### Opening Prayer Service

##### Gather

God of mystery, we come together to learn more about you, and to grow in our relationship with you.

We know that despite our best attempts to understand you and your role in our lives, you remain mystery beyond our ability to fully comprehend.

Open our hearts and minds to you and each other that your love and grace may touch our lives. Amen.

##### Listen: Exodus 3:1-15

*Narrator*

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said,

*Moses*

“I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.”

*Narrator*

When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush,

*Voice of God*

“Moses, Moses!”

*Narrator*

And he said,

*Moses*

“Here I am.”

*Narrator*

Then he said,

*Voice of God*

“Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

*Narrator*

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said,

*Voice of God*

“I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey . . . The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

*Narrator*

But Moses said to God,

*Moses*

“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

*Voice of God*

“I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”

*Narrator*

But Moses said to God,

*Moses*

“If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”

*Narrator*

God said to Moses,

*Voice of God.*

“I Am Who I Am. Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I Am has sent me to you. The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you:’

This is my name for ever,
and this my title for all generations.

##### Respond

*Exodus 3:14 reveals certain things about God. First, God promised to be present in the world with the Israelites, God’s people. That promise stands. It has the weight of God’s word behind it. It is up to Moses, to the people of Israel and to us to live faithfully with that truth. Second, God’s presence may be counted on, though its manner is unpredictable. God will be present as God wills, not as dictated by history or religion or sacred texts.*

*The community’s identity is bound up in God’s identity. God goes forward into the wilderness with escaped slaves; out there they will discover the one God and themselves. In the wilds, they will find themselves transformed as a people into a new and better community by the God who promises a continuing presence in their community. Like the community’s, Moses’ identity is bound up with God’s. Thus, when Moses asks: “Who are you?” and “What is your name?” he simultaneously asks: “Who am I, what is my identity?” These same questions are repeated by the Israelites, the people led and represented Moses.*

*Moses is in trouble, for being in God’s presence is awesome but manageable as long as he knows where he stands. He thought he knew enough about the God of his ancestors to handle being in the divine presence. Now, before the burning bush, his old definitions crumble as he gropes in a fog to understand. Therefore, he asks a sincere question of God—ostensibly for a name. In reply, Moses is told: “I will be who I will be,” more and less than a name.”*

*(*Arthur Zannoni*, Tell Me Your Name)*

##### Go Forth

God of our ancestors,

You revealed yourself to Moses in the burning bush.

Give us the eyes and ears to see and hear you today in our daily lives.

Help us to recognize your life-giving presence in our lives and world.

Transform our lives with your love.

Amen.

### Images of God Planning Form

Fill in the table below by determining which images of God you want to present, and which medium (Scripture, art, music) you will use to present that image.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Image of God** | **Scripture**  | **Art** | **Music** |
| Powerful |  |  |  |
| Creator |  |  |  |
| Defender of the Poor and Oppressed |  |  |  |
| King |  |  |  |
| Shepherd |  |  |  |
| Rock, Fortress, Refuge |  |  |  |
| Eagle |  |  |  |
| Liberator |  |  |  |
| God of Justice |  |  |  |
| God of the Covenant and Relationship |  |  |  |
| Parent, Father, Mother |  |  |  |
| God of Caring and Compassion |  |  |  |
| Potter |  |  |  |
| Wisdom |  |  |  |
| Love |  |  |  |
| Teacher |  |  |  |

### Handout #1.

### Who is God?

All our language about God relies on image, metaphor, and story. God can be found in any of them. Use your own language skills—however developed or not—to discover what other people down through the centuries have known: God can be found in the words and pictures we use.

What images, words, or stories would you use to tell other people who God is for you today? Select one or more of the following ways to identify your images of God. Families with children should work together to complete the activity.

**The most meaningful and important images of God for me are . . .**

* **Picture.** What pictures reveal who God is to you? Think of photos, paintings, stained glass windows, statues. If you had to create a picture, what would it look like?
* **Metaphor**. Complete this sentence: “God is like . . .”
* **Story.** What is your favorite Old Testament story? What does that story tell you about God? What is your favorite Gospel story? Again, what does that story tell you about God?

### Handout #2.

### Images of God

Use this worksheet to identify the images of God listed below in the order they are presented in the session.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Images of God Presented 1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_4. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_5. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_6. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_7. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_8. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_9. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_10. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_11. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_12. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_13. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_14. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_15. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_16. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | Images of God from Our Tradition 1. God the All Powerful
2. God the Creator
3. God the Defender of the Poor and Oppressed
4. God the King
5. God the Shepherd
6. God the Rock, Fortress, Refuge
7. God the Eagle
8. God the Liberator
9. God of Justice
10. God of the Covenant and Relationship
11. God the Parent, Father, Mother
12. God of Caring and Compassion
13. God the Potter
14. God of Wisdom
15. God the Teacher
16. God of Love
 |

### Handout #3.

### Biblical Images of God

##### God the All Powerful - Psalm 29:1-4

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,
   ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name;
   worship the Lord in holy splendor.

The voice of the Lord is over the waters;
   the God of glory thunders,
   the Lord, over mighty waters.
The voice of the Lord is powerful;
   the voice of the Lord is full of majesty

##### God the Creator - Genesis 1 (excerpts)

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. (1-3)

And God said, ‘Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ God called the dome Sky. (6, 8)

And God said, ‘Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.’ Then God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.’ (9, 11)

And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night . . . God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. (14, 16)

And God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.’ (20)

And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.’ (24)

Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness . . .
So God created humankind in his image,
   in the image of God he created them;
   male and female he created them. (26-27)

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (31)

##### God the Defender of Poor and Oppressed - Psalm 146:5-9

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
   whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth,
   the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
    who executes justice for the oppressed;
   who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets the prisoners free;
    the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
   the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the strangers;
   he upholds the orphan and the widow,
   but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

##### God the King - Psalm 95:3-7

For the Lord is a great God,
   and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth;
   the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
   and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

O come, let us worship and bow down,
   let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
For he is our God,
   and we are the people of his pasture,
   and the sheep of his hand.

##### God the Shepherd - Ezekiel 34:11-12, 30-31

For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

They shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the Lord God. You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, says the Lord God.

