

Images of a Healing God in Scripture

– Letting Scripture Heal our *Image of God* –

Introduction

T. Cosentino Renfrew County CDSB 2012

Most people who believe in God have various images of what God is like, depending on the day, their mood, health and history. These images of God change as we grow older – sometimes for the better, and sometimes for worse. A healthy image of God can free us to trust the movement of grace, bringing tremendous human and spiritual growth. A poor image of God can keep us imprisoned in mistrust and fear, rather than growing in love. None of us carries around the perfect image of God. And so, our images of God constantly need to heal and mature. God also desires this for us, that we might truly live in the freedom of being all we were created to be.

In this exercise, you'll be invited to:

- reflect on your personal stories and images of God
- consider which images you'd like to retain and which need healing
- allow God's word to touch your heart and help heal where needed.

I: Our Personal Stories

Our personal stories say much about our image of God, and the healing that image may require. You are invited to read the examples below, and then to take a few minutes to consider your own story and the images of God that you carry at this point in your life.

- 1. My earliest religious experiences involve praying with siblings and parents around the youngest child's bed, then being tucked in for the night.**
The image of God that comes to mind is *nurturer*.
- I cherish this image, and want to pass it on in my own family.
- 2. I was told constantly, "God is watching you," when my parents were trying to get me to do something.**
The image of God that comes to mind is *a vigilant police officer*.
- I know in my head this is not true, but I do want to grow to know a God who loves me unconditionally for who I am, and not for what I do.
- 3. My grandmother told us stories of the saints, took us to church. I used to pray the Rosary with her after supper. She had faith, and shared it with love.**
The image of God that comes to mind is *someone with a heart like my grandmother's*.
I want to share with others my faith in this loving God.
- 4. I grew up with workaholic parents who drank too much to numb their pain. They often told me they loved me, but we rarely spent time doing anything as a family.**

The image of God that comes to mind is *someone not really present to my needs*. I don't pray very much, because I'm not sure I'll be heard. I'd like to know differently.

5. **My parish experience has involved a lot of division and pain.**

The image of God that comes to mind is now *too associated with conflict*.

I need to find a place to heal and meet the true God of peace.

6. **I found God in the happiness of my marriage, in the birth of my children and parenthood, in the wind's caress, the beauty of nature, and joy of my faith.**

The image of God that comes to mind is love, alive in my life and in the world around me.

I cherish these moments; they strengthen my faith, and I bring them to prayer.

7. **I grew up in a very violent and unstable home, and my only refuge was school. Some very caring teachers reached out to me over the years. Their help gave me the confidence and support to get where I am today.**

On difficult days, the image of God that comes to mind is *fearful and untrustworthy*.

On better days, the image of God that comes to mind is *a teacher with a kind heart*.

My experience of these teachers' kindness has helped me believe in a God who accompanies me through the healing journey of dealing with a traumatic past.

Where is here?

You are invited to take a few moments to reflect on the life experiences that have helped shape your image of God.

What kinds of experiences and images come to mind?

What would you like to do with these?

(e.g., keep, nurture them; heal and grow beyond them; discard them; pass them along)

II. Healing the Image

The beautiful thing about being made in God's image is that none of us is a helpless victim of our past. We have been created for freedom to seek and choose God's constant offer of healing.

Where can we go to find healing for our image of God? God's word is a very good place to start: living, active, and always ready to draw us into a deeper encounter with the One for Whom we were created in love.

Three Healing Concepts in God's Word

It is helpful to have *keys* to help us break open the healing power God's word. Three key biblical Hebrew concepts that can assist us are

loving-kindness (*hesed*, in Hebrew),

grace (*hen* in Hebrew)

truth (*emet* in Hebrew)

Loving-kindness (*hesed* in Hebrew) is often ascribed to God in scripture. God's *loving-kindness* is exercised as *mercy, compassion* and *steadfast love*. It is referred to throughout the Hebrew scriptures, and culminates in Jesus. Jesus *is* the full expression of the Father's *loving-kindness (hesed)* for humanity.

