

My Image of God



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Welcome to my site

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Click on 'God' (left menu)



Our image of God is affected by a misunderstanding of the relationship between inspiration and the biblical record.

Some people who lacked the necessary childhood development will find it most difficult to imagine God as one who loves them.

Others will be spiritually handicapped by poor religious education.

Still others will gradually lose their simple and secure childhood image of God.

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 surface at times of crisis and stress.

Even though our idea of God may be correct,
we may still react fearfully when we hear God mentioned.

Like Adam and Eve after their fall,
we may react to God with shame and guilt.

God loves, before the fall and after the fall.

God does not change.

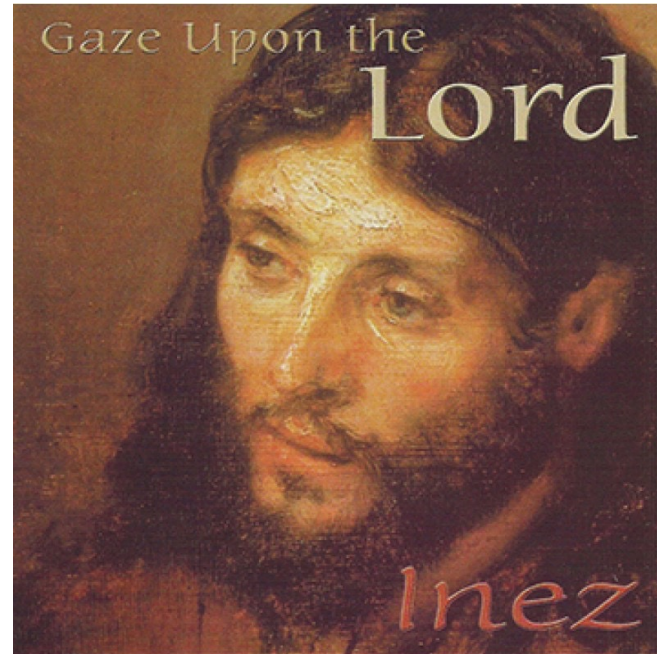
It is our image of God that can become distorted!

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.

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.



Jesus' disciples were attracted to Jesus

They came to see that he was revealing who God really is

Jesus reveals a God who wants us to “live and live to the full”(John 10:10).

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

Jesus is offering us a share in his faith in God,

in his communion with God

in the Spirit of love that unites him with his Father.

Jesus is journeying with us

I. The Distant God

In difficult moments we might discover that we know about God, but don't really know God. If that is true, Jesus might be just another historical figure.

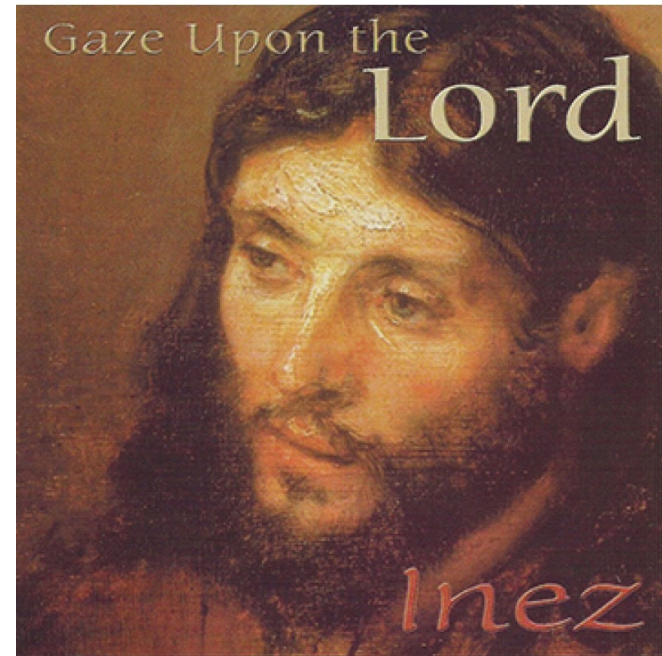
Maybe our religion has taught us about God the Creator, and about Jesus who died on a cross to save us, and something about the power of the Holy Spirit, but it is just information that we have stored in our heads.

