

HE SAID WHAT?!?!

Title: Part 2 – “You’ve Been Looking at the Wrong God”

Date: April 19, 2026

While everyone here in the house is saying “Hi” I want to welcome everyone joining us online or on our app. Thanks for hanging out with us! We consider you a part of our church family, so let us know how we can pray for you or serve you this week. AND if this message blesses you then consider sharing it with a friend.

If you have a Bible with you today or on your phone, let’s head to **John chapter 14**. If you don't have a Bible, no worries, we will throw everything up on the screens. But before we read anything, let me set the scene for you, because where this conversation takes place matters.

So, it’s Thursday night of Holy Week. Tomorrow, Jesus will be arrested, beaten, and crucified. He knows it. The disciples don't. They're in an upstairs room somewhere in Jerusalem. They've just finished dinner. Jesus has just washed their feet. He's just told them that one of them will betray Him. Judas has already left the room. The mood is heavy. There's confusion in the air. And into that heaviness, Jesus begins to speak. Here's what He says, starting in verse 1:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸ Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

We are in week two of a collection of messages called “He Said What?” that is all about meeting the real Jesus in His own words. Last week we started at Caesarea Philippi where Jesus asked the most important question ever asked (does anyone remember it?): “Who do you say I am?” And Peter gave the right answer: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

SO, if week one was about the identity of Jesus—who is He—then the natural next question is what does He reveal about the One who sent Him? If Jesus really is the Son of God, what does that tell us about God the Father? What does that tell us about what God is actually like?

Because I think a lot of people, maybe even a lot of people in this room, have a picture of God in their heads that doesn't look anything like Jesus. And that picture is doing real damage to our souls.

SO, today I want to preach a message I am calling:

You've Been Looking at the Wrong God

Here is the tension I want to work with today. If I were to walk through this room with a microphone and ask each of you to describe God—not the church answer, not the Sunday school answer, but what you actually believe about Him deep down in your gut when life gets hard—I think we would get a pretty wide range of responses.

Some of you would describe a loving Father. And that's beautiful.

But I think some of you, if you were really honest, would describe something closer to a **disappointed boss**. A God who's keeping score. A God who tolerates you but doesn't really enjoy you. A God who's always a little bit frustrated with your lack of progress. You know He loves you theoretically, you've heard the verse, you've seen the bumper sticker, but if someone asked you, "Does God actually LIKE you?" A lot of us might say something like, "Well, that depends on the day..."

Some of you might describe God as an **absent landlord**. He exists. He created everything. He set things in motion. But He's not really involved in the day-to-day. He's distant. He's cosmic. He's out there somewhere. But He's not here. Not in your mess. Not on Tuesday in rush hour traffic. Not in your anxiety at 2 am when you can't sleep.

BUT others of you, and I want to be gentle here, others of you would describe a God who looks a lot like the **person who hurt you** the most. Your dad who was never satisfied. Your mom who was emotionally unavailable. Your coach who only noticed your mistakes. Your ex who made you feel like you were never enough. A teacher who humiliated you. A pastor who used the Bible like a weapon. You didn't set out to project that onto God. Nobody does. But somewhere along the way, that wound became a lens. And now everything you read in the Bible, everything you hear in church, gets filtered through a picture of God that was never accurate in the first place.

I actually think this is one of the biggest issues in the American church right now. We've got millions of people walking around with a distorted image of God, trying to have a relationship with a caricature, and wondering why it's not working. They're exhausted from performing for a God who never asked them to perform. They're hiding from a God who came looking for them. They're trying to earn the love of a God who already paid the highest price to demonstrate it.

AND I'm not talking about people outside the church. Some of the most distorted views of God I've ever encountered are from people who've been in church their whole lives. Because sometimes religion adds layers to the distortion instead of stripping them away. Amen?

