

:: summary

How accurately could you describe something or someone you have only observed through a telescope? The problem with speculating from a distance is that our perceptions are not always accurate, and we can easily come to false conclusions based on misunderstandings. This is a constant hazard when we make inferences about what God is like from a distance, looking through the subjective lens of life experience. For example, sometimes life experience can make it seem like God is far away, but distance is a matter of perception and the God who reveals Himself in the Bible wants us to see Him as He truly is right in front of us.

:: discussion

Deism, from the Latin *deus* or “god,” is a philosophical belief that rose out of the 17th century scientific revolution in Europe and came to prominence during the Enlightenment. Based on scientific and natural laws, Deism presumes God to be a great “clockmaker,” who created and wound up the universe and then withdrew from His creation to let it run on its own. This philosophy is based on human reason, not revelation from God.

Have you ever come to a false conclusion about something or someone based on a misunderstanding? What were the circumstances and how did you discover you were wrong?

Read Genesis 16:1-7

Especially without much context, this is a challenging and confusing passage that could easily lead to all kinds of conclusions about what God is like. A reading of this passage in the original historical and cultural context reveals a situation that was not uncommon for families in the ancient Near East, where Hagar acts as a surrogate for Abram and Sarai. However, jealousy and the mistreatment of Hagar cause her to flee into the desert to face dire circumstances.

Have you ever been in challenging life circumstances where God felt distant or you wondered where God was? What were those circumstances and what conclusions did you make about God at that time?

Read Genesis 16:8-12

Like Hagar, we have all had moments when we run away, or sometimes we feel like God has run away from us when we need Him. In this passage, God reveals His presence with Hagar in her place of desperation, and tells her to name her son Ishma'el or “God who hears” and makes a promise to continue her family line.

Considering the same challenging life experience from the previous question, how might this truth God reveals about being the one “who hears” have changed your experience and perception of God?

Read Genesis 16:13-16

In the ancient Near East, a name said something about the essence of what or who was named. We can know God's character and heart by His names, which describe His essence, and the name He reveals to us in this passage through Hagar's personal experience is El-Ro'i (rah-ee), or “the God who sees.” God is close enough to hear and present enough to see and even know experientially what you are going through.

How does it make you feel to know that you matter in God's eyes and He sees *you*?

Distance is a matter of perception. As God revealed himself to Hagar, so He reveals himself to you as El-Ro'i (rah-ee), the ever-present “God who sees.” God sees regular people with everyday problems because we are precious and matter to Him. To recognize God beside you is to know God as He truly is.

