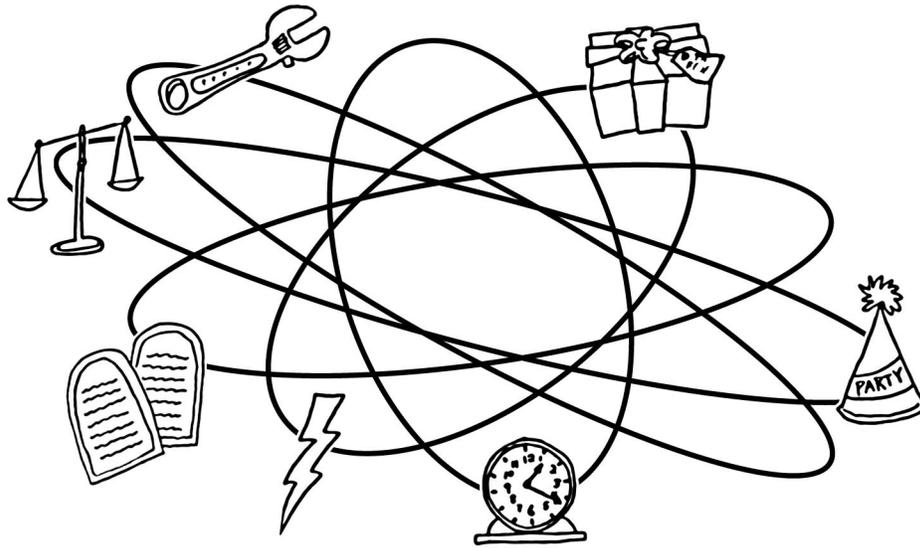


Cosmic Sheriff



GOD VIEWS



The above swirling mass of energy and images is presented to represent some aspects of God (e.g., justice, law, power, etc.). Take a few moments to consider whether or not there is a certain aspect of God's character that stands out in your mind. Perhaps it is captured by one of the above images. If not, draw it in above.

Now consider what the effect would be if you saw God only in terms of that one image. Write about this below.

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Bible Study

READ MATTHEW 23:23-26

²³ *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ²⁴You blind guides! You strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.*

²⁵ *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.*

1 What does this passage tell us about what God considers to be the most important matters of the law?

2 What does the passage have to say about where our attention should be focused?

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3 In the larger context of Matthew 23, verses 23-25 represent one of the “Seven Woes” Jesus hurled at the Pharisees. There are many good things about the Pharisees. They had great respect for the Torah and the oral tradition and lived lives of scrupulous conformity to the law. Why do you suppose that the Pharisees emerged as a group who received Jesus’ harshest criticisms?

4 What is the process by which a Christian goes about cleaning the “inside” of his or her “cup and dish”?

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GOD VIEWS

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Have you ever experienced a passage of Scripture? There is an historic way of reading Scripture that makes it possible to do just that. Ignatius of Loyola called it the “application of the senses.” It works like this. Read a familiar passage of Scripture until it is almost memorized. Then, with your eyes closed, meditate on the words. As they move across your mind, let the passage turn into a scene from a movie. Then watch that “movie” five times. One time for each of your five senses. Step into the passage. Experience it with your senses.

1 Sight.

First time through, notice what you see. What are the people wearing? What is the time of day—and how does that affect the colors you see? What expressions are on the faces you see?

2 Sound

Then play the movie again and notice what you hear. What do the voices sound like? Is there background noise—the sound of wind or water? Animal noises? The sound of sandals on sand, or pots and pans?

3 Touch

Third time through, notice what you feel. Experience the passage with your sense of touch. Notice if there is a breeze. Notice what the ground feels like if you are seated there. Be aware if any of the characters in the passage bump into you or put a hand on your back.

4 Smell

Notice any smells (baking bread, a field of flowers, the smell of grass).

5 Taste

Finally, be aware of any tastes that might present themselves to you from the passage.

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GOD VIEWS

The purpose of this exercise is to experience more deeply a familiar passage of Scripture and to be open to any insight of teaching that God may want to present to you. The idea is, if we will take the time to slow down and listen, God always has something new for us to learn about Him.

Apply this ancient prayer form (the application of the senses) to one or more of the following passages of Scripture. It will be better to use only one passage per exercise time—approximately 10 minutes.

Psalm 23
John 1:10-18

Mathew 9:9-13
John 3:1-17

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GOD VIEWS

An Additional Story

Sometimes it is hard to let go of the notion of God as a cosmic sheriff for fear that if He is too compassionate, all the “work” won’t get done. If you are wrestling with this, see if this illustration helps.

It was the day of the prom when the two boys got in trouble at school. The principal sent them both home. Suspended for the day.

The first boy was distraught. “How can this be?” he thought. “When my dad finds out, he’ll ground me for a year. I’ll miss the prom. I’ve got to do something!”

And he did. He went outside, started the lawn mower, and spent the whole day working in the hot sun. And as he worked, he worried.

“I hope this will be enough at least to earn the freedom to go to the prom. I don’t care what he does to me after this, but I can’t miss the prom. What if this isn’t enough? Maybe he won’t even find out until later—after the prom. But he’ll see all this work I’ve done and know I was home. Oh, no! But this is my only chance. He can’t punish me tonight after I’ve done all this for him.”

The father arrived home. He had already learned about his son’s suspension and was ready to pounce on him. But when he saw all the work he had done, he said, “Son, you are in such deep trouble. But I do respect all the work you’ve put in around here today. Go ahead and go to your prom. But tomorrow we’ll talk about your punishment.”

The boy went to the prom, but he could not stop worrying about what the next day would bring. He had a miserable time.

The second boy went home in tears. He sat in his room all day feeling bad about what he had done, ready to accept the additional punishment he knew would come.

An hour before it was time to leave for the prom, his father opened the door to his room. He saw the tears in his son’s eyes, and said, “Shouldn’t you be getting ready? You’ve got a big night ahead.”

“Didn’t you hear, Dad? I got suspended from school today. I did something really stupid...”

“It’s prom night, Son. I can see you know you made a mistake. We can talk about that tomorrow.”

And with that he sailed his set of car keys across the room. “Better take my car, Son. I washed it for you on the way home.”

The boy had a wonderful time at the prom. But half of his joy was thinking about how much his father loved him.

The next morning he got up early and spent the day doing yard work. But unlike the first son, he whistled the whole time—that is, when he wasn’t smiling and thinking about how wonderful his father is. The work still got done, but unlike the first son, it was done with a whistle, and out of a deep sense of appreciation for a father’s love.

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GOD VIEWS

Transparency

Session Outline

I. INTRODUCTION



- Welcome
- Prayer
- Review

II. WARM-UP



- Retelling of the Synopsis
- Exercises and Discussion
- God and Putt-Putt Golf

III. CONTENT



- Video Vignette
- Class Response
- Discussion/Exercises

IV. BIBLE STUDY



- Small Groups or All Together

V. SUMMARY



- Review

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