A.W. Tozer wrote one of the most quoted sentences in all of Christian literature. He said:

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

Let that sink in for a second. The most important thing about you is not your job title, your bank account, your relationship status, your follower count. The most important thing about you is what you think God is like. Because that picture—whether it's accurate or distorted—will shape every decision you make, every relationship you have, and every crisis you walk through.

SO, what do you do when your picture of God is wrong? What do you do when the God you've been reacting to, running from, or trying to earn the approval of isn't actually the God who's there?

Jesus answers that in seven words. Seven words that changed everything for His band of followers. But before we look at them again, here's the first thing I want you to see today:

1. You might be rejecting a God that Jesus would reject too.

Right? Maybe the reason you keep God at a safe distance (even as a believer) is because you don't have a full picture of who He really is.

SO, let's go back and look at what happens in John 14. Philip, one of Jesus 12 disciples, has been with Jesus for three years. He's seen the healings. He's heard the sermons. He's watched Jesus calm storms, multiply bread, cast out demons. Three years of front-row access to the most extraordinary life ever lived. And after all of that, here's what Philip says: ⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Now on one hand, that's a beautiful request. There's an ache in that. Philip wants more. He wants a burning bush, a pillar of fire, a trembling mountain, something transcendent. He's saying, "Jesus, everything you've done is amazing, but I need to see GOD. Can you just pull back the curtain?"

And I think Philip represents so many people today. People who have been around church for years. People who have read the Bible, served on teams, sat through sermons. But deep down, they're still asking, "Where is God? I want to know what God is actually like."

And here's what breaks my heart. For a lot of those people, the reason they can't see God isn't because God is hiding. It's because they're looking for the wrong God. They've got a picture of the Father in their mind that was handed to them by someone or something other than Jesus.

Maybe it was a religious system that taught them God was primarily angry and needed to be appeased. Maybe it was a parent who was physically present but emotionally checked out, so they assume God is the same way. Maybe it was a church experience where they were shamed, controlled, or made to feel like they could never measure up. And all of that formed a picture. And now they're asking God to reveal Himself, but they're looking for a God who doesn't exist.

I cannot tell you how many conversations I have had as a pastor in my office, at lunch, after services... where someone tells me they're angry at God. And as I listen to their story, I realize they're not angry at God. They're angry at a version of God that Jesus would be angry at too. They've rejected a god who was never there in the first place.

I mean, think about it. If someone described your spouse or your best friend in a way that was totally inaccurate—I mean they got the personality wrong, the motives wrong, the character wrong—wouldn't you say, "I don't know who you're describing, but that's not the person I know." That's what's happening with so many people and God. They're rejecting a version of God that God Himself would reject. And the tragedy is they walk away thinking they've walked away from the real thing when they've actually only walked away from the counterfeit.

I've seen this play out so many times. Someone has a terrible church experience—they were shamed, they were judged, they were made to feel small—and they leave. And I don't blame them for leaving that. But they don't just leave a bad church. They leave God. Because in their mind, the bad church and God are the same thing. The pastor who wounded them and God are the same person. But they're not! Jesus would have flipped the tables in some of those churches too. Jesus is not the God who hurt you. Jesus is the God who's furious that you were hurt in His name.

This is what Brennan Manning was getting at when he wrote:

“God loves you as you are, not as you should be, because you will never be as you should be.”

So many people are trying to become acceptable to a God who already accepts them. They're trying to earn the love of someone who has already given it. And the reason they can't receive it is because their picture of the Giver is all wrong.

AND I am not trying to play a psychologist here, no couch for you to lie down on, but MOST of the time this happens in childhood. Maybe you have heard about attachment theory. Attachment theory says an early, consistent, and responsive bond between a child and their caregiver is crucial for healthy emotional development and for healthy future relationships. And that makes sense, right? BUT now take that a step further to our relationship with God.

If you grew up with a parent who was inconsistent, sometimes warm, sometimes explosive, and you never knew which one you were going to get—research shows you are significantly more likely to view God the same way. Unpredictable. Unreliable. Someone you can't quite trust.

