

My Image of God



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We are called and graced to live in loving communion with God.

It may be that it is our image of God that needs to change

Our disappointment in God and our frustrated attempt to understand our suffering will further confuse the distorted image of God we may have been carrying around for much of our life.

It is unlikely that we escaped some distortion of our image of God.

These distortions hide below the surface of our consciousness and do affect us in many ways. They will surface at times of crisis and stress.

We pray to share Jesus' image of God.

The image we have of God shapes how we feel and think about God, ourselves and others. It shapes how we pray, or if we pray at all. Nothing has an effect on life as much as how we perceive God, especially on the feeling level.

We hunger for unconditional love, a love that is both faithful and personal. This is the magnetic force that draws us to God. If the human heart has this desire, we sense intuitively that there has to be a fulfilment of that desire. When God is not seen as the source of unconditional, faithful, personal love, we look for such love in others or in created things. Ultimately we will be disappointed or become addicted.

Experience of and belief in God's unconditional, faithful and personal love helps us accept others the way they are, without resentment, disappointment, blame or destructive tendencies that destroy relationships.

I. The Irrelevant God (see Handout 02_1)

Atheists : What 'god' are they rejecting?

Agnostics : The question is too hard so they live their life without pursuing it, and without any conscious relationship with God.

Others live their life as though God was irrelevant.

Feeling that God is not someone they can depend upon, they try to be self-reliant, to keep control or find someone to rely on.

Often we will have this distorted image when we are trying to assert our own independence when life around us seems to be out of control or when we work in situations where we have to practise high levels of control of our human and physical environments. We might even depend solely on ourselves to become holy. If so, God is for us to all intents and purposes irrelevant.

This is not the God revealed by Jesus.

"God so loved the world (you and me) that He sent His only begotten Son so that everyone may have eternal life"(John 3:16).

Jesus reveals a God who loves us 'to the end'.

Jesus reveals a God who is intimately involved in our lives.

Jesus reveals a God who takes personally whatever happens to us.



2. The Perfectionist God.

The cry of the one who has this distorted image is:

‘I can't make a mistake. It would be terrible if I make a mistake!’

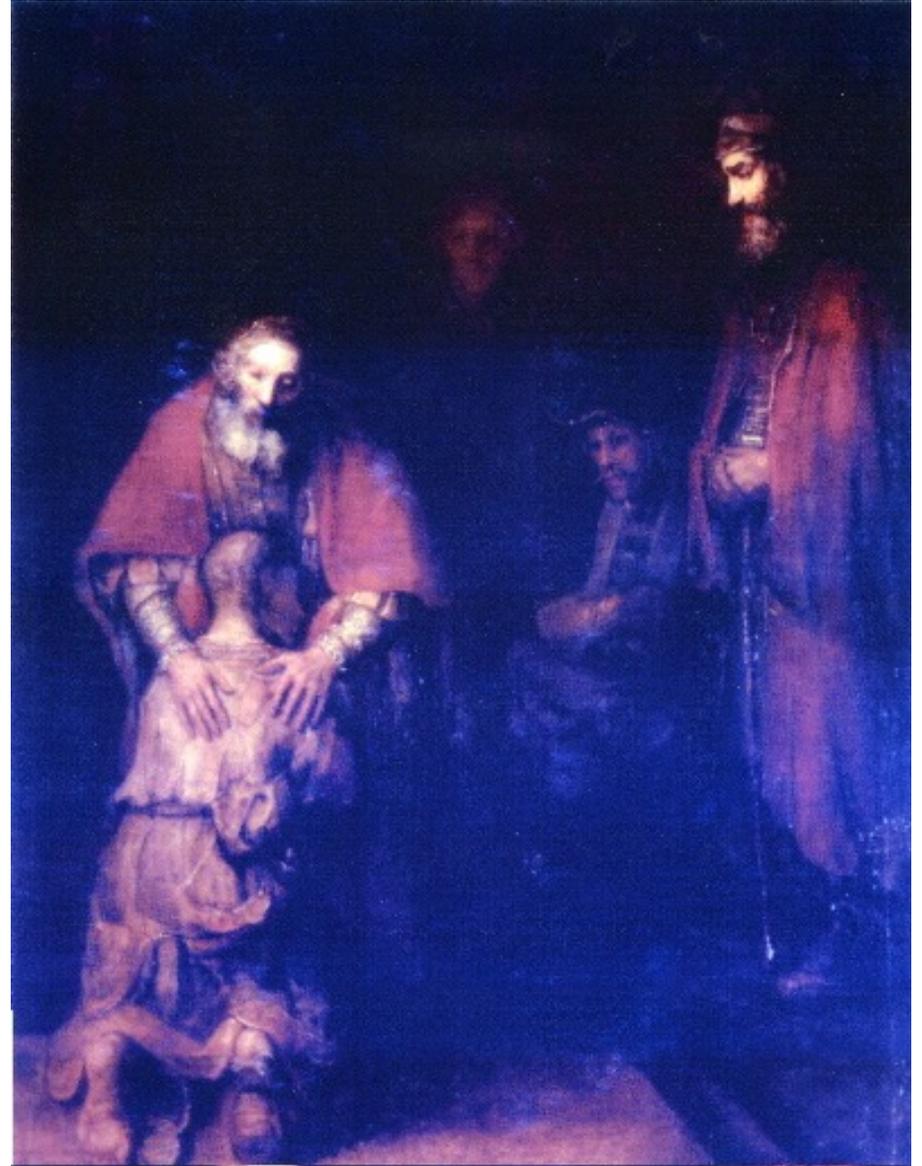
There is a belief that God is present in creation and in the human struggle, but as one who observes, judges and then punishes the guilty.

