

PARENTS & TEACHERS
InFormation

Week 2
Who am I?

The questions of Who am I? and Who is God? Are the most fundamental ones a child can ask. As parents and teachers, how we understand the nature and character of God and communicate it to children will have a significant impact on their spiritual formation.

Reflect back on your own early image of God . (You may want to look at the exercises in the Congregation InFormation packet.) Who helped form that image? Chances are that it was a parent, grandparent, or Sunday School teacher. What did that image teach you to expect from God? What did it mean that God expected from you?

For some of us, God was a being who demanded good behavior, and was angry if when we failed to live up to high standards. Although the Bible does use the image of God as Righteous Judge, if that is the only image (or one of the few) that we share with children, we have presented an incomplete, distorted, and ultimately de-forming image that children will have to un-learn if they are ever to relate to God as loving, nurturing, protecting, and forgiving.

Children have a more natural affinity for prayer than most adults—they have less religious baggage, fewer distractions, and an ability to let go of control. Children can be encouraged to imagine God with a rich variety of concrete biblical images (rock, fortress, shepherd, Father) and abstract ones (light, Word, love). They can also take images from their own experience (friend, mentor) and use the best of those things to help imagine what God is like. As adults we may have learned to say one thing about God (“God is love”) while actually believing another (God is keeping track of my wrong-doings). Children haven’t learned to dissemble in this way: how they imagine God will shape how they see themselves and how they pray. As a parent or teacher, you may be the face of God to a young child, a reminder that “the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” (Matthew 19:14)