One of the false images of God is to imagine God as far away and uninterested in us and our problems. It is a small step to think of God as irrelevant. Feeling that God is not someone we can depend upon, we try to be self-reliant, to keep control, or to look for someone that we can 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 want to sort things out for ourselves.

This is not the God revealed by Jesus.

God is not only the Creator of the Universe, but my creator, loving me into existence, and sustaining me to reflect God's being in my unique way.



“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 is
intimately involved in our lives.



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



2. The God of Rules and Regulations.

When we were growing up some of the significant adults around us who wanted us to behave, told us to be good – because God is watching us. We might still feel that God is in heaven, checking to see that we do everything perfectly.

We hear Jesus telling us: ‘Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect’ (Matthew 5:48). In the context Jesus is telling us that the kind of perfection that is the goal for Jesus’ disciples is the kind of perfection which we see in God: namely perfection in self-giving love.

The Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium, 1964] reminds us that we are all called to a life of holiness:

‘The holiness of the Church is constantly shown forth in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful. And so it must be. It is expressed in many ways by those who, each in his or her own state of life, tend to the perfection of love’(LG n.43).

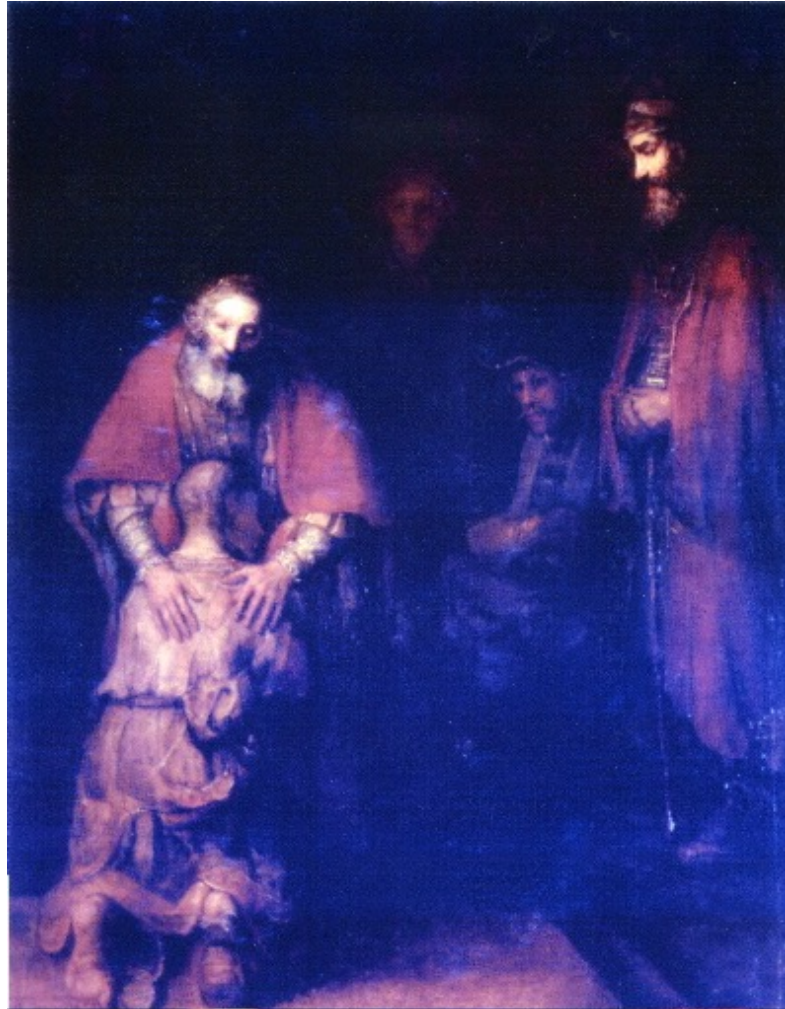
Of course there is need for rules and regulations, but if they become our key focus, rather than God as Love, we can distort the call to perfection.

