

“Your God Is Too Small”

Matthew 11:28-30; John 1:14; 14:8-11

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A little girl was drawing one day when her brother asked her what she was doing. She calmly said, “I am drawing a picture of God.” He laughed and replied, “Nobody knows what God looks like.” “They will when I get finished,” she confidently responded.

What does your God look like? From where did you get your concept of God? How has your concept of God changed over the years? These were some of the questions that were discussed last Monday night in our home.

We are beginning a book club at Smoke Rise and Monday night was our first session. Bill and Judy Neal hosted a group in their home, too. We had enough people to sign up that merited opening two homes.

The book we discussed was **J. B. Phillips, Your God Is Too Small**. I suspect that many of you have read it because it was published in 1961. The author was an Anglican minister who was best known at the time as the translator of the New Testament in Modern English.

Phillips wrote, “If it is true that there is someone in charge of the whole mystery of life and death, we can hardly escape a sense of futility and frustration until we begin to see what He is like and what His purposes are.” After dismantling some unhealthy and unbiblical concepts of God, Phillips proceeded to help his readers understand how they can “draw a picture of God” that is healthy and biblical.

It is not my purpose today to give a review of Phillips’ book, as interesting as that might be. Instead, I wish to answer two questions that emerged as I read it. Why is our God too small and how can we keep from shrinking Him?

Let’s begin with the first question. Why is our God too small? I suppose there are several reasons and perhaps the first is that **in our need to understand God, we humanize Him**. We use words that we know and understand to describe Him to satisfy our need to comprehend Him. In so doing, however, we run the risk of creating Him in our image and making Him nothing more than a man with supernatural powers.

How can human words describe God? How can the finite describe the infinite? This in itself is an oxymoron. At best our words can give us incomplete analogies, i.e., Father, Judge, Shepherd, Redeemer, Fortress, but these words can only point to God, not describe Him.

We are also guilty of limiting God by creating Him based upon what we need. In formulating a concept of God, many do not begin with who He is but what they need Him to be.

When I want to know what someone’s concept of God is, it is not uncommon for me to ask that person what kind of God he or she needs. Most of the time our God is an expression of our needs. While it is true that God wants to meet our needs, it is risky building an image of God from this perspective. My parents would have been quite different had they been limited to fulfilling my expectations and meeting my needs as a baby, a child, an adolescent or even an adult. I am sure you can see how constructing an image of God from our needs can limit Him, too.

Some people limit God because they have a need to control Him. Instead of trusting God to make wise and loving decisions, they want God to trust them. They want to determine what He should do or not do under various circumstances and even go so far as to draft an image of God based upon their wisdom, not His.

How can we keep from doing these things? Remember the movie, “Honey, I Shrunk the Kids?” How can we keep from shrinking God? Let me suggest some things you might want to consider.

First of all, let God be God. Don't try to control or manipulate Him. He doesn't need your help.

Trust Him to be honest, fair, just, righteous, faithful, reliable, compassionate, merciful and loving. He will do the right thing in the right way at the right time. You can count on it.

Even trust Him with tears in your eyes, pain in your heart and questions in your mind. Cultivate a tenacious and stubborn faith that cannot be shaken.

Allow God to reveal Himself to you. We possess no ability to find or understand God. The only way we can know God is if He reveals Himself to us, which He does in a variety of ways because He wants us to know Him. So, open your heart and mind and let Him speak to you through the written word, the Bible, the Living Word, Jesus and the still small voice, the Holy Spirit. Allow Him to reveal Himself to you through nature, through others' insight and especially through your own experiences.

Again, trust God to reveal to you what you need to know about Him at any given point on your pilgrimage. Don't be alarmed if others seem to know more or even have a different view of God. If He wants you to know what they know, He will reveal it to you.

Have you ever heard a coach say to a player, "Let the game come to you?" There are times when a player tries to control the flow of the game and impose his or her expectations upon everyone and the game itself. Under these circumstances, a wise coach will look at that player and say, "Remember the fundamentals, play your position and be ready to do your part when necessary. Let the game come to you."

Discovering who God is and what He is like may be similar. Read your Bible, pray, listen to others and evaluate your own experiences. Do the fundamentals and be prepared to receive insight and understanding when God comes to you.

One of my favorite passages in the Bible is in Matthew 11:28-30. Jesus said, "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and **learn of me**, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The key phrase in that paragraph is "learn of me." Knowing God is a life-long learning process that begins with developing a relationship with Jesus and continues by cultivating that relationship the rest of your life. For me, Jesus is the fullest and finest revelation of God that we have in this world. I base this upon several passages of scripture, two I will mention.

John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." Augustine said this verse is the key to understanding God. I agree.

Secondly, I take seriously Jesus' words to Philip in John 14: 8-11, "Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' Jesus answered, 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you after such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father living in me who is doing His work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.' "

If you want to know who God is, look at Jesus. If you want to know what God thinks or what He expects of us, listen to Jesus. I don't think there is a clearer picture of God to be found in this world than the one I see through Jesus, so learn of him. Learn everything you can about him through the study of his words and let him use every experience in life to teach you even more.

Is your God too small? The only way I know to answer this question is to ask another question. What do you know about God today that you did not know last Sunday? If nothing, then your God is too small.