

ELEVATE: Your Vision of God

Session #1: From Grandfather to God Most High

Session Objective: The objective of this session is to help students understand God as Holy and Wholly Other. Hollywood has done a good job of domesticating God. He's not someone to be feared; He's more of a grandfather type of figure. He'll give you candy and a word or two of advice, but He won't get in your face about stuff. Well, as nice as that sounds, that's not the Yahweh of Scripture. The Yahweh of Scripture spoke the heavens into place, exploded matter from emptiness, breathed life into empty flesh, led the Israelites with a pillar of fire, carved the Law into solid rock, sent the Philistines running with cracks of lightening and peels of thunder, and defeated death by raising Jesus from the grave. The Bible says that the 'fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.' (Proverbs 1:7) This session will try and help students understand what it means to have respect and righteous fear of God Most High.

Minimum Prep: Read through the entire session outline. Prepare an environment where discussion can occur.

Extended Prep: This lesson plan requires pencils, pencil crayons and blank paper. In addition there are a few audio/visual aids that could be used to add punch to this session.

- Alanis Morissette makes a brief cameo in the movie **Dogma** as God. Consider showing a brief clip.
- Morgan Freeman plays God in the movie **Bruce Almighty**. There are a great many clips you could select that would be appropriate. Perhaps the best would be the scene near the end where Bruce shows up on time (the 7th at 7:00 p.m.) to help mop the floors.

Session Outline

Leader Preamble:

*Let's play a little game. It's called word association. I'll say a word and then you describe whatever images come into your mind when you hear the word. Ok? "Winter". (Listen to responses). "High School". (Listen to responses). "Disco". (Listen to responses). "Christmas" (Listen to responses). "God" (Listen to responses). Most of us have some very definite imagery in our mind that is associated with the word God. Where do we get that from? God has been in a lot of movies recently and I think that some of our imagery probably comes from there. Let's take a look at how a few movies image God. (Show clip from **Dogma** or **Bruce Almighty**) God is pretty cool in the movies. He always*

seems wise and easy going and fun to be around. He doesn't get angry or pass judgment or pressure us to be any different than we are. Actually, He sounds a lot like Santa Clause or your grandfather.

But is this who God really is? In the Bible, people who see God tend to react a little different than Ben Affleck did in Dogma or Jim Carrey in Bruce Almighty. What do they know that maybe we have forgotten? Tonight we are going to look at how the Bible portrays God and discuss what that means for those of us who would follow. Let's break up into our Small Groups to discuss that in team.

Small Group Preparations:

This particular exercise will work better if students are seated in chairs around a table. Pens, pencils and pencil crayons are necessary.

Small Group Questions:

- 1. Take a look at the sheet titled "What does your God look like?" Read through each of the images and then use the pencil crayons provided to draw your own image of God. You can combine any one, two, three or four images to create a picture that reflects truthfully how you understand God. Not how you SHOULD understand God, how you REALLY DO. Be prepared to explain your picture to the group.**

Leader help: Give the students some time to draw their pictures. A sharp student might ask: "Doesn't the Old Testament forbid making any sort of image for God?" That's a good question. The church wrestled with that for many years. There were long stretches of time when pictures of Jesus were not allowed. The consensus that everyone seems to have arrived at is that the reason God forbade the making of images in the 10 Commandments was to prevent people from limiting the nature of God to the extent of the human imagination. God is greater than what you or I can conceive! At the same time, Jesus is said by the Bible to BE the image of God – not someone's imagination of God. Pictures of Jesus that aid in devotion were therefore deemed appropriate. This exercise is actually intended to prove the point the Bible makes anyway: that the human imaginations of God always fall short of His true nature. Therefore you can do this exercise free from eternal peril.

Encourage the students to share how they really imagine God – not how they think they should. Expect a lot of Jesus in sandals also wearing a Santa Hat with gift bag – because most of us have a very watered down, Hollywood sanctioned vision of God. Let the students share without your editing or correcting. It's fun to hear where they are coming from.

2. Let's take a look at Isaiah 6:1-8, Revelation 4:1-11, Matthew 17:1-8 and Exodus 33:18-23 with Exodus 34:29-30. Let's collect a master list of data about God from these passages. Get a piece of paper and make a vertical line down the middle creating two columns. On the left side record all the data provided about God in these passages. On the right side record all the reactions that people have when they see God. Do that now.
3. How different is the God you have described than the God played by Morgan Freeman in Bruce Almighty? How would you react if you came face to face with Morgan Freeman in his soothing white pants and cotton shirt? How is that similar or dissimilar to the way people reacted when they met Yahweh? Make another chart comparing what you have learned about Yahweh with what you know about the Morgan Freeman God of Bruce Almighty. What are the similarities and differences?
4. Take a look at Proverbs 1:7. What does it mean to 'fear the Lord'? How is that the beginning of wisdom?
5. Take a look at Luke 3:50 and Galatians 6:7. What do those verses mean to you? Do they crash up against the domesticated Hollywood God imagery that you have in your brain? What mental realignments do you think might be necessary?
6. But hold on a second! Isn't the Majestic, Powerful, AWESOME God the God of the Old Testament with Jesus being the nice lamb-like God of the New? I thought Jesus was all warm and cuddly – kind of a user friendly, full of mercy type God. Check out Revelation 1:10-18 and Revelation 5:3-7. How is Jesus described in these passages?

Leader Note: Jesus came to earth as a lamb but the Scriptures tell us that He will return as the Lion of Judah. In order to have a balanced view of God, we have to understand that He is simultaneously powerful and approachable, merciful, yet holy. God is not mocked and we are fools to think that God is some cosmic pushover that will let things slide. God is awesome and holy and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. If you have a hard time teaching this, spend some time in prayer. Spend time reflecting on the Scriptures. Pray through all of the references ahead of time and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you.

7. How can God be both POWERFUL and APPROACHABLE? How can He be HOLY and still be MERCIFUL? How can He be LOVING, and yet be so TOTALLY MAJESTIC? How can we keep all those extremes together in one image of God?

Leader help: It's important to remember that God is greater than anything we can imagine. He defies description and cannot be captured by any images or definitions. As human beings we struggle with that and so we try to reduce God to one thing or the other so that we can 'understand' Him. So we shrink him down to a Cosmic Santa or a Grandiose Grandparent. When we do this, we lose something important. Sometimes we lose the Holiness of God and we begin to think that our sin doesn't matter, sometimes we lose the Power of God and we begin to doubt that God is really in control. That's why it is so important to try and help students learn to come to grips with the 'indescribability' (I invented that word!) of God. Let God be bigger than you can imagine! Let Him be so big that He can be powerful and approachable. Let God be God and then you can be you!

8. Let's go around the circle and have everyone complete this sentence:

"I used to think of God primarily as _____ but now I see Him as being _____ and _____ as well."

Leader Note: This is your place each week to record significant sharing or growth in the lives of your students for subsequent follow up. You can also use this space to provide feedback on the material. All suggestions are welcome.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

5