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## IS YOUR LORD LARGE ENOUGH?



*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child,  
I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways  
behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror;  
then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know  
fully, even as I am fully known.*

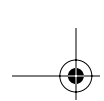
1 CORINTHIANS 13:11-12



Is your Lord large enough?" C. S. Lewis raised that question repeatedly in his writings, though not in exactly those words. And the fact that he raised it so often suggests that it is an important issue to him and thus may be an issue worth considering by other Christians. Notice that the question is not "Is *the* Lord large enough?" The answer to that is a simple and easy: "Yes, definitely!" "The LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods," says the psalmist (Psalm 95:3). "Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise" (48:1). God's largeness is far beyond human comprehension.

And that's the point. In our finite humanness, we cannot comprehend God's immensity, cannot take in God's greatness. What we do is





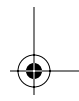
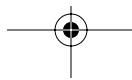
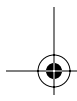
form an image in our minds encompassing as much of God’s greatness as we can handle—and that image is inevitably too small.

### FORMING IMAGES

We do the same, of course, for the people in our lives—parents, for example. No matter how well we think we know (or knew) our parents, we don’t (or didn’t) know them fully. The image of our parents we had in first grade was very limited; the image we formed later should have been bigger and more complete (though, in some cases, it wasn’t). These images are important and may be truthful, but they are no more than images, and they are inevitably partial. Through the image we know the real person, but only in part, not in his or her fullness.

We can know people only through mental images. That’s the way perception takes place: our minds receive data as we see, hear and learn about a person. The more data we receive and the longer the span of time involved, the fuller our image can be and the more chance there is for added data to correct our earlier perceptions and memories. But there are always things about a person that we don’t see or hear or know about, and we tend to be selective about what we do receive or remember. The immediacy of data is also important: when we have not been with a person for some time, we forget some details and emphasize others, and what we retain begins to solidify.

No matter how close you are to your best friend or the love of your life, you know that person through an image. If that image doesn’t change, doesn’t grow, it will become static, like a photo that you place on your desk and look at but don’t interact with in a living relationship. Images need to be constantly growing. They need to change as you learn things that don’t fit the old image and force you to replace it with a fuller, more adequate image.





## IS YOUR IMAGE OF GOD AS LARGE AS IT SHOULD BE?

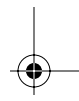
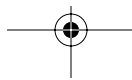
The question “Is your Lord large enough?” really asks, “Is your image of Christ, your conception of God, as large as it should be?” In 1952 J. B. Phillips, an author familiar to Lewis, published a book titled *Your God Is Too Small*. In it he talked about the limited conceptions of God that some people have—of God as a parent figure or God as a grand old man on a throne in the sky or Jesus as a mild young Galilean with pale skin and long, blond hair. Phillips challenges readers to think about the images of God they have and to consider whether those images are changing and growing.

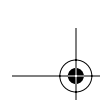
When Lewis was nine, his mother was diagnosed with cancer and he prayed for her to be healed. After she died, he prayed for a miracle, that she be brought back to life. Almost fifty years later, in his autobiography, he reflected on the way he thought about God then:

I had approached God, or my idea of God, without love, without awe, even without fear. He was, in my mental picture of this miracle, to appear neither as Saviour nor as Judge, but merely as a magician; and when He had done what was required of Him I

*The trouble with many people today is that they have not found a God big enough for modern needs. While their experience of life has grown in a score of directions, and their mental horizons have been expanded to the point of bewilderment by world events and by scientific discoveries, their ideas of God have remained largely static. It is obviously impossible for an adult to worship the conception of God that exists in the mind of a child of Sunday-school age, unless he is prepared to deny his own experience of life. If, by a great effort of will, he does do this he will always be secretly afraid lest some new truth may expose the juvenility of his faith.*

J. B. PHILLIPS, *YOUR GOD IS TOO SMALL*





supposed He would simply—well, go away. It never crossed my mind that the tremendous contact which I solicited should have any consequences beyond restoring the *status quo*.

His youthful conception of God was not as large as it needed to be.

### A GROWING KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Lewis's stories often make such points more clearly and more powerfully than his essays and books about Christian ideas. Consider, for example, the episode in *Prince Caspian* when Lucy Pevensie encounters Aslan, the great lion, a year after she last saw him. She gazes up into his large, wise face and says,

"Aslan, . . . you're bigger."

"That is because you are older, little one," answered he.

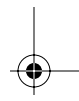
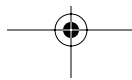
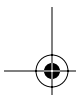
"Not because you are?"

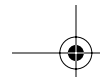
"I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger."

The word *grow* here is crucial: "every year you *grow*, you will find me bigger." It doesn't mean just growing older or physically bigger: her *capacity for knowing Aslan* must grow larger. And this isn't automatic: it takes effort and attention.

Lewis talks about that in his book *Mere Christianity*. He is commenting on Christ's words that only those who receive the kingdom of God like a little child will enter that kingdom. Lewis warns us not to misunderstand this saying. As he puts it, "Christ never meant that we were to remain children in *intelligence*: on the contrary . . . he wants a child's heart, but a grown-up's head. He wants us to . . . [use] every bit of intelligence we have. . . . [You must not] be content with the same babyish ideas [of God] which you had when you were a five-year-old."

