore further?

## Tool/Practice 2: Our Pictures of God and Ourselves

### 1. Our Picture of God

What is your picture of God, and where does that come from? Use these four boxes to jot down some of the most important things (positive and negative) shaping your understanding of God.



#### Scripture

Which ideas, verses or passages from the

Bible have most shaped your understanding of who God is?



#### Tradition

How has your picture of God been shaped by the worship,

teaching and practices of the churches you have been part of?



#### Your Experience

What experiences (of God, other people and

society) have shaped how you see God?



#### Reason

What other knowledge, ideas, info or thinking

(either yours or someone else's) has shaped how you see God?

## 2. How Does God See You?

Now think about how you think/feel that God sees you (include positive and any negative thoughts and feelings). Where do those ideas come from?



### Scripture

Which ideas, verses or passages from the

Bible have most shaped your understanding of how God sees you?



### Tradition

How has your understanding of how God sees you

been shaped by the worship, teaching, traditions of your church(es)?



### Your Experience

What



experiences (of God, other people and society) have shaped how you think God sees you?



### Reason

What other knowledge, ideas, information

or thinking (either yours or someone else's) has shaped how you believe God sees you?

### 3. Which of these ideas/feelings do you want to Treasure, Sort or Bin?

In the TV programme *Sort your Life Out*,<sup>1</sup> families with cluttered houses are encouraged and challenged to sort through all their possessions. Some items are treasured possessions to keep, and others can immediately be thrown away. Occasionally, some items require a bit more thought before deciding whether they are useful to keep, or not.

Below, spend some time thinking about how you see yourself, in the light of what we know about God and how God sees us. Which of the ideas you noted down on the previous two pages are important to treasure and keep hold of? Which can be 'binned' because they lead you to a distorted picture of God and how God sees us? Do we possess any pictures of God or ourselves which need a bit more exploration or 'sorting' before we decide to keep or discard them?



#### Treasure

Bible verses, ideas, experiences of God and influence of church, family/friends and society which help us develop a secure identity in Christ



#### Sort

Images of God and ourselves (positive or negative) which we still need to 'sort through', explore or wrestle with further



#### Throw Away

Images of God and/or ourselves which we know are unbiblical and unhelpful, and we choose to reject

<sup>1</sup> Made by Optomen Television.

## Discipleship Questions

As in all the sessions, this is a menu of questions. You don't need to go through them in strict order. Choose those most relevant to you/your group (but don't avoid all the challenging ones!).

### For Individuals

- When we hear the word 'God', what comes to mind? Where do these images come from? Are they true or false images?
- What are the things we often tell ourselves about ourselves? How would you finish the sentence: 'it's just like me to...'? Are these true to how others see us? And how God sees us?
- Which of the biblical images of God or names for God most naturally resonate for us? Which do we find more challenging? Which do we feel prompted to explore further?
- How does reflecting on the character of Jesus re-shape our image of God? Is there any particular aspect of Jesus' character that you want to sit with and learn from more?
- What has helped us experience God's love? When you think of God's love, what story or image do you think of?
- What could you do over the coming days and weeks to reflect more on how we are 'made in God's image', and deeply loved by God? (Is there a particular story or image you can hold onto, to help you?)

### For Groups/Churches

- How is God most often described in your church or group? (e.g., which of the names of God are most often used? What characteristics of God are most often referred to? How can you see this in sermons, worship, prayer and other activities?)
- Are there aspects of God's character which aren't mentioned so often? Why might that be?
- How could you create opportunities to explore more aspects of God's character in your group/church? What would help you do that? What specific decisions about church activity (prayer, preaching, hymns/songs, small groups, special events, etc.) will this require?
- How is humanity in general most often described in your church or group? (e.g., in sermons, singing, prayer, casual conversation). As loved? Sinful? Gifted? Precious? A mixed bag? Something else?
- Are there important biblical ideas about humanity which aren't mentioned so often in your church? Why might that be?
- How might we talk about a God-shaped vision of humanity, and embed it into the way we do things in our church/group/soul friendships? What practical changes or steps would enable your group or church to treat every human being as a 'bearer of the image of God'?

## Enabling Tips

- Exploring our images of God and our attitudes to ourselves can take us into some quite deep, personal and potentially uncomfortable territory. If you or others are really struggling with this topic, it's important to seek out expert help - for example, from a counsellor or mental health professional. Unless we have appropriate professional training ourselves, it's really important not to try and be an expert on this. We CAN offer to pray and show friendship and solidarity with people wrestling with difficult stuff.
- As well people who find this area challenging, you're also likely to find people in most church settings who have a very secure sense of God's love and their own identity, and may even be puzzled that other people don't experience the same thing. (When running Renovaré's *From the Inside Out* course at church, our group contained both kinds of people at once!). It's worth encouraging those with a secure sense of God's love to recognise that this can be more challenging territory even for many very faithful Christians, and to make room for questions, doubts and wrestling.
- Although this topic forms only one week of the *Discipleship Enablers* journey, exploring our images of God and self can take time. It's better to take a few weeks to explore the material than to rush in an effort to cover it in one session.

---

## Further Resources

- ***From the Inside Out*** - free six-week small group course from Renovaré, covering topics including: what is my picture of God? What is my picture of myself? What is my picture of the Gospel? How do people change? How do I follow Jesus? (<https://renovare.org/courses/io>)
- ***Way of Discipleship: Experiencing God's Love*** - ready to use small group session which is part of the Way of Discipleship bank of resources (<https://wayofdiscipleship.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/WoD-Small-Group-Experiencing-Gods-love.pdf>)
- ***Images of God*** reflective activities from [ignatianspiritualexercises.com](https://www.ignatianspiritualexercises.com) (a free self-guided programme for walking through the Ignatian spiritual exercises). See also supplementary activities here: <https://www.ignatianspiritualexercises.com/supplements/>