

# HomeWord

Dedicated to household harmony & family faith

## Sharing About

- God Is a Rainbow
- Images of God in the Psalms
- Capturing God in a Picture

## God Is God!

by Sarah Schneider

- God is love.
- God is life.
- God is light.
- God is everlasting.
- God is understanding.
- God is a friend.
- God is new life. . . .

The list is endless. When you think of God, who or what do you see? Some see a young man, or an old man, a vision of Jesus, or a “holy ghost.” All are valid images of God, yet God is beyond any human existence.

I have always loved the story of Noah’s Ark. Ever since I was little, whenever I read it or hear it, I feel uplifted by such a happy ending and inspired by such a promise and a gift as a beautiful rainbow. I shared this thought with a friend at a time when I was struggling with many things, and he asked me, “Sarah, is God your rainbow?” That was it! A rainbow encompasses so much of what God is to me. To appreciate the rainbow, I have to experience the rainstorm. Often, it is the same with God: we fail to see God in the good times, and have to experience something negative to learn to see God.

My Confirmation sponsor taught me to see God in many new ways, big and small. He also taught me to talk to and question God. He sees God more as Mother than Father. He was the first person I heard call

God “she.” That simple action gave me new insights. Why does God have to be a he? God is God and God is good. God is above any name I can give, so God can’t be only a he.

Yet, both the Bible and the church refer to God as he. I should just go along with the Bible and the church, right? But why can’t I have my own image of God? Must I automatically agree with what those who translated the Bible wrote at a time when males dominated everything? When I take time to talk to God, these are the questions that come to mind. Whether I see God as a human or as a rainbow, God is still God. God is all powerful and all loving. As long as I know this image as God, that’s all that matters.

Who am I to give God an identity? Who am I to say that God is a rainbow? I am a young person continually searching for truth. I am a follower of Christ called to live the Gospels. To do this I must have an image of God that connects with my experience of God. A rainbow connects; God as “he” does not.

Growing up, I heard God called “he” so often that it is hard for me to break the habit—I still catch myself often—but more and more people are challenging the church to do just that. Here is the struggle: God is as much she as God is he, so how can we be wrong to call God “she”? Struggles like this challenge us to be stronger in our faith, for through

In preparation for his book *The Spiritual Life of Children*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990) Robert Coles asked hundreds of children about their images of God. In the chapter titled “The Face of God,” he quotes nine-year-old Betsy:

“They didn’t have television then, and there were no movies, and you had no cameras, either, so we guess when we think of Him—what He looked like. You close your eyes, and pray you’ll see right. The teacher [in Sunday school] told us that’s what to do. She said, if you have faith, you’ll ‘receive’ Him. She said He’ll just come to you with His words, and what He wants you to do, and you’ll see Him, you can, sometimes. I mean, you won’t actually see Him, but you’ll try to, and if you’re really sincere, then He’ll be there for you, and whatever way you see Him, it’ll be Him, it will be.”

questions we learn to see God for who God is.

As I go into the world, I am grateful for all that God has given me, and I am challenged to spread God’s love where I can.

*Sarah Schneider, 19, is a student at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.*

# Glimpses of God

by Eileen Pettycrew

When I was a young girl, I would lay in bed at night and try to wrap my mind around the concept of eternity. I created the same image every time, one I've long since forgotten. After the image was in focus, I waited for the delicious moment when the futility of my mental exercise would hit me: Bam! That doesn't work because eternity goes on forever! Try as I might, I was never able to create a picture with no beginning and no end into my brain.

My youthful attempts to image eternity mirror my adult attempts to image God. My mind isn't big enough to capture God in a picture. Instead, I settle for bits and pieces. When my mind turns to God, I might see a yellow light. I might sink into pillowy clouds that nestle me like eiderdown, or I might feel a gentle pair of hands cradling my head. I might image God as a full moon that seems to follow me as I walk, or as a clear pool of water.

Maybe my image of God comes from being firmly rooted in the material world—my mind insists on something concrete. If I'm lucky I can image God even when I'm slogging through piles of dirty laundry or trying to walk through the strewn board games, plastic toys, and books my daughters have left in the hallway. God can be revealed to me in a once-white sock now splashed with grape juice, a lonely token from the Monopoly game lying under the dresser, or the dog-eared copy of *Are You My Mother?* that I read to my girls over and over when they were toddlers.

Both of my daughters have read my forty-year-old *Catholic Picture Bible* from cover to cover. Just as I did as a child, they have studied all the pictures, including the one of God hovering above the burning bush, sporting long white hair and a

flowing beard. In my role as their highly evolved parent, I made it a point to tell them that God doesn't really look like an old man in the sky.

"I know," they answered.

I also told them that, if I let myself, I can see God in all things. Then they were off and running, and I congratulated myself on how well I had enlightened them.

Months later, I asked the girls what God looks like in their own mind. "All I know," said one daughter, reminiscent of Will Rogers, "is what I've seen in pictures."

"I have one question," said the other. "When was God born?"

Their replies did more than burst my parent-as-perfect-teacher bubble. In an instant I was transported back to my girlhood, struggling to grasp the mystery of eternity. As I did my best to explain that God always was and always will be, I felt no better equipped than I did as a girl trying to fit God and eternity into my brain.

Maybe images of God lead us to the mystery of God. Strip away the image, and at its core is an unfathomable nothingness that points to those things we can never really understand.

For now, I content myself with glimpsing God in the details of this material world I live in. When I smell the rich fragrance of a freshly cut Christmas tree, hear the sweet voices of a children's choir, see the first speckled-egg crocus of spring, feel the velvet smoothness of a baby's skin, or taste the first raspberry of summer, I smell, hear, see, feel, and taste God. And it is divine.

*Eileen Pettycrew lives in Portland, Oregon, where she enjoys hiking, bicycling, reading, and playing the piano.*

Images of God are abundant in the Psalms. Reading the Psalms aloud as a family can be a way to invite family members to share what God looks like in their own minds.

Poetry also can be a rich source of potential images of God that can be read with those in your household. The poetry and prose of Joyce Rupp is a wealth of imagery, as is the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, to name just two examples of the vast store available to us.

The children's book *What is God?* by Etan Boritzer (Willowdale, Ontario: Firefly Books Ltd., 1990) is another way to explore images of God with your family. Here is one excerpt from the book:

If everything is God,  
Then God is the hot wind in  
the desert,  
And God is the freezing snow  
in the winter,  
And God is the big, yellow  
moon.

Your family might also be interested in your childhood images of God and how those images have evolved over the years.

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Write to *HomeWord* at  
Saint Mary's Press  
702 Terrace Heights  
Winona, MN 55987-1320  
E-mail: [lkehrwald@smp.org](mailto:lkehrwald@smp.org)  
Phone: 800-533-8095

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