

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter One: A Bad Reputation

1. What negative images of the God of the Old Testament do you or people you know have?
2. How valid are these negative images?
3. Where do these negative images come from? The media? TV or films? The Bible?
4. What Old Testament passages do you find problematic, confusing or bizarre?
5. How is the God of the Old Testament (Yahweh) similar to, or different from, the God of the New Testament (Jesus)?
6. What do you think of Richard Dawkins's quote about Yahweh ("The God of the OT is . . . a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic capriciously malevolent bully")? Where do you agree or disagree with Dawkins?
7. How do negative images of Yahweh affect your desire to read, study and teach the Old Testament?

8. What can you do to better understand the God of the Old Testament?

Chapter Two: Angry or Loving?

1. Have you ever worried that God would punish you or strike you down for something you did? What was it?
2. How would you have felt if you were David and you saw Uzzah get struck down by Yahweh? What would you have said to God?
3. Have you ever ridden in the trunk of a car? Let's say you were hoping for "shotgun," how would you feel if someone asked you to ride in their trunk?
4. Tell a story about losing something important to you. How did you celebrate when you found it? How does that experience help you understand the story of the recovery of the lost ark?
5. What kinds of things make you mad? How quickly or slowly do you get angry? How difficult is it to control your temper? What do you learn about God from our own struggles to control our anger?
6. How angry do you get about a breakdown in relationship? How angry do you get about injustice or oppression?
7. When is it good to be angry? How does a person find the right balance between appropriate anger and steadfast love in relationships?

Chapter Three: Sexist or Affirming?

1. Begin the discussion by having women share any experiences of sexist comments or incidents, particularly those that occurred in the context of the church.

2. If someone were to say to you that “the Old Testament God is sexist,” what would you say?
3. Which curse is worse—the man’s or the woman’s (Gen 3:16-19)? Why do you think so?
4. Following in the spirit of epidurals and combine harvesters, how can we work to overcome the effects of the curse, specifically the part of men ruling over women?
5. What woman from the Old Testament would you like to read about and study?
6. Why do you think Jesus praised the woman who anointed his feet so dramatically? For the men, when was the last time you, like Jesus, affirmed a woman publicly in a dramatic way?
7. End by having women share experiences of being honored or affirmed publicly by men in the context of a church.

Chapter Four: Racist or Hospitable?

1. How big of an issue is race in your culture? In the church in general? In your church specifically?
2. If God isn’t racist, why does he focus so much attention on the Israelites?
3. How integrated or segregated is your church? What obstacles are there to welcoming people of other races or ethnic backgrounds?
4. What does it tell you about God that he welcomes Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, into his people, even making her one of Jesus’ ancestors?
5. What makes the story of the hospitable Samaritan such a popular story?

6. What can you do to bring up the issue of race in your church?
7. How can you be more like Saint Francis in befriending people of different races or different faiths?
8. What would the church today be like if the early Christians didn't cross ethnic barriers to spread the gospel?

Chapter Five: Violent or Peaceful?

1. How would you have felt if you were Elisha and Yahweh protected you from a gang of teens?
2. Why is the slaughter of the Canaanites so troubling? How is it similar to, or different from, modern genocides?
3. Why did the biblical authors include so much violence and warfare? Should they have edited some of that out?
4. How comfortable do you feel with the idea of violent punishment?
5. Who are your enemies? How can you love them like Elisha and Jesus did?
6. Share stories of ways you loved an enemy or someone who you didn't get along with.
7. How can you promote peace and reconciliation in your family, school, job and neighborhood?

Chapter Six: Legalistic or Gracious?

1. Why are so many Christians legalistic? How does this affect the perception of God for those outside the church?
2. Pick an Old or New Testament law that does not make sense to you (one that seems weird, bizarre, harsh or unfair). Discuss possible reasons why God would command it.

3. Pick a biblical command that is difficult to follow because it seems like God wants to deprive you of something good. How can you remind yourself that God can be trusted in this area?
4. How can you become more like the author of Psalm 119 in your love of and appreciation for God's law?
5. Which commands of God do you find easy to obey (to have sex? to eat? to rest? to feast? to help the poor?)? What is it about these commands that make them so easy to follow?
6. Why is it difficult for people in your culture to rest? When do you take a sabbath rest? What do you do on your sabbath? How do you make sure that you and your family are following God's command to rest?

Chapter Seven: Rigid or Flexible?

1. Think of a stubborn person you know (it could be you). What is it like to be around this person? When is it good that he or she is this way?
2. How easily do you change your mind? In what types of situations do you find it easy or difficult to do so?
3. How would you have felt if you were Isaiah when Yahweh told him to go back to tell Hezekiah that he had changed his mind and Hezekiah would live fifteen more years? Why would that have been difficult?
4. Do you ever feel like Jonah and wish that God wasn't merciful to someone? What types of people make you feel this way? Why?
5. Share stories of times when you were too flexible or too inflexible.
6. How do you decide when to be flexible and when to be stubborn?

Chapter Eight: Distant or Near?

1. How comfortable do you feel complaining or lamenting to God?
2. What would you have said to Jesus on the cross as he lamented?
3. Share stories of times when God seemed either distant or near during a personal crisis.
4. How does God manifest his presence to us today? How does he speak to you? When do you experience his presence?
5. What obstacles make it difficult to walk with God—like Abraham did with Yahweh or the disciples did with Jesus?
6. What do you find most appealing about Yahweh or Jesus? Why do you want to draw near to them?
7. What is the percentage of mobsters and prostitutes in your church? How can you increase that percentage to make your community more like Jesus'?

Epilogue: Is the Answer Really “Yes, Yes and Yes”?

1. What problematic Old Testament passages will you commit to read, study or teach in the future?
2. If you were truly to perceive God as fascinating, relational and good, how would that affect your life? What would you do differently?
3. What is your favorite word to describe God? Why? How can you become more like God in this respect? Pray for God's grace to help you in this process.