

**All Souls Church Unitarian**

**April 2015 Covenant Group Guide**

## **God**

If you let go of what isn't real in your life, what's left will be real: what's left is God alone.

Deepak Chopra

God is that infinite All of which man knows himself to be a finite part.

Leo Tolstoy

If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving. If God cannot do this, then it is time we got rid of Him.

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

Be careful how you talk about God. He's the only God we have. If you let him go he won't come back. He won't even look back over his shoulder. And then what will you do?

Harold Pinter, *Ashes to Ashes*

If we are made in the image of God, we actually can find out something about this Mind Behind It All by looking at ourselves, just as we can better understand the personalities of Michelangelo and Picasso and Monet by looking at their work. . . .

If God exists, there's nobody else in God's class. God is unutterably "other." We can't use the words person or know or love—or even exist—about God in anything remotely like the way we are persons who know, love, and exist. This limitation of language gives rise to the problem of anthropomorphism, applying to God the meanings of words as they apply to us—the only beings of whom we have firsthand knowledge. This is trying to understand God as if God were patterned on us rather than the other way around.

William J. O'Malley, *God: The Oldest Question: A Fresh Look at Belief and Unbelief*

If you don't feel strong desires for the manifestation of the glory of God it is not because you have drunk deeply and are satisfied. It is because you have nibbled so long at the table of the world. Your soul is stuffed with small things, and there is no room for the great.

John Piper, *A Hunger For God*

Truth is where God's been. Revelation is where God is. Truth is God's tracks. It's His trail, His path, but it leads to what? It leads to Him. Perhaps the masses of people are happy to know where God's been, but true God chasers are not content just to study God's trail, His truths; they want to know Him. They want to know where He is and what He's doing right now.

Tommy Tenney, *The God Chasers*

God's beneficence streams out from the morning sun, and his love looks down upon us from the starry eyes of midnight. It is his solicitude that wraps us in the air, and the pressure of his hand, so to speak, that keeps our pulses beating.

E.H. Chapin, *Living Words*

I cannot conceive of a God who rewards and punishes his creatures, or has a will of the type of which we are conscious in ourselves. An individual who should survive his physical death is also beyond my comprehension, nor do I wish it otherwise; such notions are for the fears or absurd egoism of feeble souls.

Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It*

God expects but one thing of you, and that is that you should come out of yourself in so far as you are a created being and let God be in you.

Aldous Huxley

God is like a mirror. The mirror never changes, but everybody who looks at it sees something different.

Harold S. Kushner

### **First He Looked Confused**

I could not lie anymore so I started to call my dog, "God."  
First he looked confused,  
Then he started smiling, then he even danced.  
I kept at it: now he doesn't even bite.  
I am wondering if this might work on people.

Tukarum, *Love Poems from God*

### **The Scientist and God**

A scientist approaches God, and says to Him, "Look, God, we don't need you anymore. Nowadays, we can do all sorts of things that used to be considered miraculous. We can transplant organs, giving new life to a dying man, we can cure almost any disease, and we can even clone animals. It won't be long, and we'll be able to clone humans, too. So, I'm sorry, but you are just outdated."

God listens patiently to the scientist and says, "I can see that you believe you don't need me, and I understand. However, I love you, and I don't want to see you make a big mistake, so why don't we make sure? I say we should have a man-making contest, just to be sure."

The scientist replies, "I'll take that challenge."

So, God says, "Ok, let's do it the way I did it in the old days, with Adam and Eve." The scientist says, "No problem," and reaches down to scoop up a handful of dirt.

"Whoa, hold on there a minute," God says. "You get your OWN dirt."

A joke related by Stephen Knapp at [stephenknapp.com](http://stephenknapp.com)

### **Personal Experience and the God We Are Taught**

Our acquired associations with the word "God" can overwhelm our ability to relate God to our own experience. . . . What we so often receive as a description of God is of a being, outside of ourselves, outside even nature, that is perfect, all knowing, all powerful, and all good. Because it is perfect – it never changes. Because it is all knowing, it sees all that is, was and will be. Because it is all powerful it can dictate and control everything that happens. And because it is all good, its actions and choices are always just.

Take a look around you at this world – does that fit your experience? It does not comport with mine. Take a look at Torah, does that fit the God you see there? . . . The God we see in Torah makes mistakes, changes its mind, is persuadable, and does not always know what is coming.

If we reject the idea of an omnipotent, all powerful determiner of our fate, do we have to reject God? If the word God is just a finger pointing to the moon, but is not the moon, can we point it in another direction? Can we rehabilitate this word in a way that better reflects our experience and incorporates the revelations of science in a way that does not separate science from spirit? Can doing so provide a way to relate to Torah in a meaningful, relevant and authentic way?

We could start by replacing the omnipotent, all powerful arbiter of all fate with this description:

“God” is not an entity or a being outside of ourselves, but is an interactive “process” that is the source and force of all phenomena, including ourselves; that the essence of this process is creative, relational (that is interactive and collaborative-not isolated) is constantly evolving, and that The power of this process is persuasive, not coercive. It aims us toward the most life-affirming choices for our lives, choices that influence not just our lives but the larger community of life and the evolving manifestation of God itself.

Ann Kline, in an address to her synagogue

### **God in Popular Song**

Al Green, *God Is Standing By* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=3\\_f\\_cugM2Ps](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_f_cugM2Ps))

Mick Jagger, *God Gave Me Everything I Want* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRebxwqsewA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRebxwqsewA))

Leonard Cohen (Buffy Saint-Marie), *God Is Alive, Magic Is Afoot*  
([www.youtube.com/watch?v=3enVT53yDLM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3enVT53yDLM))

Bob Dylan, *With God on Our Side* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tyljfE-tlk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tyljfE-tlk))

George Strait, *I Saw God Today* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=q06AvQF5NOw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q06AvQF5NOw))

Elton John, *If There's a God in Heaven (What's He Waiting for?)*  
([www.youtube.com/watch?v=sA2CiM52AIE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sA2CiM52AIE))

## Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. God is \_\_\_\_\_. What comes to mind first as you fill in the blank? Does your answer surprise you?
2. Is the question of whether or not there is a God a big deal to you? If you do believe in God, is this God a constant companion? A distant relative? A reassuring presence? What exactly?
3. How does what you've been taught about God relate to your personal experience?
4. How does your personal history, the work that you do, the roles that you play feed into your experience of God?
5. Have you been moved in your understanding of God by the beliefs of others? Do you talk about your beliefs? Do you know what your closest friends believe about God? Is it better to know or not know or does it matter at all?
6. Is there a vital connection between your beliefs about God and how you act in the world?
7. Are you in the presence of God when you attend services? All the time? On a hike? While meditating? When you pray? When listening to particular music? Does God come to you or do you come to God?
8. How does your participation at All Souls align with your understanding of God and the will of God?

Prepared for All Souls Covenant Groups by Mary Beth Hatem