

READING | *What Is God Like?*

This fall in the return to our in-person services, we've made a few changes to how we gather. One of those shifts is that our kids now join us for the first half the service and we worship together, before they head off to their classes. We LOVE the spirit that brings to the room. And we know that many of you at home as well are taking the service in together as families.

So this morning as part of our worship we're actually going to read a storybook that's technically pointed towards kids – so, YAY kids, we hope this helps you connect with God in a special kind of way. But I'll also say, that this moment (like every other part of worship) is for every single one of us, regardless of age. The words that Rachel Held Evans and Matthew Paul Turner have put together, paint a beautiful picture (actually a bunch of them) of who God is, how God loves, and the place each one of us can find inside those arms.

So whether you are 5 or 105 today, let these words stir your heart to both wonder and worship.

What Is God Like – by Rachel Held Evans & Matthew Paul Turner

What is God like?

That's a very big question, one that people from all around the world have wondered about since the beginning of time. And while nobody has seen all of God (because God is far too big for any of us to fully see) we can know what God is like.

God is like an eagle, sharp eyed and swift, with wings so wide you can play under their shadows.

God is like a river, constant and life giving. When you grow near God. You'll sprout up strong as a tree.

God is like the stars, forever present and bright. Even when they feel far away, you can always look up and see them winking at you.

God is like a shepherd, brave and good, a protector who loves her sheep so much that she watches over all of them and knows each of their names by heart.

God is like a fort, strong and secure with walls that are mighty and safe. Inside, there are hidden places to hold you when you're scared or need a quiet place to rest.

God is like a gardener, patient and nurturing. God plants, waters, weeds, and fertilizes the earth until every good thing on it seeks the nourishing sun and grows.

God is like the flame of a candle, warm and inviting. With God close by, you can look to the light and see through the darkest of nights.

God is like the wind, passionate and full of mystery.

God is both here and, mysteriously, also over there.

God is everywhere, swirling throughout the world, whistling across mountain ranges, rustling through the trees, and pressing against your cheeks on a breezy day.

God is like an artist, creative and unpredictable, always busy making and remaking everything brilliant and new.

God is like a mother, strong and safe. You can crawl up into her lap whenever you want to, and she will hold you until you fall asleep.

God is like a father, gentle and safe. He will put you on top of his shoulders to give you a bird's-eye view of all creation.

God is like three dancers, graceful and precise. They move to the same music in very different ways, showcasing all of God's elegance and rhythm in your life.

God is like a rainbow, vivid and full of color, a dazzling reminder of promise and hope for all people after a storm.

God is like a best friend, faithful and true, closer to you than even your brothers or sisters.

And because we know what God is like, we know that...

God is kind. God is forgiving. God is slow to get angry. God is quick to be glad. God is happy when you tell the truth and sad when things are unfair.

She is your protector. He is trustworthy. They are friends when you feel alone.

God hopes. God perseveres.

What is God like?

That's a very big question, one that people from places all around the world, throughout all time, have answered in many different ways. Keep searching. Keep wondering. Keep learning about God. But whenever you aren't sure what God is like, think about what makes you feel safe, what makes you feel brave, and what makes you feel loved. That's what God is like.

CONFESSION & COMMUNION | *Taking God's Name In Vain*

For many of us, this might be the first time we've processed the idea of "taking the Lord's name in vain" in this way. And if you're anything like me, you might be realizing you've been guilty of breaking this, maybe more than we'd care to admit. Truthfully, we all have. We've dragged God's name through the mud, in how we've represented Christ both individually in our daily lives, and in how we've failed as a church to be a good reflection of who God really is.

So what do we do with that realization? Rather than simply pledging to do better, we need to first take the step to humbly admit the ways we've actually broken this.

Now, if you're a guest with us today, and don't consider yourself to be part of Christianity or the church, we invite you to simply hear our confession, and to receive our heartfelt apology for any of the ways we've been un-Christ-like to you. We've gotten it wrong more than we realize.

For those of us who do identify as Christ-followers and members of the church, *confession* is an important healing practice for us to embrace. It's not a time to be defensive, and it's not about shame. We just want to look at ourselves humbly, and honestly admit where we've participated in unfairly giving God a bad name in the experience of so many.

CONFESSION

To guide our confession, we're going to use the name of God from Exodus 34 ***The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and rich in love***" (Exodus 34:6). If you want to join in this confession, I invite you to maybe just put a hand over your heart, even say these words along with me.

First, let's pray about graciousness:

God, as people who claim your name as our identity, we confess that we have not been gracious like you. We've held grudges and withheld forgiveness. Instead of assuming the best of others, we've often assumed the worst. We've been arrogant and judgmental, enforcing higher standards on others than we've held for ourselves. We've presumed to be the judge and jury on the sins of others, while defending our own.

Now, I'm going to give you a moment to privately talk to God about any ways that you personally have not been gracious.

Now let's confess together the ways we've lacked compassion:

We confess that we have not shown compassion to the same degree that you've shown it to us. We've been unkind and careless with those we don't understand. We've viewed the struggling with indifference and hostility. We've claimed our security, possessions, and privilege as a so-called blessing, guarding them for ourselves while ignoring the sick, the poor, the lonely, those pushed to

the fringes of society. We have failed to honour those you identify with most and, in doing so, we've failed to honour You.

Now take a moment to make any private confessions you need to here, again.

Now together let's confess the ways we've not been slow to anger:

We confess that we are often quick to anger, even though you have never once gotten angry with us. Jesus, you said the world should recognize we are Yours by the way we love, but we are known instead for what and who we hate, for what we're against. We've become hurtful enemies to those with whom we disagree. We are quick to enter debates and arguments, to picket and protest, to spread hurtful opinions and spiteful attitudes online and around dinner tables. And our anger has led people to believe that you are an angry God, when you are not.

Silently confess any of the ways that you've struggled with anger.

Finally, let's be honest about love:

God we confess we've not been rich in love, as you are. We've built fences around our love, saving it for those who love us first. We have not loved strangers and foreigners, not loved our neighbours, and not loved our enemies. We've allowed racist, sexist, homophobic attitudes to go unchallenged. The church has participated in the genocidal treatment of Indigenous people, and we all have benefited from their mistreatment without remorse. The church has been rife with scandals and abuse, only made worse by cover ups. Because of us, the world runs away from You, instead of towards you, even though You are the definition of love.

Finally, confess any ways that you haven't been rich in love.

COMMUNION

1 John 1:9 says, ***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."***

The good news about confession is that God is eager to not only forgive, but to cleanse and restore us, enabling and empowering us to be different. We're not left on our own to try harder to do better; God gives us the Holy Spirit to fill us and transform us from the inside out. So, in response to our confession, and as a way of claiming God's forgiveness and receiving that transforming power, we want to conclude our time together with communion.

So if you've got your bread and juice nearby, grab those now, and let's also do this together.

God, we thank you for your forgiveness, demonstrated so clearly through Christ on the cross. You are indeed gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and rich in love. As we eat this bread, which is Your

body, may we be reminded that we too are your body here on earth. May we bear Your name, not just in word, but in our actions, well. Amen.

Holy Spirit, as we drink this juice, which reminds us of Christ's blood poured out for us, may Your presence become the lifeblood that flows through us, to heal and transform us from the inside out. Amen.