If you grew up with a parent who was emotionally cold or distant, they provided for you, they kept the lights on, but there was no warmth, no affection, no tenderness—research you are more likely to view God as distant and uninvolved. A cosmic clockmaker who wound things up and walked away.

And if you grew up with a parent who used love as a weapon, conditional love, approval based on performance, withdrawal of affection as punishment—you are very likely to see God as someone who loves you when you're good and pulls away when you're not. And you will spend the rest of your life trying to perform for a God who never asked you to perform.

The research on this over the past few years just confirms what I've watched happen in people's lives over and over again. People don't form their view of God in a theology class. They form it in their living room. They form it at the kitchen table. They form it in the moments where they needed safety and either got it or didn't.

In fact, we have a book in the lobby called *“The Seven Primal Questions”* that goes into this in detail, but this isn't just about people with traumatic childhoods. This affects all of us to some degree. Even good, loving parents are imperfect mirrors of God. Every earthly relationship is a cracked lens. That's not a criticism of your parents—they were probably doing their best. It's a recognition that no human being can perfectly represent an infinite

God. Which is exactly why we need Jesus. Because Jesus isn't a cracked lens. He's the exact representation. He's the uncracked, unfiltered, undistorted image of who God actually is.

Here's my point. For a lot of people, your image of God is not theological. It's emotional. It's not something you read in a book. It's something that happened to you in a home. And unless that picture gets corrected, you will spend the rest of your life reacting to a God who was never real.

SO, how does it get corrected? That brings us to the second thing. Write this down first:

2. Familiarity doesn't equal intimacy.

You can be around Jesus your whole life and still not truly see Him, just ask the guy who walked with Him for three years. Philip spent over 1,000 days in Jesus' physical presence and still asked to see God. BUT listen to how Jesus responds. Listen for His tone, because the tone is everything. Verse 9:

⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?"

Now, in English that can sound like a scolding. Like Jesus is annoyed. But the Greek tells a different story. The tone here isn't anger. It's lament. There's a sadness to it. There's a heartbreak. Jesus is essentially saying, "Philip, I've been showing you the Father every single day for three years. Every healing? That was the Father. Every meal we shared? That was the Father. Every time I stopped for the outcast, touched the leper, forgave the sinner, wept with the grieving? That was the Father. How have you missed it?"

Three years of proximity. And Philip still didn't see it. Which is so humbling to me. Because if Philip can be in Jesus' physical presence for three years and miss it then I have to admit that it's possible to be around Jesus for a really long time and still not truly see Him. I can go to church every Sunday. I can serve. I can sing and worship. I can have a JoyFM sticker on my car and still not truly know the God I claim to follow.

Proximity does not equal intimacy. Attendance does not equal encounter. Familiarity does not equal seeing.

I think this is one of the most sobering things in the entire New Testament. Because it's not the skeptics and the atheists who missed God in the Gospels. It's the people who were closest to Jesus! The Pharisees missed Him because they were too religious. Philip nearly missed Him because he was too familiar.

And I wonder if that's some of us today. We've been around Jesus so long that we've stopped seeing Him. We've heard the stories so many times that they've lost their voltage. We sing songs about His presence and check our phones during the bridge. We read about His power at church and then go home and worry ourselves to sleep. We've domesticated the most untameable being in the universe and wondered why our faith feels boring!

I had someone say to me not long ago, "I just feel like God is so far away." And I said, "I get it... I have felt that way before, especially in pain. But when was the last time you actually stopped and looked at Jesus? Not watched a sermon about Him. Not listened to a podcast about Him. Actually sat with one story from the Gospels and let it get inside you?" And they looked at me and said, "I honestly can't remember ever doing that."

Lovingly as your pastor I want to say, "And that's the problem." We're consuming content about God like we consume everything else—scrolling through it at the speed of light. But Jesus is not content to be consumed. He wants to be encountered. And encounter requires slowing down, getting quiet, and actually looking.

