

Overview

How do we imagine God and in what ways do we believe God is interested in and involved in the ongoing work of creation? By exploring a range of images and metaphors used to describe God, we will share and explore what kind of God we believe we are relating to. We will consider the implication of this for our own work and what ways God is interested and involved in our own work. This will enable us to look again at our own work with a fresh perspective.

This is your worksheet; for notes, ideas or questions.

Facilitator

Offer a quick overview of this session and note that there are other Topics in this series that relate to the wider question of work and how we connect our faith with our work. Some issues that may come up in discussion will need to be dealt with in another session.

Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members

Introduction

Margaret Kane writes : It is impossible to know God fully. If it were possible he would not be God.....But that is not to say we cannot speak of God at all. Indeed it is absolutely necessary that we do speak of God. In order to do so we must be clear about the data that is possible. Two main factors are involved in a Christian understanding of God: our daily experience of life and God, and the Christian tradition including the Bible. Our experience comes first, our convictions about God arise out of actually meeting with God.

From 'What Kind of God?: Reflections on Working with People and Churches in North East England' by Margaret Kane (SCM Press, 1986)

Facilitator

Invite people to draw on their personal experience of God and describe what they imagine God is like. We can only talk about God using images, metaphors and models and the kinds of models we use resonate with experience.

Question

What images, models or metaphors do you commonly use to describe God? 'God is like...'

Facilitator

Ask each group member to share their responses in turn and draw out any similarities and similar types of response. Explore the implications of the different images or metaphors with the group. Does God feel close or remote, judgmental or accepting etc.

Facilitator

In the next activity we will explore some of the images and metaphors that are used to describe God in scripture. Ask the group to identify the work-based metaphor that is being used to describe God taking each of the extracts in turn.

Activity

God as Worker in Scripture (All extracts taken from NRSV Bible)

Look at these examples of how God is described as a worker in the Bible and underline the words or phrases that offer an image of God as a worker.

- 1 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; **he** will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. *Malachi 3:2-3*
- 2 'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?? *Job 38:4-5*
- 3 Unless the Lord builds the house,
those who build it labour in vain.
Unless the Lord guards the city,
the guard keeps watch in vain. *Psalms 127 : 1*
- 4 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters; *Psalms 23:1-2*
- 5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths. *Proverbs 3:5-6*
- 6 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. *Jeremiah 18:5-6*
- 7 Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. *Matthew 3:10*
- 8 On that day the Lord will thresh from the channel of the Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you will be gathered one by one, O people of Israel. *Isaiah 27:12*
- 9 Who has heard of such a thing?
Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day?
Shall a nation be delivered in one moment?
Yet as soon as Zion was in labour she delivered her children.
Shall I open the womb and not deliver? says the Lord;
shall I, the one who delivers, shut the womb? says your God. *Isaiah 66:8-9*
- 10 No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. *John 6:44-45*

Facilitator

Clearly these images or metaphors of God from the Hebraic / Christian traditions arise from the particular context and culture of the times but they all imagine God to be in some way directly involved with material and in the substance of life. All these images come from experience – as a key claim that Margaret Kane has made in the earlier quotation. We may need to look for images and metaphors drawn from our own time and cultural context.

Perspective

Margaret Kane observes that “our present problem with God lies not in the conflict of competing models, but in the fact that our conception of God is dominated by so few models. To make matters worse, those that are in use do not resonate with people’s experience of God or insights into life. This leads to a divorce between God and life and a distorted and restricted view of God....In our urban / industrial society a few models: Lord, Master, King, Father, dominate our conception of God.....perhaps the exclusive use of these models is distorting our image of God”

*‘What Kind of God?: Reflections on Working with People and Churches in North East England’
by Margaret Kane (SCM Press, 1986)*

Facilitator

Ask the group what new metaphors or images of God from our everyday work experience might we come up with which indicate his involvement in our everyday lives.

Question

Are there any modern day metaphors for work that we might use to describe God’s in this age?

Facilitator

Review the ideas with the group

Facilitator

Invite the group to compare and contrast whether they imagine God to be directly involved in the ongoing work of creation or whether they imagine him to ‘set the ball rolling and stand back’. What is the basis for their view?