Look at God as revealed by Jesus.



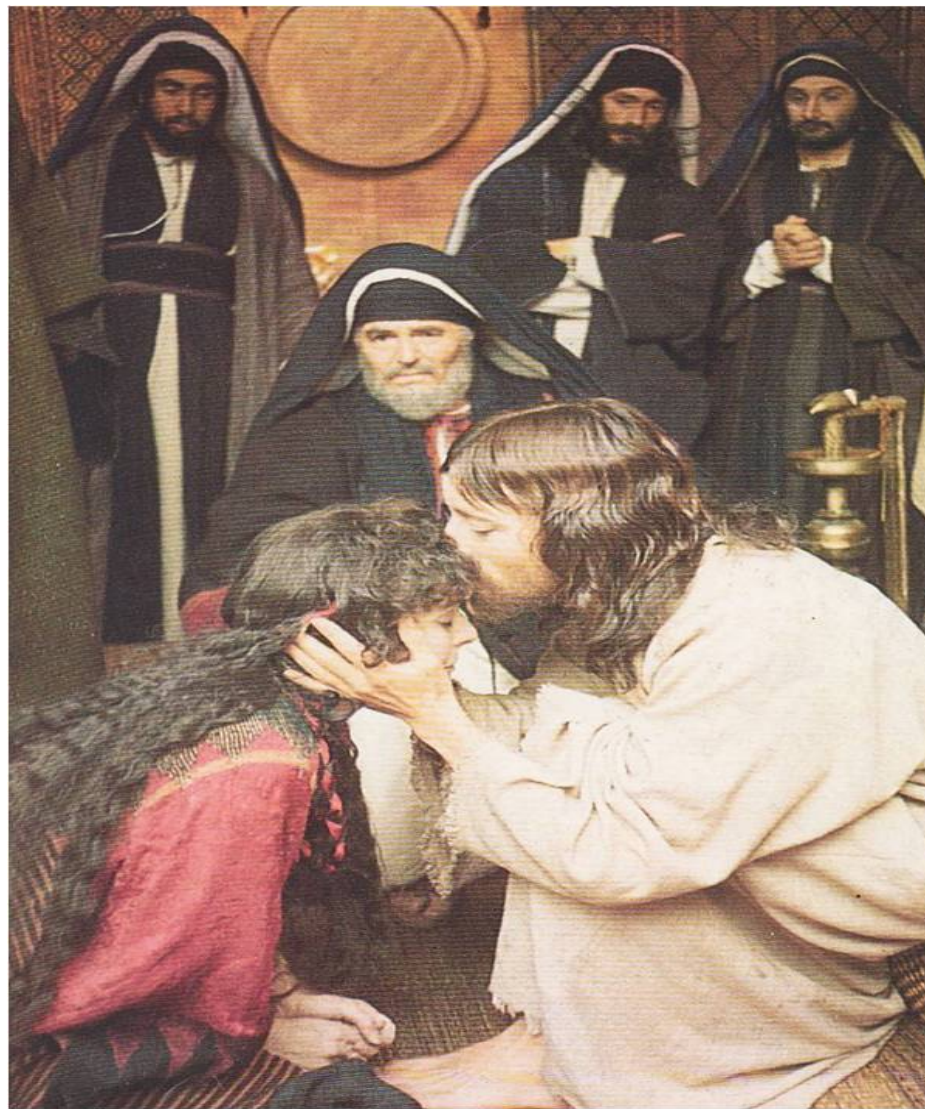
To the woman caught in adultery Jesus says:
“I do not condemn you. Go. Sin no more” (John 8: 11).

The true God is one who does not stop loving, even when we do.
God gazes upon us with love because God is Love.





‘Your sins are forgiven’ (Mark 2:5).



‘Her sins, her many sins, must have been forgiven, or she could not love so much’ (Luke 7:47).

3. The Testing, Punitive God.

In our roundedness we can think that the hurts, losses and disappointments in life are all tests from God. Then we think that suffering is a punishment given for not passing the test. This may be complicated by my thinking of myself as a failure.