Using our brains, developing every bit of intelligence we have, is important during the high school and college years: while we are in





school our minds are being stretched (at least, they should be!); our understanding of the sciences, the social sciences, the humanities and the arts expands. It's vital that our knowledge of God keep up with the rest of our growth. But developing intellectually, and having our knowledge of God grow, remains equally important for the rest of our lives. If you remain content with a junior high or high school conception of God, there will be a gap between your mind and your spirit. Your God will be too small to cope with the challenges you are going to face, too small to deal with dangerous ideas. You'll be tempted to oversimplify complex issues and be content with stock answers to difficult questions.

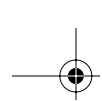
*What happens to me if I try to take [addressing God] . . . "simply" is the juxtaposition of two "representations" or ideas or phantoms. One is the bright blur in the mind which stands for God. The other is the idea I call "me." . . . I know . . . that they are both phantasmal. The real I has created them both—or, rather, built them up in the vaguest way from all sorts of psychological odds and ends.*

C. S. LEWIS, *LETTERS TO MALCOLM, CHIEFLY ON PRAYER*

### PUTTING GOD IN A BOX

The danger is putting, and keeping, God in a box, the way Job's friends did. They were real friends, sincerely concerned about Job and wanting to help him, and they had impeccable religious credentials. They thought they had God sized up perfectly: God doesn't let bad things happen to good people. Since bad things are happening to Job, he must have done evil and needs to repent. But God rebukes them, saying that they have reduced God to the shape and size of their own understanding: "The LORD . . . said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has'" (Job 42:7).



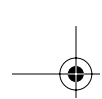


Lewis said in his book *A Grief Observed* that we need constantly to smash the images we form of God, so they can expand into new and larger ones. If we do not, our image of God will turn into an idol, that is, into a solidified idea that we worship instead of worshiping the living God. If we allow it, God will begin breaking those images for us. God, says Lewis, is the great iconoclast—the great image breaker. God will show us where our images are limited and inadequate—through our experiences, our thinking and our contacts with new ideas and other people, especially ideas and people different from those with which we are most familiar.

Growth in our conceptions of God is the subject of the remaining chapters in this book. But here are some specific, initial suggestions of practices through which such growth could occur:

- Both studying and meditating on the Bible. We need to listen to God through the Scriptures as well as to study the texts. And we need to be open to all that the Scripture says. Don't let yourself reduce God's thoughts to the size of your ideas. The Bible is one of the most radical books in the world, socially and economically as well as spiritually. If you are never surprised as you read it, if you never stop and say, "I can't believe it just said that," then your God may be too small.
- Using written prayers sometimes as well as prayers in your own words (more on this in chapter 3). Buy a collection of liturgies and prayers and use it in your devotional life; meditate on—and memorize—some of the beautiful traditional prayers and liturgies of the church. Your God will grow as you do this.
- Singing the traditional hymns of the church as well as praise songs. The best of those old hymns have great depth of wisdom and theology; they're worth studying as well as singing.
- Attending services at churches outside your own tradition as well





as the kind of services you're accustomed to. Get outside your comfort zone occasionally, and go not to criticize and reject but to enlarge your sense of how God can be worshiped.

Is your Lord large enough? No, and he never can be. God will always be beyond our greatest thoughts and deepest understanding. But our thoughts and understanding can expand, and we are called to a lifelong journey of growth and learning that allows God to grow as we grow.

### GROWTH IN NARNIA

In *Prince Caspian* Lewis introduced the idea of the need for growth in one's knowledge of God as one grows older. The marvelous conclusion to *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* extends that idea. At the end of their voyage, Aslan tells Lucy and Edmund they will not be able to go to Narnia again.

"Oh, *Aslan!*" said Edmund and Lucy both together in despairing voices.

"You are too old, children," said Aslan, "and you must begin to come close to your own world now."

"It isn't Narnia, you know," sobbed Lucy. "It's *you*. We shan't meet *you* there. And how can we live, never meeting you?"

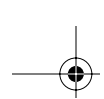
"But you shall meet me, dear one," said Aslan.

"Are—are you there too, Sir?" said Edmund.

"I am," said Aslan. "But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there."

For many, many readers, coming to know Aslan through the Chronicles of Narnia becomes a means to a larger, deeper conception of God in our world.

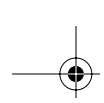




### FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Think back to and describe the way you thought about or pictured God at earlier times in your life. Describe the way you think of, or picture, God now. Have your images of God changed and grown? In what ways?
2. Have you had any experiences that have forced you to think of God in new and different ways? Describe them and explain how they led to changes.
3. Read the story of Peter's vision at Joppa in Acts 10, calling him to minister to the Gentiles. Look for and reflect on how God forces Peter to get beyond the limitations his understanding has placed on God, the box he has placed God in. Can you think of other examples in the Bible where people come to a larger conception of who and what God is?
4. What are ways in our time that people are led to enlarge their conception of God the way Peter was, to allow God to break out of the boxes they put God into?
5. Evaluate and discuss the practical suggestions on pages 16-17. Which ones seem useful and valuable to you, and why? Which ones do not, and why not? What other possibilities can you think of to add to the list?
6. If you have read all of the Chronicles of Narnia, think about how the appearance of Aslan changes in them as the series progresses, in the order in which the books were published: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was first (1950), then *Prince Caspian* (1951), *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* (1952), *The Silver Chair* (1953), *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), *The Magician's Nephew* (1955) and *The Last Battle* (1956). Consider the way Aslan in the earliest books is present physically and is actively involved in help-





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ing solve problems, and the way later he appears only at a distance, or indirectly, and empowers the children and the Narnians instead of acting directly himself. Does it seem that Lewis's conception of Aslan might have grown, or changed at least, as the series proceeded? If so, how?