Fear of God's judgment prevents any loving relationship.

This distorted image implies that suffering happens because God is punishing us.

Jesus has revealed the true image of God: God's forgiving love that forgives seventy times seven times. When the apostle, Peter, asked Jesus how often he should forgive others, Jesus answer was: “Not seven times, but seventy times seven times”(Matthew 18:21-22).

Jesus asks us to forgive our enemies just as he did as he died on the cross. God's message to the world is that He so loved the world that He sent His only Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven. This means your sins and mine!



3. The Testing God.

The cry of the one who labours with this distorted image is:
'God, you don't love me; your tests are too heavy.
I can't earn your love'.

An early Christian heresy was that people must earn God's blessing by their own efforts. If life goes well, we are being rewarded. Hurt, loss and suffering are a test. If we pass the test, we get a reward; if we fail the test, we get more suffering.

The truth is God's love is unconditional. Saint Paul describes in his Letter to the Romans how God loves us when we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). Jesus loves us exactly the way we are. He has no conditions on His love. Jesus said that he came to call sinners.

4. The Fatalistic God.

The cry of the one who is contaminated by this distortion is: "How long can this good time last?" God is seen as the one who gives good things and then takes them away, almost like a tease. Those with this distortion believe that when things are going well they better watch out because things are going to turn bad.

‘If we are faithless, God remains faithful –
God cannot deny God’s Self’(2Timothy 2:13).

God cannot change. Our human heart hungers for a love that will always be faithful. It is almost too good to be true but God loves you and me faithfully!

God doesn't micromanage creation. God does not control us or our world. God loves us, and the whole of creation.

God respects the freedom of our universe, and human freedom.

God acts with, in and through our reality.

5. Santa Claus God.

The cry of those inflicted with this distortion is: God, you didn't give me what I wanted; you must not love me! It is almost as though God has to prove his love for us. We all too often forget the many expressions of God's love we have already received. But what have you done for me lately?