This false image of an unforgiving and punishing God can lead us to fear God. This makes it hard to trust God and to listen to God offering us mercy and love.

This is not the image of God revealed by Jesus who is
'God-with-us', 'Emmanuel' (Matthew 1:23; see 28:20).

God is with us in the poverty of the stable where he was
born due to the oppressive census rules of politicians
and the indifference of the innkeeper in Bethlehem.

God is with the migrant refugee child and his parents in Egypt.

God is with us in the ordinary life in Nazareth.

God is with us when those nearest to us leave because they
cannot cope in the Garden of Gethsemane.

God is with us on our Calvary, when we feel abandoned
even by God.

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 said that he came to call sinners. We are never alone.



4. The Fatalistic God.

We have made our own the false picture of a God who micromanages creation, such that everything that happens is either willed by God or permitted by God. This leads to the idea that God is ultimately responsible for everything that goes wrong in the world, and, more specifically, in my world.

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.

‘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!

Happiness and Meaning are not found in having more, or in being more important or more powerful, but rather in receiving and giving love, which in its origins is divine.

We might let go of power and influence and become vulnerable enough allow for the healing touch of others.

5. Santa Claus God.

We think we have grown up and have left Santa Claus behind! But have we? When we have done everything we thought we should do, and have prayed diligently, and still God doesn't give us what we ask for, we might dismiss God the way we dismissed Santa.

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.

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.

“I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.

Everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened’ (Luke 11:9-10).

Don’t miss the next verses!

“Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish?

Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion?