##### God the Rock and Fortress and Refuge - Psalm 18:1-2, 31-32

I love you, O Lord, my strength.
The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,
   my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
   my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

For who is God except the Lord?
   And who is a rock besides our God?—
the God who girded me with strength,
   and made my way safe.

##### God the Eagle - Deuteronomy 32:10-14

He sustained him in a desert land,
   in a howling wilderness waste;
he shielded him, cared for him,
   guarded him as the apple of his eye.
As an eagle stirs up its nest,
   and hovers over its young;
as it spreads its wings, takes them up,
   and bears them aloft on its pinions,
the Lord alone guided him;
   no foreign god was with him.
He set him upon the heights of the land,
   and fed him with produce of the field;
he nursed him with honey from the crags,
   with oil from flinty rock;
curds from the herd, and milk from the flock,
   with fat of lambs and rams…

##### God the Liberator - Exodus 3:7-12, 16-17

Then the Lord said, ‘I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey . . . The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.’ But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’ He said, ‘I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.’

Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, “The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt . . .

##### God of Justice - Micah 4:1-4

In days to come
   the mountain of the Lord’s house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
   and shall be raised up above the hills.
Peoples shall stream to it,
    and many nations shall come and say:
‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
   to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
   and that we may walk in his paths.’
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
   and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
He shall judge between many peoples,
   and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
   and their spears into pruning-hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
   neither shall they learn war anymore;
but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,
   and no one shall make them afraid;
   for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

##### God of the Covenant and Relationship - Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, ‘Know the Lord’, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

##### God the Parent - Hosea 11:1-9 (excerpts)

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
   and out of Egypt I called my son.
The more I called them,
   the more they went from me. . .

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
   I took them up in my arms;
   but they did not know that I healed them.
I led them with cords of human kindness,
   with bands of love.
I was to them like those
   who lift infants to their cheeks.
   I bent down to them and fed them.

They shall return to the land of Egypt,
   and Assyria shall be their king,
   because they have refused to return to me . . .
My people are bent on turning away from me . . .

How can I give you up, Ephraim?
   How can I hand you over, O Israel? . . .
My heart recoils within me;
   my compassion grows warm and tender.

##### God the Father - Psalm 103:13-14

As a father has compassion for his children,
   so the Lord has compassion for those who fear [love] him.
For he knows how we were made;
   he remembers that we are dust.

##### God the Mother - Isaiah 49:14-16

But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me,
   my Lord has forgotten me.’
Can a woman forget her nursing-child,
   or show no compassion for the child of her womb?
Even these may forget,
   yet I will not forget you.
See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;
   your walls are continually before me.

##### God the Mother - Isaiah 66:13

As a mother comforts her child,
   so I will comfort you;
   you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

##### God of Caring and Compassion - Isaiah 43:1-2

But now thus says the Lord,
   he who created you, O Jacob,
   he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
   I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
   and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
   and the flame shall not consume you.

##### God the Potter - Isaiah 64:8

Yet, O Lord, you are our Father;

we are the clay, and you are our potter;

we are all the work of your hand.

##### God of Wisdom - Wisdom 7:23—8:1

There is in her a spirit that is intelligent, holy,
unique, manifold, subtle,
mobile, clear, unpolluted,
distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen,
irresistible, beneficent, humane,
steadfast, sure, free from anxiety,
all-powerful, overseeing all,
and penetrating through all spirits
that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle.
For wisdom is more mobile than any motion;
because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things.
For she is a breath of the power of God,
and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty;

therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her.
For she is a reflection of eternal light,
a spotless mirror of the working of God,
and an image of his goodness.
Although she is but one, she can do all things,
and while remaining in herself, she renews all things;
in every generation she passes into holy souls
and makes them friends of God, and prophets;
for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.
She is more beautiful than the sun,
and excels every constellation of the stars.
Compared with the light she is found to be superior,
for it is succeeded by the night,
but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other,

and she orders all things well.

##### God the Teacher - Deuteronomy 10:12-13

So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.

##### God of Love - 1 John 4:7-12, 16

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

#### Additional Scripture Passages

##### God the Creator - Psalm 104

Bless the Lord, O my soul.
   O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
   wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
   you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
   you ride on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers,
   fire and flame your ministers

You set the earth on its foundations,
   so that it shall never be shaken.
You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
   the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee;
   at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.
They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys
   to the place that you appointed for them.
You set a boundary that they may not pass,
   so that they might not again cover the earth.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
   they flow between the hills,
giving drink to every wild animal;
   the wild asses quench their thirst.
By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;
   they sing among the branches.
From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
   the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.

You cause the grass to grow for the cattle,
   and plants for people to use,
to bring forth food from the earth,
   and wine to gladden the human heart,
oil to make the face shine,
   and bread to strengthen the human heart.
The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly,
   the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.
In them the birds build their nests;
   the stork has its home in the fir trees.
The high mountains are for the wild goats;
   the rocks are a refuge for the coneys.
You have made the moon to mark the seasons;
   the sun knows its time for setting.
You make darkness, and it is night,
   when all the animals of the forest come creeping out.
The young lions roar for their prey,
   seeking their food from God.
When the sun rises, they withdraw
   and lie down in their dens.
People go out to their work
   and to their labor until the evening.

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
   In wisdom you have made them all;
   the earth is full of your creatures.
Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
   creeping things innumerable are there,
   living things both small and great.
There go the ships,
   and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

These all look to you
   to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
   when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
   when you take away their breath, they die
   and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
   and you renew the face of the ground.

May the glory of the Lord endure for ever;
   may the Lord rejoice in his works—
who looks on the earth and it trembles,
   who touches the mountains and they smoke.
I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
   I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
May my meditation be pleasing to him,
   for I rejoice in the Lord.
Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
   and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

##### God the Defender of Poor and Oppressed - Psalm 68:5-6

Father of orphans and protector of widows
   is God in his holy habitation.
God gives the desolate a home to live in;
   he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,
   but the rebellious live in a parched land.

##### God the Defender of Poor and Oppressed - Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14

Give the king your justice, O God,
   and your righteousness to a king’s son.
May he judge your people with righteousness,
   and your poor with justice.
May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
   and the hills, in righteousness.
May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
   give deliverance to the needy,
   and crush the oppressor.