Question

Do you tend to believe that God is directly involved in the ongoing work of creation or God ‘sets the ball rolling’ and stands back?

Facilitator

Encourage the group to tease out the implications of their point of view. This has implications for how we believe we are to participate in the ongoing work of creation.

Perspective

The ongoing work of the Incarnation

The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ demonstrates convincingly that God is infinitely bound up with the substance of life and in Christ unites for ever the material and the spiritual into one. Through Jesus Christ we come to believe in a God that makes a difference in our own life and the universe in which God is passionately concerned. In Christ we can believe that God is at work in the world, changing things for the better, making things new, advancing creation. In Christ we come to appreciate that

transformation is possible and we are called to share in this transformational work. In Christ our work has a new meaning and purpose. Margaret Kane notes “by entering into the world in one human life through Jesus Christ, God has become present to all humanity. If God is to be found anywhere he must be found in the ‘ordinary’ things and ‘ordinary’ people. Our search for God must be, not primarily by considering religious matters, but by digging deeply into human experience. God is not who we want him to be, or who we think he ought to be. God is as he is in Jesus Christ reconciling the world to himself.”

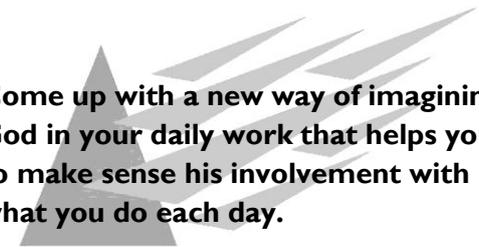
*With material from ‘What Kind of God?: Reflections on Working with People and Churches in North East England’
by Margaret Kane (SCM Press, 1986)*

Facilitator *Introduce the following question to explore where the limits are, if any to how we imagine God to be involved in our working lives.*

Question **Think about all the very ‘ordinary’ aspects of the substance of your work and the ‘ordinary’ interactions you have, how might you imagine God to be active and involved?**

Facilitator *Encourage the group to test whether they see any limit to aspects of work and life where God is not directly interested and involved. What difference does that make for the way we think about our work?*

Facilitator During the week, you might like to reflect on :



Come up with a new way of imagining God in your daily work that helps you to make sense his involvement with what you do each day.

Facilitator *Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session and ask them to share quickly 1 or 2 points.*

Ponder **What did you learn this session?**

Prayer

I would like to rise very high

I would like to rise very high, Lord,
Above my city. Above the world. Above time.
I would like to purify my glance and borrow your eyes.

I would then see the universe, humanity, history, as the Father sees them.
I would see in the prodigious transformation of matter
In the perpetual seething of life,

Your great body that is born of the breath of the Spirit.
I would see the beautiful, the eternal thought of your Father's
love taking form step by step,
Everything summed up in you, things on earth and things in heaven.
And I would see that today, like yesterday, the most minute details are part of it.
Every man in his place. Every group and every object.
I would see a factory, a theatre, collective bargaining and the construction of a fountain.
I would see a crowd of youngsters going to a dance,
A baby being born, and an old man dying.
I would see the tiniest particle of matter and the smallest throbbing of life,
Love and hate, Sin and grace.
Startled, I would understand that the great adventure of love,
which started at the beginning of the world, is unfolding before me,
The divine story which, according to your promise, will be
completed only in glory after the resurrection of the flesh,
When you come before the Father, saying: All is accomplished,
I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End

I would understand that everything is linked together,
That all is but a single movement of the whole of humanity
and the whole universe toward the Trinity, in you, by you, Lord
I would understand that nothing is secular, neither things, nor people, nor events,
But that, on the contrary, everything has been made sacred in its origin by God
and that everything must be consecrated by man, made divine.

I would understand that my life, an imperceptible breath in this great whole,
Is an indispensable treasure in the Father's plan.
Then, falling on my knees, I would admire, Lord, the mystery of this world
Which, in spite of the innumerable and hateful snags of sin,
Is a long throb of love, towards love eternal.

I would like to rise very high, Lord,
Above my city. Above the world. Above time.
I would like to purify my glance and borrow your eyes.

From 'Prayers of Life' by Michael Quoist (Gill And Macmillan, 1965)