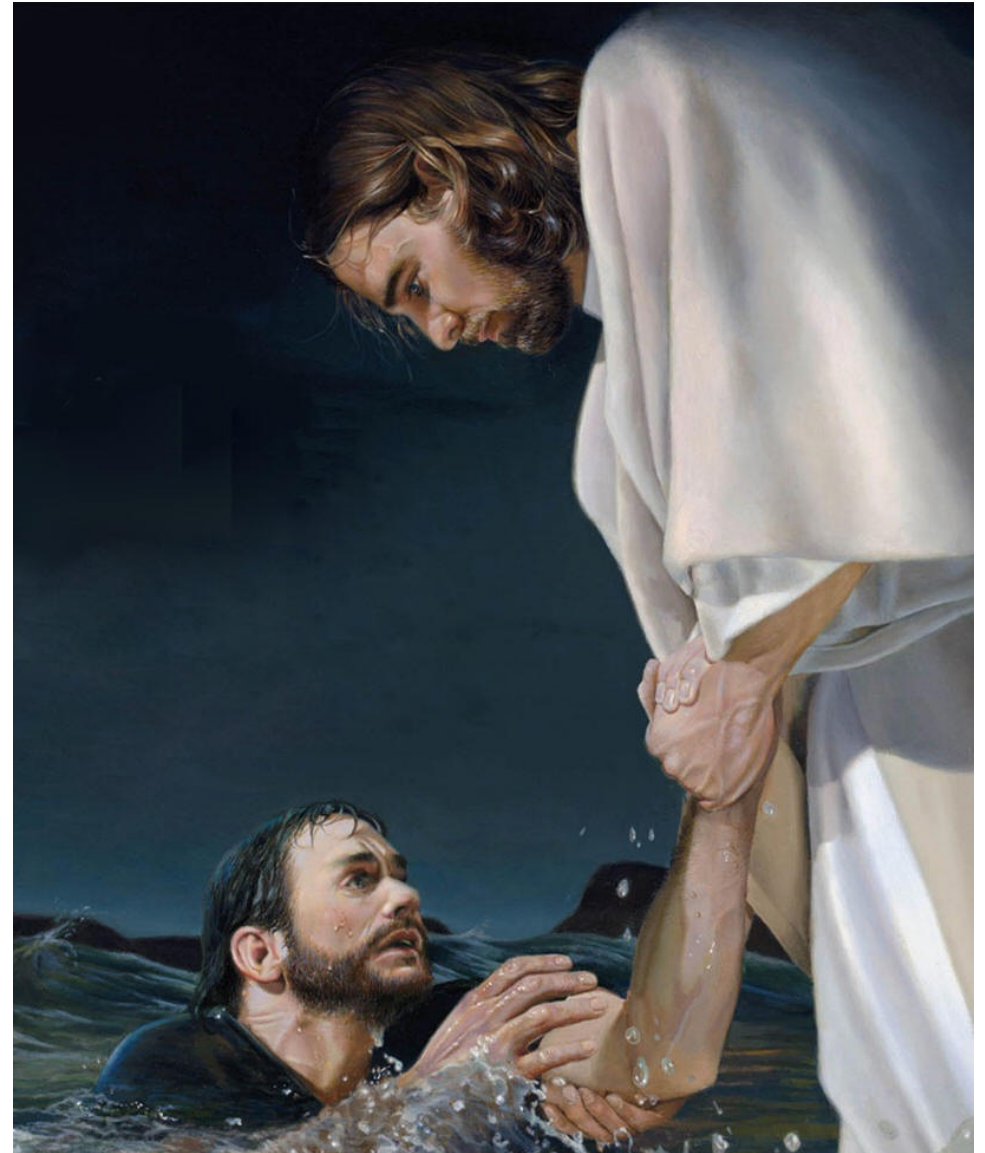
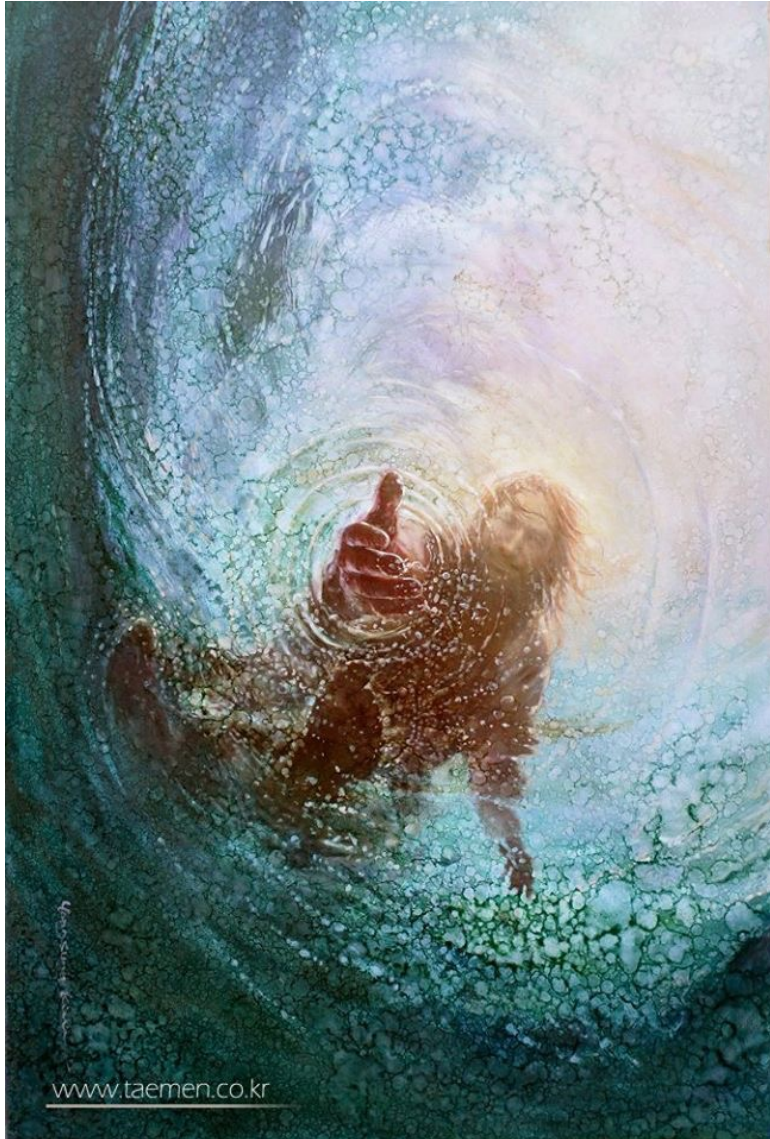
“If you then know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:11-13).