For he delivers the needy when they call,
   the poor and those who have no helper.
He has pity on the weak and the needy,
   and saves the lives of the needy.
From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
   and precious is their blood in his sight.

##### God the Shepherd - Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
    He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
    he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
   for his name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
   I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
   your rod and your staff—
   they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
   in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
   my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
   all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
   my whole life long.

##### God the Shepherd - Psalm 78:52-53

Then he led out his people like sheep,
   and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.
He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid;

##### God the Shepherd - Psalm 100:1-3

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.
   Worship the LORD with gladness;
   come into his presence with singing.

Know that the LORD is God.
   It is he that made us, and we are his;
   we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

##### God the Shepherd - Isaiah 40:11

He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
   he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
   and gently lead the mother sheep.

##### God the Rock and Fortress and Refuge - 1 Samuel 2:2

The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge.” The people of Israel built their life on God—the rock, the foundation.

##### God the Rock and Fortress and Refuge - Psalm 91:1-2, 3-4, 14:16.

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
   who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,\*
will say to the LORD, ‘My refuge and my fortress;
   my God, in whom I trust.’

For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
   and from the deadly pestilence;
he will cover you with his pinions,
   and under his wings you will find refuge;
   his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

Those who love me, I will deliver;
   I will protect those who know my name.
When they call to me, I will answer them;
   I will be with them in trouble,
   I will rescue them and honor them.
With long life I will satisfy them,
   and show them my salvation.

##### God the Eagle - Exodus 19:3-6

Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.’

##### God of Justice - Psalm 146:5-9

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
   whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth,
   the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith for ever;
    who executes justice for the oppressed;
   who gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets the prisoners free;
    the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
   the Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the strangers;
   he upholds the orphan and the widow,
   but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

##### God of Justice - Isaiah 41:17-18

When the poor and needy seek water,
   and there is none,
   and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the Lord will answer them,
   I the God of Israel will not forsake them.
I will open rivers on the bare heights,
   and fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
   and the dry land springs of water.

##### God of the Covenant and Relationship - Genesis 17:1-8

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.’ Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, ‘As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God.’

##### God of the Covenant and Relationship - Exodus 19:1-8

At the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, 6but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.’

So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. The people all answered as one: ‘Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.’ Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

##### God the Father - Psalm 68:5-6

Father of orphans and protector of widows
   is God in his holy habitation.
God gives the desolate a home to live in;
   he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,
   but the rebellious live in a parched land.

##### God of Caring and Compassion - Psalm 145:8-9

The Lord is gracious and merciful,
   slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
The Lord is good to all,
   and his compassion is over all that he has made.

##### God the Potter - Jeremiah 18:1-6

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ‘Come, go down to the potter’s house, and there I will let you hear my words.’ So I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at his wheel. 4The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter’s hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

Then the word of the LORD came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

##### God the Teacher - Exodus 20:1-17

God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

### Handout #4.

### God in Our Family: God from A-Z

The purpose of this activity is to create a chart using each letter of the alphabet to recall the variety of images of God. Your family will begin this activity in the session and continue it at home. Go all the way from A to Z.

Begin by reviewing the sixteen images of God on Handout #3. Using the alphabet as a guide, generate ideas for images of God or characteristics of God that fit the letters. Here’s an example:

For *C*, God is *Compassionate*. God is gracious and merciful. His compassion comforts us. We know God loves us always. (Isaiah 43:1-2, Psalm 145: 8-9)

For *R*, God is our *Rock*. We build our family’s life on our faith in God. God is our strength, even when we are weak. When we have times of trouble we turn to God. God’s love never fails. (1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 18:1-2, 31-32; Psalm 91:1-2, 3-4, 14:16)

Write your entry in the appropriate box on the “God from A-Z” chart, and add a phrase from Scripture, identify a Scripture passage to read, and/or write a personal message. If there is enough space, children can add a picture or symbol.

#### Biblical Images of God

1. God the All Powerful
2. God the Creator
3. God the Defender of the Poor and Oppressed
4. God the King
5. God the Shepherd
6. God the Rock, Fortress, Refuge
7. God the Eagle
8. God the Liberator
9. God of Justice
10. God of the Covenant and Relationship
11. God the Parent, Father, Mother
12. God of Caring and Compassion
13. God the Potter
14. God of Wisdom
15. God the Teacher
16. God of Love

### God from A-Z Chart

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **A** | **B** | **C** | **D** |
| **E** | **F** | **G** | **H** |
| **I** | **J** | **K** | **L** |
| **M** | **N** | **O** | **P** |
| **Q** | **R** | **S** | **T** |
| **U** | **V** | **W**  | **X** |
| **Y** | **Z** |  |  |

### Handout #5.

### Image of God Poster

The purpose of this activity is to create a poster of your family’s most important images of God. Imagine the poster as a stained-glass window of your family’s images of God. Like the artists who created stained glass windows or those who created the great religious art masterpieces, utilize art to express the meaning of your family’s images of God.

The poster should include at least one image of God from each family member, as well as images that the whole family embraces. You can use the 16 images from the Bible, re-phrase a traditional image in contemporary language, and/or add a new image from your family’s own experience of God.

First, parents and children draw a picture, cut out symbols, and/or find pictures in magazines to illustrate each image. Second, identify a Scripture passage to accompany each image (see Handout #3) and summarize the passage or select a key phrase from the passage. Parents or children can write the passage on the banner.

#### Biblical Images of God

1. God the All Powerful
2. God the Creator
3. God the Defender of the Poor and Oppressed
4. God the King
5. God the Shepherd
6. God the Rock, Fortress, Refuge
7. God the Eagle
8. God the Liberator
9. God of Justice
10. God of the Covenant and Relationship
11. God the Parent, Father, Mother
12. God of Caring and Compassion
13. God the Potter
14. God of Wisdom
15. God the Teacher
16. God of Love

### Handout #6.

### A Prayer Banner

The purpose of this activity is to create a prayer banner that expresses in prayer your family’s most important images of God. The prayer banner can include different forms of prayer:

* Prayers of adoration express the greatness of God. Prayers of adoration can begin with the phrase: *We give you praise God for . . .* or *We praise you God for . . .* (Example: Creator God, we praise you for creating all the good things of the earth.)
* Prayers of thanksgiving express the things for which we are thankful to God: people, creation, blessings, etc. Prayers of thanksgiving begin with the phrase: *We give you thanks, God, for . . .* or *Thank you, God, for . . .* (Example: God of love, we give you thanks for loving us always and forgiving us when we turn away from you.)
* Prayers of petition or intercession express concern for others. Prayers of petition begin with the phrase: *We ask you, God, to . . .* or *God, we pray for . . .* (Example: God of justice, we pray for all those without food or shelter in our world.)