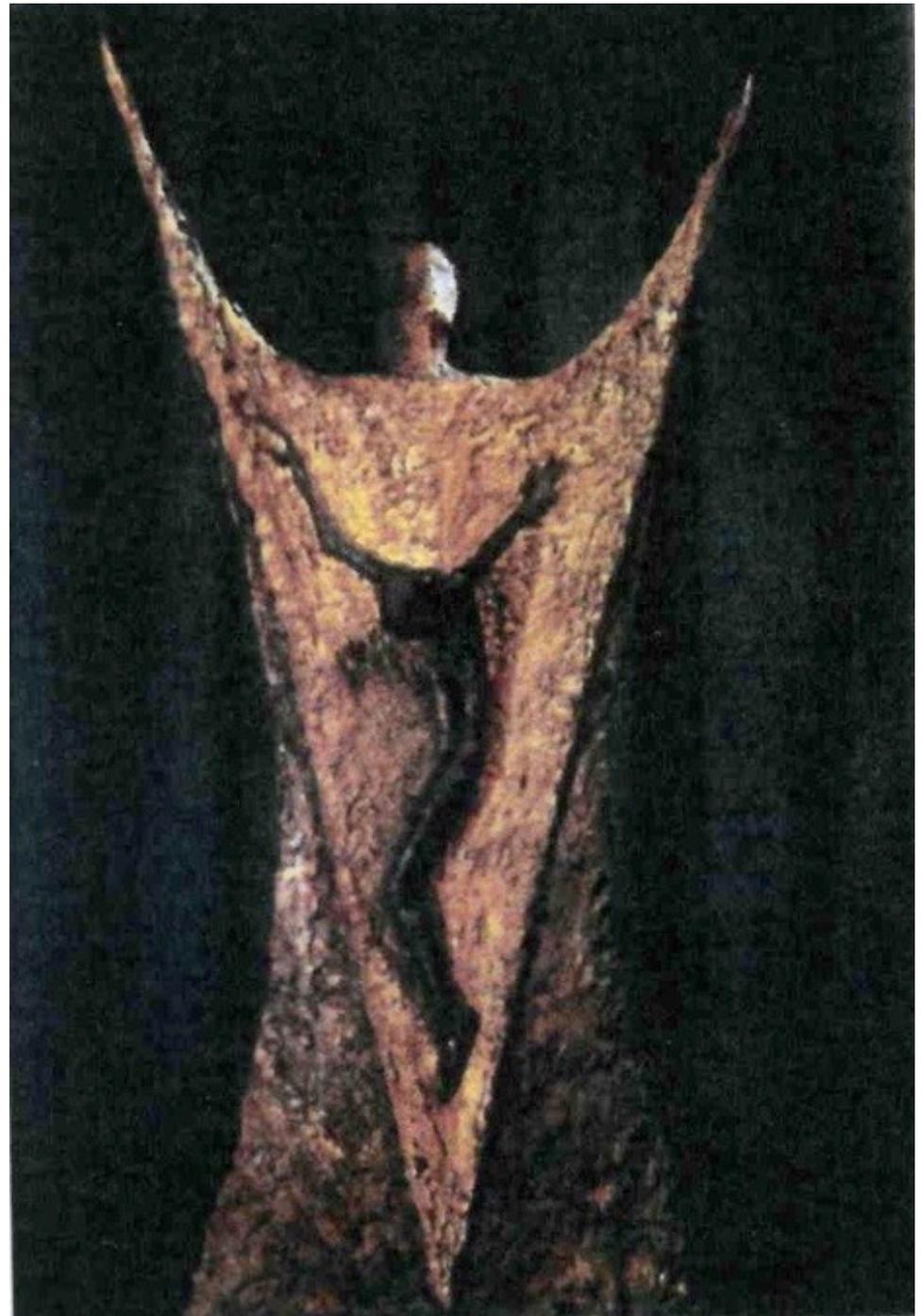
This confusion defines God's love by the number of gifts, often material, that we receive. In this distorted belief, pain is especially acute when we believe we have done what is right and still are losing something precious such as a job, a marriage, or health. The cry of the heart is: *'It's not fair; I did all that was asked of me, but still I'm losing what is important to me.'* God does not fulfil my expectations.

Our greatest gift is God's
compassionate love

In Jesus God suffers with
us

God is able to make good
come from our suffering

‘We know that all things
work together for good
for those who love
God’(Romans 8:28).



Meditating on Jesus' image of God (Handout 02_2)

In the Healing Journey we are encouraged to replace our distorted images of God by meditation on the God revealed by Jesus in the Gospels. In these meditations Jesus gives people an experience of His loving presence and will gradually reveal who God really is. Jesus will gradually heal hearts and transform lives. Jesus offers hope to us all, especially when we are feeling alienated, isolated or separated from God's love in any way.

We begin to recognize and accept God's unconditional and faithful love of us by letting go of our distorted images of God. In the Gospels, Jesus reveals who his Father really is by his teachings, example and actions. The Gospel images will replace our distorted images. Jesus reveals the compassion of God.

We journey best when we are able to experience the Scripture by identifying with someone in the story. We will hear these messages of love as the message is given to them. Experience has taught that we usually take time, often a long time, to replace our distorted images of God with a true and healthier image.