Be like a child and look to God and ask anything, so long as you end with Jesus’ words: “Not my will but yours be done” (Mark 14:36), or with Mary: “Let what you have said be done to me” (Luke 1:38).

Sometimes sickness or death of someone we love, or some other difficult event in our lives, will only take on meaning after a period of time, or perhaps even after this life. Without minimising the pain and suffering in different moments of our lives, we should recall that God is tenderly nearby, ready to nurture us and help us find meaning.

Jesus shows us in his life that listening to God and being faithful to God will give us hope in our suffering which will not end in death but in new and eternal life.

The storm on the Lake (Matthew 14:23-33)



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).



Chester Cathedral

Meditating on Jesus' as revealing God

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

1. Imagine the scene as vividly as you can.



2. Imagine yourself as the person who seeks healing from Jesus.

3. 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.

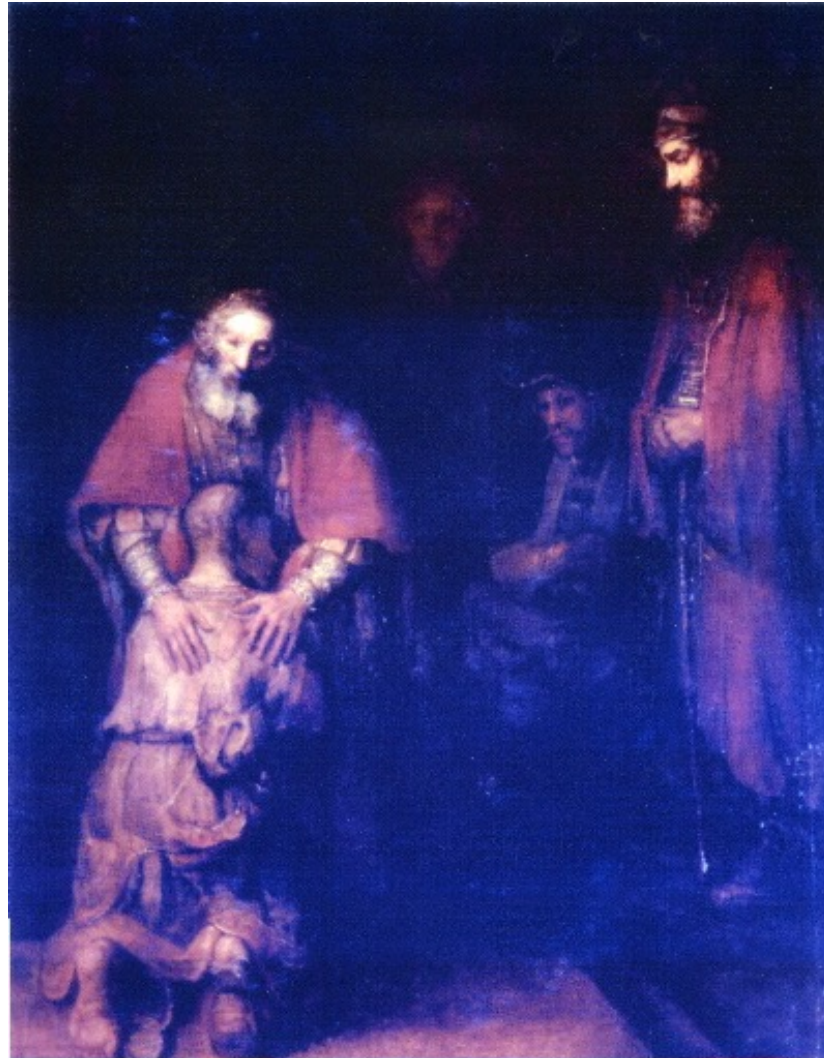
Then you share with him.

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.

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 healing a crippled woman
(Luke 13:10-17)



Reflect on Jesus in his Agony in the Garden



Reflect on Jesus on the cross





All you need to know