The prayer banner should include at least one prayer for each important image of God from each family member, as well as images that the whole family embrace. You can use the 16 images from the Bible, re-phrase a traditional image in contemporary language, and/or add a new image from your family’s own experience of God.

Once you have identified your images, review the Scripture passage that accompanies your image. Then compose at least one prayer for each image. Write these prayers on the banner. Children can illustrate the prayers by drawing pictures, cutting out symbols, and/or finding pictures in magazines.

#### Biblical Images of God

1. God the All Powerful
2. God the Creator
3. God the Defender of the Poor and Oppressed
4. God the King
5. God the Shepherd
6. God the Rock, Fortress, Refuge
7. God the Eagle
8. God the Liberator
9. God of Justice
10. God of the Covenant and Relationship
11. God the Parent, Father, Mother
12. God of Caring and Compassion
13. God the Potter
14. God of Wisdom
15. God the Teacher
16. God of Love

### Handout #7.

### Images of God Mobile

 The purpose of this activity is to create a mobile of your family’s most important images of God.

The mobile should include at least one image of God from each family member, as well as images that the whole family embraces. You can use the 16 images from the Bible, re-phrase a traditional image in contemporary language, and/or add a new image from your family’s own experience of God.

The family works together in creating and assembling the mobile, as well as selecting the items to make up the mobile. The mobile should include objects or pictures that reflect the most important images for both individual family members (including parents) and for the family as a whole.

If you are drawing pictures or using symbolic objects, talk about what the objects or pictures tell us about the images of God. Children and parents should identify a Scripture passage to accompany each image (see Handout #3) and summarize the passage or select a key phrase from the passage. Parents or children can write the passage on each picture or attach the passage to an object on the mobile.

#### Biblical Images of God

1. God the All Powerful
2. God the Creator
3. God the Defender of the Poor and Oppressed
4. God the King
5. God the Shepherd
6. God the Rock, Fortress, Refuge
7. God the Eagle
8. God the Liberator
9. God of Justice
10. God of the Covenant and Relationship
11. God the Parent, Father, Mother
12. God of Caring and Compassion
13. God the Potter
14. God of Wisdom
15. God the Teacher
16. God of Love

### Handout #8.

### A Prayer of Praise to God

The purpose of this activity is to create a family prayer of praise to God using Psalm 103 as a model.

Many of us pray when we want to ask God for something either for ourselves or someone else. Sometimes it is difficult to just give compliments to God. Prayers of praise give praise to God for being good, for the mystery and majesty of God. Prayers of praise can be a challenge for us to think about God in terms of someone who deserves our praise. It forces us to not take God for granted. Prayers of praise reflect our own attitude and ability to recognize others for their goodness, especially our ability to just praise God for being God.

Psalm 103 is a priceless treasure that becomes more precious as we spend time with it in reflection and contemplation. The Psalm has four main parts:

1. Personal blessings received from God (1-5)
2. National blessings received from God (6-14)
3. A reminder of our human frailty and utter dependence upon God (15-18)
4. A declaration that all creation praises God (19-22)

Begin by reading the Psalm as a family or table group. Ask one person to read verses 1-5, a second person to read verses 6-14, a third person to read verses 15-18, and a fourth person to read verses 19-22.

1 Bless the Lord, O my soul,

and all that is within me,

bless his holy name.

2 Bless the Lord, O my soul,

and do not forget all his benefits—

3 who forgives all your iniquity,

who heals all your diseases,

4 who redeems your life from the Pit,

who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

5 who satisfies you with good as long as you live

so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

6 The Lord works vindication

and justice for all who are oppressed.

7 He made known his ways to Moses,

his acts to the people of Israel.

8 The Lord is merciful and gracious,

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 He will not always accuse,

nor will he keep his anger forever.

10 He does not deal with us according to our sins,

nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,

so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west,

so far he removes our transgressions from us.

13 As a father has compassion for his children,

so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.

14 For he knows how we were made;

he remembers that we are dust.

15 As for mortals, their days are like grass;

they flourish like a flower of the field;

16 for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,

and its place knows it no more.

17 But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting

on those who fear him,

and his righteousness to children’s children,

18 to those who keep his covenant

and remember to do his commandments.

19 The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,

and his kingdom rules over all.

20 Bless the Lord, O you his angels,

you mighty ones who do his bidding,

obedient to his spoken word.

21 Bless the Lord, all his hosts,

his ministers that do his will.

22 Bless the Lord, all his works,

in all places of his dominion.

Bless the Lord, O my soul.

Use Psalm 103 as a guide for writing your family’s own psalm of praise to God. Write your prayer in four parts, using the structure of Psalm 103:

* Personal blessings received from God (1-5)
* National blessings received from God (6-14)
* A reminder of our human frailty and utter dependence upon God (15-18)
* A declaration that all creation praises God (19-22)

Work together as a family generating ideas for the prayer, then write the prayer on paper and, if desired, add any decorations.

After your family completes the prayer of praise to God, take a few moments to talk about how it felt to offer God praise. Talk about when you can pray your family psalm at home.

### Handout #9.

### Contemporary Scripture Passages

The purpose of this activity is to write modern-day Scripture passages on the images of God using the Scripture passages we explored in this session.

One way to give your children insight into a Scripture passage is to have them rewrite it. Creative writing can lead children to understand more deeply the meaning of the Scripture and help them to remember it.

Working together as a family, identify several of the most important images of God and select the corresponding Scripture passage from Handout #3. Read each Scripture passage and ask yourselves:

* If we were writing this Scripture passage today, what words would we use to communicate this image of God?
* How can we update this image of God so that it speaks to people today?