There's a big difference between information and revelation. Information tells you facts about God. Revelation shows you who God is. Information you can get from a book. Revelation requires the Holy Spirit. Information changes your mind. Revelation changes your life. Philip had three years of information. What he needed was revelation. And Jesus was standing right there waiting to give it to him.

Don't miss the weight of what Jesus is saying. He's not saying, "Philip, try harder." He's saying, "Philip, open your eyes. I'm RIGHT HERE." That's not a scolding. That's an invitation.

And it's the same invitation He's offering you today. You don't need a burning bush. You don't need an audible voice. You don't need to go to seminary or attend a conference or have some mystical experience on a mountaintop. You need to look at Jesus. That's it. Look at Him. Because what you're going to see in Him is the exact representation of the Father's heart.

Which brings us to the third thing, and this is the big one:

3. If you want to know what God is like, just look at Jesus.

Look at the rest of verse 9, Jesus looks Philip in the eyes and says:

Anyone who has seen me has SEEN the Father.

That's the one-liner. Seven words that turned the disciples world upside down. Jesus says just look at Me, I and My Father are one. This isn't Jesus saying, "I'm similar to the Father." Or, "I kind of look like Him." This isn't, "I'm a good likeness." This is Jesus saying, "You have been staring at God and didn't realize it."

The writer of Hebrews puts it this way: (Heb 1:3)

3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

The Greek word used here is charaktēr {Car Ach Tear}. It's where we get our English word... who can guess... "character!" But originally, it didn't mean imitating someone's personality. It referred to the impression a seal makes when pressed into hot wax. You know those old wax seals on letters? The stamp goes in, and the wax receives a perfect imprint. Every detail. Every line. Every curve. That's the word.

Jesus isn't an approximation of God. He's not a rough sketch. He's not "close enough." He's the imprint. He's the wax that received the seal. He is the exact, complete, perfect revelation of who God is. If you want to know what God thinks about sin, look at how Jesus handles the woman caught in adultery. If you want to know what God thinks about religious hypocrisy, watch Jesus flip tables in the temple. If you want to know what God does with grief, watch Him weep at the tomb of Lazarus. If you want to know how God treats the outcast, watch Jesus eat dinner with tax collectors and sinners.

Everything you need to know about God, you can find in Jesus. Everything!

And that means if your picture of God can't be demonstrated by something Jesus said or did, your picture is wrong. I'll say that again because someone needs to hear it. If your theology about God doesn't look like the life of Jesus, your theology needs to be updated.

You think God is disgusted by you? Show me where Jesus was disgusted by a sinner who came to Him honestly. I'll wait... no? You think God is keeping score? Show me where Jesus pulled out a ledger before He healed someone! You think God gives up on people? Show me where Jesus threw in the towel on Peter—the guy who denied Him three times! You think God can't handle your mess? Jesus was born into a mess, touched lepers, and hung on a cross between two criminals! Mess is literally where He does His best work!

Come on, somebody needs to let this recalibrate their entire picture of God today! The God you've been afraid of? He's not the God who's actually there! The God who's actually there looks like Jesus weeping at a funeral! He looks like Jesus stopping a crowd to notice one woman who touched the hem of His garment! He looks like Jesus washing the feet of the man who would betray Him hours later! THAT is our God. That is what the Father looks like!

You want to see the Father? You're looking at Him and His name is Jesus!

And I know some of you are thinking, "That sounds too good to be true." I get it. It does sound too good. But here's what I've learned about the Gospel: if it doesn't sound too good, it's not the Gospel. The whole thing IS too good! That's why it's called Good News! It's supposed to wreck your expectations! It's supposed to be better than you thought!

So, hear me, whatever picture of God you've been carrying around—whether it was given to you by a parent, a church, a teacher, a painful experience, or just years of assuming the worst—Jesus says you can let it go. You can bring it to Him and say, "Is this what You're really like?" And He'll say, "No, Philip. I'm like this. Look at Me."