Suggested steps to help our Gospel meditations

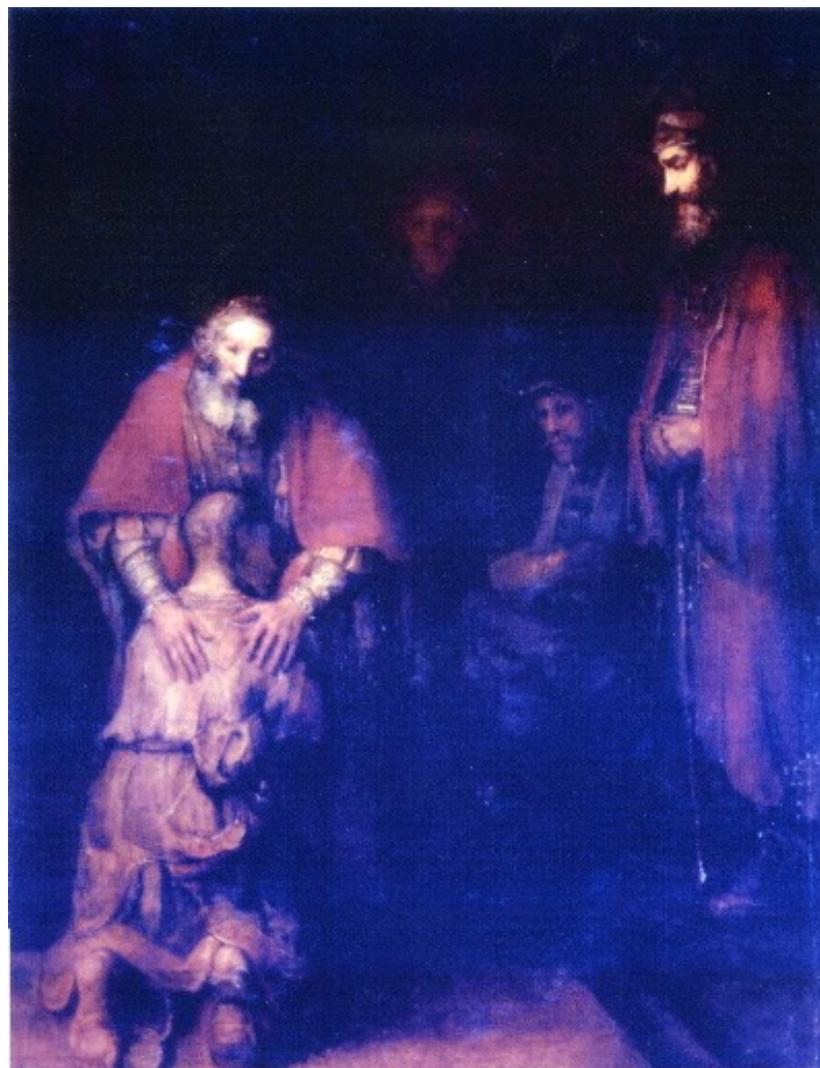
We imagine the scene as vividly as we can; we imagine ourself as a participant in the scene (eg., the leper/Jesus).

We imagine having a conversation with Jesus. What would he say to you? What would you want to say to him? Listen to him share his feeling about the event with you. Then you share with him. It may help you if you write the conversation down. Don't worry if you can't imagine anything. Just pay attention; God's silence speaks too.

We share our story of loss out loud with Jesus; complain or blame if you want. Don't expect explanations and solutions.

Pray, "Lord reveal to me what needs to be healed in me."

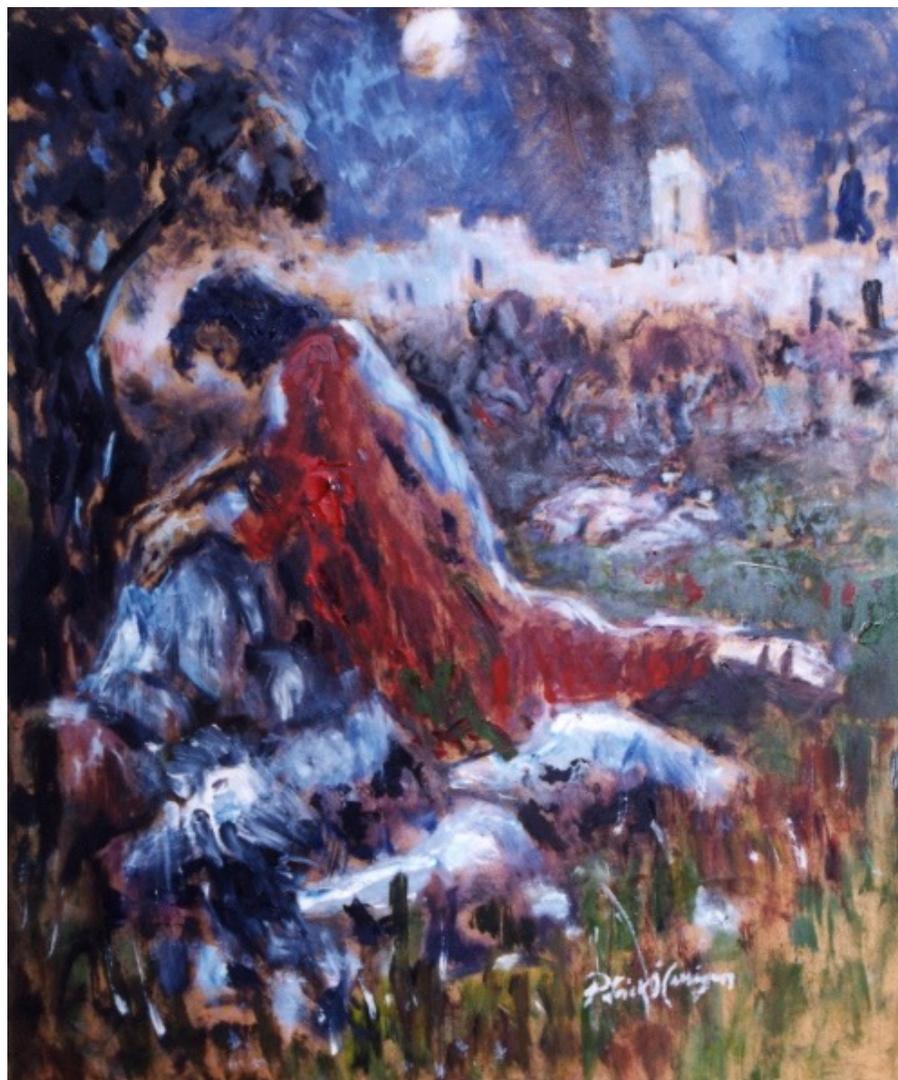
Reflect on the image of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son
(Luke 15:1-2, 11-32)