Take notes on your discussion and then rewrite the Scripture passage using a contemporary setting and language. Children may want to decorate the passage with an image or symbol.

**Variation**

You can rewrite a Scripture passage using a letter from God format. Read the Scripture passage and imagine that it is God’s letter to your family. Write the letter in contemporary language using the message in the Scripture passage. Use a format such as: *Dear (family name), I am writing to share with you. . .*

##### Biblical Images of God

1. God the All Powerful
2. God the Creator
3. God the Defender of the Poor and Oppressed
4. God the King
5. God the Shepherd
6. God the Rock, Fortress, Refuge
7. God the Eagle
8. God the Liberator
9. God of Justice
10. God of the Covenant and Relationship
11. God the Parent, Father, Mother
12. God of Caring and Compassion
13. God the Potter
14. God of Wisdom
15. God the Teacher
16. God of Love

### Handout #10.

### Commitment to God

We are challenged to put God first in all things—to love God completely: heart, soul, and mind. Read these two Scripture passages as family:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

“When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘ “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’” (Matthew 22:34-40)

Believing in and completely loving the One God have enormous consequences for our whole life—as individuals and as families.

It means coming to know God’s greatness and majesty. Discuss:

* How do we love and serve God first?
* What can we start doing as a family to love and serve God first?

It means living in thanksgiving. Everything we are and have comes from God. Discuss:

* How do we respond to God’s graciousness (goodness) in our lives and family?
* What can we start doing to give thanks to God?

It means knowing the unity and true dignity of all people. We are all made in the image of likeness of God. Discuss:

* How do we protect and respect the dignity of all people—at home and around the world?
* What can we start doing to protect and respect the dignity of all people?

It means making good use of created things. How will we resist dependence on material goods while positively using them in our lives and families? Discuss:

* How do we make sure that God is first, not material things?
* How can we “de-clutter” our lives so that God is first?

It means trusting God in every circumstance, even in adversity. Discuss:

* How can we live in complete trust that our faith in God is all that we need in life?

Complete the “Commitment to God” as a way to summarize how your family will put God first.

**Our Commitment to God**

***To put God first in all things—to love God completely: heart, soul, and mind, we will do the following as individuals and as a family:***

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

**Our Commitment to God**

***To put God first in all things—to love God completely: heart, soul, and mind, we will do the following as individuals and as a family:***

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

### Handout #11.

### Reflections on the Images of God

##### God the All Powerful: Psalm 29:1-4

We believe that God is almighty, meaning all-powerful or omnipotent. These words can evoke images of distance and transcendence, so it is important to think about the notion of “might” that underlies our profession of faith. Numerous Scripture stories illustrate that God’s power and might are exhibited most vividly through works of love that transform the lives of human beings. In our liturgies we associate God’s might and power with love. For example, we pray to God the Father using these words: “you show your almighty power in your mercy and forgiveness. Continue to fill us with your gifts of love” (Maura Hagarty, *We Believe in God*)

##### God the Creator: Genesis 1, Psalm 104:1-30, Psalm 65:9-13

All four readings point to the creative power of God. Genesis 1 and 2 present the story of creation, culminating in the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God. Psalms 65 and 104 celebrate the wonder of creation and the praise we give God for creating everything that is good. The understanding of God as Creator was very important to the Jews, but it could only be understood in the context of the God who acted in history and who liberated the Jewish people from slavery and formed a covenant with them. The image of God as Creator and the gift of creation have had a prominent place in our understanding of ecology and environment and the need to protect and care for creation (stewardship). (Anthony Marinelli)

##### God the King: Psalm 95:3-7, Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14

Although it is not a common experience today, every nation had a king in ancient times. The image of the king is associated with grandeur, majesty, and glory. The king had power and authority and was often the lawgiver and judge. The Hebrew Scriptures also describe the king as a champion of justice for all people. The king provided protection for people, especially the most defenseless people.

##### God the Rock and Fortress and Refuge: Psalm 18:1-2, 31-32; 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 91:1-2, 3-4, 14:16

The rock is one of the most celebrated images of God in the Hebrew Scriptures. The image of the rock communicates God’s protection of humanity. The fortress and refuge provide safety and security. In times of trouble, it is good to know that we can turn to God.

##### God the Eagle: Deuteronomy 32:10-14, Exodus 19:3-6

The image of God as an eagle is parental, both protective and educational in nature. The eagle has been a symbol of strength and power since ancient times. In the Bible, God as eagle defends, protects, and educates the human community and provides a universal parental image, though circumstances often emphasize its maternal aspect. Humans are recipients of this care but are also at risk by God’s stirring up the nest. In the parental comparison . . . humanity is actively growing up and moving out of the next . . . (Arthur Zannoni)

##### God the Potter: Isaiah 64:8, Jeremiah 18:1-6

“The idea of God’s hands shaping us like clay is intimate and comforting. No one but the potter knows how much time and love went in the fashioning of a particular pot. The potter gives each pot its own special design and markings. The potter also knows its flaws. The potter and the pot share a bond that seems much like the one between each of us and God.” (*Catholic Youth Bible* p. 888)

##### God the Liberator: Exodus 3:7-12, 16-17; Exodus 6:1-13; 14:5-31

In Egypt, the Israelites multiply. But a change in the political regime transforms them from honored guests into an oppressed minority group, reduced to slavery, spending their lives on the mighty construction projects of the Pharaoh. They seem to have lost both the freedom and the faith of their father in faith, Abraham. When the oppression becomes intolerable, God prepares Moses to free the people and lead them out of Egypt.

The Scripture readings emphasize God as liberator or savior. The readings tell the story of Moses and the Exodus. This event and journey form the people of Israel. The Jews were a loosely knit group of people living under the enslavement of Pharaoh in Egypt. For the Jews, their miraculous escape from bondage against all odds (crossing the Sea of Reeds) revealed a God who freed them from slavery and who fought on their side against the Egyptians.