Let me say this to some of you who need to hear it today. You have been exhausted. You have been trying to keep up with a God who was never racing you. You have been trying to earn the approval of someone who already approves of you. You have been covering and hiding and performing and striving, and I'm telling you today on the authority of Scripture that the God who is actually on the throne is not the God you've been afraid of!

He's the God who washes feet! He's the God who weeps at funerals! He's the God who eats with sinners! He's the God who touches lepers and stops for one broken woman in a crowd of thousands! THAT is your Father! And He looks exactly like Jesus! If the only thing you take away from today is that one truth—God looks like Jesus—it will be enough to change the trajectory of your faith.

And look, some of you are new to this. Some of you are coming back after years away. And I just want to say this to you directly: if you left church or walked away from faith because of a God who felt cold, distant, angry, or impossible to please, I want you to know I'm not here to defend bad theology or bad church experiences. Some of you encountered something that looked nothing like Jesus, and it was labeled "Christianity," and I'm sorry for that. BUT I am asking you to give Jesus one more look. Not religion. Not a system. Not an institution. Jesus. Because the God He reveals is not the God you walked away from. He's the God you've been looking for.

Dallas Willard once said:

"The aim and substance of spiritual life is not fasting, praying, hymn singing, frugal living, and so on. Rather, it is the effective and full enjoyment of the active love of God and humankind in all the daily rounds of normal existence where we are placed."

The full enjoyment of the active love of God. That's what this is. This isn't about getting more religious. This isn't about trying harder or being better. It's about coming home to a Father who has been waiting for you. A Father who looks exactly like Jesus.

SO, I want to give you two things to carry with you this week.

If you're someone who is searching, skeptical, or just not sure what you believe about God, I'm asking you to do one thing. This week, read one chapter of the Gospel of John per day. You can start where we were today in chapter 14 and by next Sunday you will finish the book. And as you read, I just want you to watch what Jesus does. Watch how He talks to people. Watch how He handles fear, pain, betrayal, and death. And then ask yourself this question: "Is this the God I've been angry at? Is this the God I walked away from? Or is this someone I've never actually met?"

Because I think for some of you, the God you've been running from isn't the God who's been chasing you. Because the God who has been chasing you looks like a man who would rather die on a cross than spend eternity without you. That's not a distant God. That's not an angry God. That's a God who is relentlessly, stubbornly, scandalously in love with you. And He's been waiting for you to turn around and see Him for who He really is.

AND for those of you who are already friends of Jesus, here's my challenge. I think some of us need to update our picture. Not because it was always wrong, but because familiarity has dulled it. Philip had been with Jesus for three years and still needed a reset. Maybe you do too.

This week, take 5 minutes a day (just 5, set a timer on your phone) and meditate on one scene from Jesus' life. Not a chapter. Not a study. Just one scene. Jesus calming the storm. Jesus touching the leper. Jesus with the woman at the well. Jesus weeping at the tomb. And as you sit and meditate on that scene, let it reshape your image of the Father. Let Jesus through your mind's eye reintroduce you to God.

Because that's exactly what He's been trying to do since the Upper Room. Philip just needed to open his eyes. Maybe you do too.

For all of us, let's allow Jesus words to sink in, He opened this passage by saying this:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me."

Before the theology. Before the I-am-the-way declaration. Before the mind-blowing claim about the Father. He simply said, "Don't let your hearts be troubled."

Maybe that's the word for you today. You've been troubled. You've been carrying a heavy picture of a heavy God. You've been exhausted by the performance, overwhelmed by the distance, suffocated by the silence. And Jesus says, "Stop. Look at Me. I'm not what you expected. I'm better. And I'm not going anywhere."

The God you didn't expect is the God who has been here the whole time. And He looks exactly like Jesus. Would you bow your heads with me?

[PRAYER TIME]