*** When you read the Bible, look to see how often *mercy, compassion* and *steadfast love* are associated with God.**

Grace and favour (*hen* in Hebrew) refers to gifts bestowed, but more importantly, to the way in which God acts. It connotes an infinitely good and almighty God who lovingly condescends to the level of human affairs – like a parent bending down to help a needy child. God graciously reaches out to change hearts, to raise up all who are fallen and crying out for help, offering protection in the shadow of the divine wings. God's *grace and favour* initiate and complete every good human thought, desire and action experienced in our lives. The fullness of the Father's *hen* (grace/favour) has been poured out on us in Christ.

*** When you read the Bible, make a note of how often God is described as *gracious, showing favour, protecting and sheltering* the poor and needy.**

Truth (*emet* in Hebrew) expresses the Hebrew understanding that God established creation according to divine laws that are unchanging and true. The truth of God's word in the Hebrew scriptures is fully revealed in Jesus. Through him, with him, and in him, we carry unshakeable hope in the truth of God's promises that lead us to fullness of life.

*** When you read the Bible, take note of how reliance on the truth of God's care and promises is mentioned.**

Breaking Open the Word

You are invited to read through the biblical quotations in the pages that follow. Most are from the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), which are fulfilled in the New Testament. As you read, yield to the movement of your heart. If you feel the need to stop and remain with a certain quote, then do so. It's not about reading everything; it's about being nurtured by what you need. Just allow the depths of God's word to speak to the depths of you, and stay there as long as you need.

Part III: Sharing the Fruits

Please feel free to share the fruits of breaking open God's word.

- which images of God from the Bible captured your attention?
- were there any surprises?
- which words or images associated spoke to you in a healing kind of way?

Finally...

God's word is an inexhaustible treasury that can heal and help us become all we were created to be as sons and daughters of the Lord. You are invited to read these and other passages each day, staying with the ones that feed your spirit, and moving on when you're ready, to others.

Trust that God's word will heal and enrich your image of God through a deepened knowledge of the loving-kindness, graciousness and truth of God's love for you. You won't be disappointed.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits-

Who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

Who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

Who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

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The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.

As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.

For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.

(Ps 103: 1-5, 8-14)

You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy;

In your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

(Ps 16: 11)

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you;

my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

... for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

(Ps 63: 1-4, 7-8)

Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

for you, O lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my cry of supplication.

In the day of my trouble I call on you, for you will answer me.

There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.

All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

I give thanks to you, O lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.

For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

(Ps 86: 4-13)

I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.
(Ps 89: 1-2)

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."
For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence; He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday.
(Ps 91: 1-6)

O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our maker!
For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.
(Ps 95: 6-7)

I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
(Ps 121: 1-2)

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;
My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.
O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.
It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.
(Ps 130: 3-8)

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.
Where do I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.
... for it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
(Ps 139 1-10, 13-14)

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.
I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.
Because you are precious in my sight, and honoured, and I love you,
I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life.
Do not fear, for I am with you;
(Isaiah 43: 1b-5A)

See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands;
(Isaiah 49: 16a)

For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.
(Is 54: 10)

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and you that have no money, come buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me; listen so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.
(Is 55: 1-3)

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.
(Is 31, 31-34)

I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.
(Ezekiel 36: 24-28)

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.
The more I called them, the farther they went from me,
Sacrificing to the Baals, and burning incense to idols.
Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms;

I drew them with human cords, with bands of love;
I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks;
Yet though I stooped to feed my child, they did not know that I was their healer.
(Hosea 11: 1-4) NAB Translation

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboim?
My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.
I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim
For I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.
(Hosea 11: 8-10)

Then his [newly born John the Baptist's] father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favourably on his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a mighty saviour for us in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our
enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant,
The oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of
our enemies,

Might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare
his ways,

to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who
sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

(Luke 1: 68-79)

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my
yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your
souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

(Matt 11: 28-30)

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the
good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he
had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

(Matt 9: 35-36)

But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw
him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be
afraid.” Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased.

(Mk 6: 49-51A)