Many people today would question this understanding of God as a warrior. Yet many Christians today who are living in hunger and oppression refer to the God of the exodus as their model because God frees them not only from spiritual oppression but from political oppression and slavery as well. (Anthony Marinelli)

##### God of the Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34, Genesis 17:1-8, Exodus 19:1-8

Eighteen centuries before Christ, a nomad named Abram lived in his tent near the great city of Haran. He was an outsider living a primitive lifestyle next to a highly civilized city. We do not know if he was exceptionally wise or virtuous; what we do know is that God spoke to him. What God says to Abraham is a terrible command: “Leave your family and your homeland, everything that is familiar and secure, and set out on a journey.” To make the uprooting more difficult, he is not even told the goal of the journey. “Go to a land that I *will* show you.” The story of God and Abraham (Genesis) is the story of God building relationships with human beings. (Anthony Marinelli)

##### God of Caring and Compassion: Isaiah 43:1-2, Psalm 145:8-9;

##### God the Parent: Hosea 11:1-9

##### God the Father: Psalm 103:13:14, Psalm 68:5-6, Luke 11:1-4, John 14:1-12

##### God the Mother: Isaiah 49:14-16 and 66:13

##### God the Shepherd: Ezekiel 34:11-12, 30-31; Psalm 23, Psalm 78:52-53, Psalm 100:1-3,

##### Isaiah 40:11

The Old Testament portrays a variety of images of God that center around God’s care and protection for people and in particular the Jewish people. One of the great misconceptions that many Christians have is the idea that the God of the Old Testament is a God of law while the God of the New Testament is a God of love. The God of the Old Testament has a profound love of people. Images such as God as loving parent, as loving mother, as provider, and as good shepherd convey this love and care. Isaiah 49:14-16 assures Israel that God’s love is like that of a mother for her infant. Psalm 139 tells of God’s intimate knowledge of us. God is not only the creator of the universe, but the creator of all of us. (Anthony Marinelli)

God of Justice: Micah 4:1-4; Psalm 72:1-4, 12-14; Psalm 146:5-9

The God of the Old Testament is a God who sides with the poor and oppressed against their oppressors. God calls people beyond religious rituals to the true practice of their faith: care for the poor, the orphan, and the widow. This challenge of God usually comes through the prophets. In the Bible, prophets like Isaiah speak on behalf of God. Prophets serve as the “conscience of the people,” and often the truth that they proclaim is one that the people would rather not hear. Like our world today, the prophets saw a great gap between the rich and the poor and challenged the nation of Israel and its people to let justice reign throughout the land. (Anthony Marinelli)

God of Wisdom: Wisdom 7:23—8.1

Old Testament writers sometimes used attributes of God, such as spirit, word, and justice, as titles of God. Wisdom is another of these titles. Each title gives us some insight into God’s nature, although no one of them, or even all of them together, can give us the whole picture. The author of the Wisdom of Solomon describes God’s wisdom as a woman, which gives us insight into God’s feminine dimension.” (*Catholic Youth Bible* p. 749)

God the Teacher: Deuteronomy 10:12-13, Exodus 20:1-17

God entered into a special relationship with the Jewish people – a covenant. God promised faithfulness to Israel and, in return, they were bound to follow God’s law. The ten commandments represent the high point of God’s law or teaching. In the Bible readings above, God is portrayed as the teacher of a way of life, which provides people with a firm foundation for living. This way of life was more than teachings written on stone, but was intended to be a law written within the hearts of the people (see Jeremiah 31:31-33). (Anthony Marinelli)

##### God of Love: 1 John 4:7-12, 16

“‘God is love.’ In this remarkable statement, John is attributing to God a wonderful reality that we are able to experience in parent, child, spouse, friend. How wonderful to realize that something we may have experienced very deeply in another human person is but a faint shadow of that reality of love in God. In our search to love and to be loved, we truly are searching for God. How stupendous it is, then, to say: God is love!” (William Shannon)

### Handout #12.

### I Believe in God . . .

**Belief**: placing trust or confidence in another; accepting a conviction as true, especially a particular tenet or a body of tenets accepted by a group of persons.

**Believing:** to have faith, confidence or trust; to have confidence in the truth or value of something: *We believe in….*

We are all familiar with the Nicene Creed which we recite every Sunday at Mass. It begins with our beliefs about God: “I believe in one God the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.” In addition to the central images of the Christian tradition—God as Father, Almighty (All Powerful), and Creator—you have experienced other biblical images of God as defender of the poor, king, shepherd, rock, eagle, liberator, justice, compassion, potter, wisdom, teacher, and love.

What do you believe about God? Write your own statement of beliefs in God. Here are two examples from other young people.

I believe in the God of heaven and in the God inside all of us.

I believe in Jesus Christ, the savior and the light of our life, who came to us in this world to guide us to the Reign of God.

I believe in the miracle of life and in the everyday things we see here on earth.

I believe in the guidance of God as I ride this roller coaster called life.

I believe in the goodness of people, even those who do not show goodness in their heart, for they too are children of God.

I believe through the grace of God I will have success in my life and in this uncertain world.

*Irish E. Trinidad, Ramona Convent Secondary School, Alhambra, CA*

I believe in one God,

Both father and mother,

Who synchronized the events of Creation.

I believe in the Son

And in the Spirit who fills us with love.

I believe that all three beings are one.

I believe Jesus Christ was born and that he died for us,

Living his life in the full holiness of God,

And by his death opening the gates of heaven.

I believe that Jesus rose again

And that one day all will be judged in the fairness of God.

I believe in the forgiveness of sins

And in the existence of heaven.

*Sarah Korkowski, Holy Names Academy, Seattle, WA*

**I believe in God . . .**

### Handout #13.

### Meditation on the Burning Bush

Step into the story and become part of it. Imagine you are Moses entering the cave and seeing the burning bush and then God speaks to them**. What do you see and hear? What are you feeling? What are you thinking?**

*Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.*

*There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.*

*Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.”*

*When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!”*

*And he said, “Here I am.”*

*Then God said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”*

*And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

*Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey . . . The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”*

*But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”*

*He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”*

*But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”*

*God said to Moses, “I Am Who I Am. Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I Am has sent me to you. The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you:’ This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations.”*

* What word is being spoken to you in this Bible passage? What is God saying to you?
* What do you want to say to God? What do you want in your relationship with God?
* What is God sending you out to do?

### Handout #14.

### Praying with Music

Contemporary Christian music can be an excellent medium with which to pray. Here is a simple process that can help you pray with contemporary music.