Reflect on the scene of Jesus with the woman caught in adultery
(John 8:1-11)

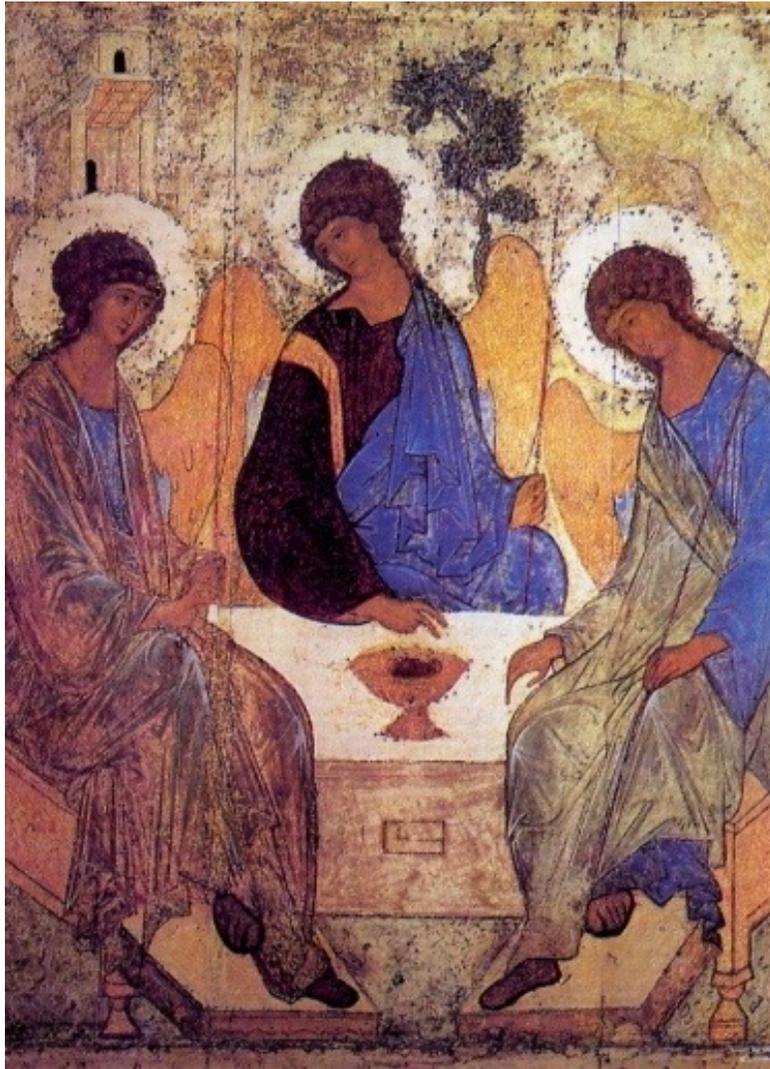


Reflect on Jesus in his Agony in the Garden



Reflect on Jesus on the cross





Everyday God