Meditate and reflect on the song.

* What are you feeling?
* What are you thinking?
* What is the main point of this song? What is it saying to you?
* How does it speak to your life right now?
* What is God saying to you through this song?

Make a resolution. How can you apply the insights you gained from the song to your life?

Thank God for the moments in prayer and for any insights you received.

Conclude by sharing your feelings and reflections on the meditation experience.

### Handout #15.

### A Letter to God

Ask, and you will receive.

Seek, and you will find.

Knock, and it will be opened to you.

For the one who asks, receives.

The one who seeks, finds.

The one who knocks, enters.

(Matthew 7:7-8)

*Dear God,*

*Even with all my questions and worries about life, I want to have faith in you. The way I will try to get to know you better in the coming weeks is....*

*When dealing with those who are having a tough time believing in you or hearing about your love for all persons and the whole world, I will tell them for you that....*

*The thing I am looking for most in life right now is....*

*I ask you, my God, for the hope and the strength to go after this personal dream. The thing I most want to do for you is....*

*I'll promise now to be in touch again real soon. I'm glad you are always there for me. And I am glad that our relationship can continue to grow every day too.*Your loving daughter/son,

### Handout #16.

### Making God First

We are challenged to put God first in all things—to love God completely: heart, soul, and mind. Read these two Scripture passages:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

“When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘ “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’” (Matthew 22:34-40)

Believing in, and completely loving the One God has enormous consequences for our whole life. Take a moment to reflect on the following:

**It means coming to know God’s greatness and majesty.**

* How do you love and serve God first?
* What can you start doing to love and serve God first?

**It means living in thanksgiving. Everything we are and have comes from God.**

* How do you respond to God’s graciousness (goodness) in your life?
* What can you start doing to give thanks to God?

**It means knowing the unity and true dignity of all people. We are all made in the image of likeness of God.**

* How do you protect and respect the dignity of all people—home, school, world?
* What can you start doing to protect and respect the dignity of all people?

**It means making good use of created things. How will we resist dependence on material goods while positively using them in our lives and families?**

* How do you make sure that God is first, not material things?

* How can you “de-clutter” your life so that God is first?

**It means trusting God in every circumstance, even in adversity.**

* How can you live in complete trust that your faith in God is all that you need in life?

**My Commitment to God**

***To put God first in all things—to love God completely: heart, soul, and mind, I will do the following:***

(Examples: say my morning or evening prayers each day, seek forgiveness from anyone I’ve hurt, engage in works of mercy and justice for others, participate fully in Sunday worship, be accepting to others at school and on the job.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

### Handout #17.

### Reflection & Discussion of the Biblical Images of God

I believe in one God

the Father, the Almighty,

maker of heaven and earth,

of all that is visible and invisible.

 (Nicene Creed)

Begin by reviewing the biblical images of God presented in the All Ages Learning Experience (see Handout #3). Read more about the meaning of these images of God (see Handout #11).

#### Biblical Images of God

1. God the All Powerful
2. God the Creator
3. God the Defender of the Poor and Oppressed
4. God the King
5. God the Shepherd
6. God the Rock, Fortress, Refuge
7. God the Eagle
8. God the Liberator
9. God of Justice
10. God of the Covenant and Relationship
11. God the Parent, Father, Mother
12. God of Caring and Compassion
13. God the Potter
14. God of Wisdom
15. God the Teacher
16. God of Love

Take a moment to reflect on the questions below. Then share your reflections with your group. This is a storytelling experience so be sure to give each person time to share without interruptions or discussion.

* Which images of God were new for you? (You had never thought about God in this way before.)
* Which images helped you to name your own understanding of God?
* Are there any personally important images of God that you would add?
* How has your understanding of God been expanded and/or enriched?
* Are there any personal images of God that you would like to move beyond?

### Handout #18.

### Implications of Our Images of God

Our concept of God matters. There are major consequences of how we think of God. It can make God seem credible or incredible, plausible or highly improbable. It can also make God seem distant or near, absent or present. How we conceptualize God also affects our sense of what the Christian life is about.

Our images of God matter. How we image God shapes not only what we think God is like but also what we think the Christian life is about. People who think of God as a warrior may become warriors themselves. People who think of God as compassionate are likely to emphasize compassion. People who think God is angry at the world are likely to be angry at the world themselves.

#### Reflect

Take three or four of your most meaningful and important images of God (from Handout #1) and reflect on them using the following questions.

Image of God: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* What are the implications of this image for your relationship with God?
* What are the implications for how you live?
* What are the implications for how you see God at work in the world?

Reflections:

Image of God: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* What are the implications of this image for your relationship with God?
* What are the implications for how you live?
* What are the implications for how you see God at work in the world?

Reflections:

Image of God: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* What are the implications of this image for your relationship with God?
* What are the implications for how you live?
* What are the implications for how you see God at work in the world?

Reflections:

Image of God: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* What are the implications of this image for your relationship with God?
* What are the implications for how you live?
* What are the implications for how you see God at work in the world?

Reflections:

#### Discuss

Share at least one reflection on an image of God with your group. Give each person time to share without interruptions or discussion. Conclude by discussing your insights into why our concept and images of God matter so much for our relationship with God and the way we live.

### Handout #19.

### God—The Beyond in Our Midst

#### In the Hebrew and Christian tradition, God is revealed as both transcendent and immanent. “The prophet Isaiah masterfully describes God’s transcendence as entirely other than creation: ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.’ (Isaiah 55:8). In Genesis, God’s immanence is described: ‘They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of evening breeze’ (Genesis 3:9). The Hebrew Scriptures and the faith of ancient Israel hold in balance God’s transcendence and immanence, thus seeking to avoid the extremes of either removing God entirely from the world or making God too mundane, thereby limited divinity.” (Arthur Zannoni, p. 26-27)

“God is both transcendent and immanent. *Transcendence* means that God is not to be identified with the creatures God made—God is not just another being. God’s *immanence* means that God is no distance God; God is in *all* reality as it source. God is the ground of being and love in which all reality continues to exist. God is distinct from the world but not separate from it. For everything that is, is in God. Separated from the ground that sustains it, it would simply cease to be. God, transcendent and immanent, is needed close at hand.” (William Shannon)

#### Transcendent Images of God

God is eternal:

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable” (Isaiah 40:28).

God is unique:

“I am the Lord and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:18).

God is omnipotent:

“For I know that the Lord is great; our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the Lord pleases he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps” (Psalm 135:5-6).

God is immense:

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27)

God contains all things:

“She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well” (Wisdom 8:1). In the Book of Wisdom, God and Lady Wisdom are synonymous.

God cannot be praised enough:

“Where can we find the strength to praise him? For he is greater than all his works? (Sirach 43:28)

#### Immanent Images of God

God cannot be avoided:

“Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast” (Psalm 137:7-10).

God chooses the Hebrew tribes and makes them a people:

“It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

God establishes a covenant with God’s people:

“The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today” (Deuteronomy 5:2-3, also: Genesis 6—9; 15, 17; Exodus 19—24; and Deuteronomy 5—7).

God frees the Hebrews from Egypt

I [God] have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey . . . “ (Exodus 3:8).

God gives the people of Israel a land:

God tells Joshua: “Pass through the camp, and command the people: Prepare your provisions; for in three days you are to cross over the Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that the Lord your God gives you to possess” (Joshua 1:11).

God sends prophets to guide and sustain the people:

“Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

God sustains the chosen people in Babylon and restores them to Israel:

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” (Isaiah 40:1-2).

#### Reflect

If you think of immanence and transcendence as a continuum, do your personal images of God emphasize immanence, transcendence, or a blend of both. Write your images on the continuum below:

|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Immanence Transcendence

* What did this exercise tell you about your concept and images of God?
* If you tend to think about God as immanent *or* transcendent, what are the implications of this view on your relationship with God?
* If your think about God as both transcendent and immanent, as the beyond who is “right here,” what are the implications of this view on your relationship with God?

#### Discuss

As a group discuss the implications of seeing God primarily as immanent, primarily as transcendent, and as both transcendent and immanent. Read the following reflections and then discuss how seeing God as both transcendent and immanent leads to a relational understanding of the Christian life.

Thinking about God as both transcendent and immanent, as the beyond who is “right here,” leads to a relational understanding of the Christian life. Thomas Merton captured this balance when he said:

“Life is this simple. We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time. This is not just a fable or a nice story. It is true. If we abandon ourselves to God and forget ourselves, we see it sometimes, and we see it maybe frequently. God shows Himself everywhere, in everything—in people and in things and in nature and in events. It becomes very obvious that God is everywhere and in everything and we cannot be without Him. It’s impossible. The only thing is that we don’t see it.”

(Thomas Merton quoted in *The God We Never Knew* by Marcus Borg.)

The Christian life is about turning toward and entering into relationship with God who is already in relationship with us—with God who gave us life, who has loved us from the beginning, and who loves us whether we know that or not, who journeys with us whether we know that or not.

The Christian life thus has at its center becoming conscious of that relationship. It is a response to the words of the prophet Isaiah (43:1-5):

“But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, who formed you:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;

when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

. . . you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you,

Do not fear, for I am with you . . .”

### Handout #20.

### Believing in and Loving God

We are challenged to put God first in all things—to love God completely: heart, soul, and mind.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

“When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘ “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’” (Matthew 22:34-40)

Believing in, and completely loving the One God has enormous consequences for our whole life. Take a moment to reflect on the following.

**It means coming to know God’s greatness and majesty.**

* How do you love and serve God first?
* What can you start doing to love and serve God first?

**It means living in thanksgiving. Everything we are and have comes from God.**

* How do you respond to God’s graciousness (goodness) in your life?
* What can you start doing to give thanks to God?

**It means knowing the unity and true dignity of all people. We are all made in the image of likeness of God.**

* How do you protect and respect the dignity of all people—at home, at work, and around the world?
* What can you start doing to protect and respect the dignity of all people?

**It means making good use of created things. How will we resist dependence on material goods while positively using them in our lives and families?**

* How do you make sure that God is first, not material things?
* How can you “de-clutter” your life so that God is first?

**It means trusting God in every circumstance, even in adversity.**

* How can you live in complete trust that your faith in God is all that you need in life?

**Complete the “Commitment to God” to summarize how you will put God first.**

**My Commitment to God**

***To put God first in all things—to love God completely: heart, soul, and mind, I will do the following:***

(Examples: say my morning or evening prayers each day, seek forgiveness from anyone I’ve hurt, engage in works of mercy and justice for others, participate fully in Sunday worship, be accepting to others at school and on the job.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Take a moment to summarize your learning from this session:

***What did you learn about your relationship with God by reflecting on these five key consequences or implications of*** ***believing in and completely loving the One God —heart, soul, and mind?***

Conclude the session by sharing with the group your response. Share at least one way you will put God first in your life in the coming weeks. This is a storytelling experience so be sure to give each person time to share without interruptions or discussion.

### Closing Prayer Service

#### Gather

Let us pray to our God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God, we praise you:

Father all powerful, Christ Lord and Savior, Spirit of love.

You reveal yourself in the depths of our being,

drawing us to share in your life and your love.

One God, three Persons,

be near to the people formed in your image,

close to the world your love brings to life.

We ask you this, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

one God, true and living, forever and ever.

#### Listen

1 John 4:7-12, 16 (God is Love)

#### Respond

Gracious God, we give you thanks for creating us in your image and likeness.

Response: We are your people!

Gracious God, we give you thanks for gathering us as your people and writing your law on our hearts.

Response: We are your people!

Gracious God, we give you thanks for being the defender of the poor and oppressed of our world and calling us to work for justice.

Response: We are your people!

Gracious God, we give you thanks for caring for us, especially in difficult times, and loving us unconditionally.

Response: We are your people!

Gracious God, we give you thanks for teaching us the way to live.

Response: We are your people!

#### Go Forth

Lord, we rejoice that you are our creator and ruler.

As we call upon your generosity, renew and keep us in your love.

Grant this through Christ our Lord.

Response: Amen.

Lord, come, live in your people and strengthen them by your grace.

Help them to remain close to you in prayer and give them a true love for one another.

Grant this through Christ our Lord.

Response: Amen.