

Forgotten Pictures of God: God as Lover - Study Notes

Understanding God's Revelation

Three key frameworks for understanding how God is communicated:

1. Ontology - What God is

- God's _____ nature and fundamental attributes that define His existence and character

2. Manifestation - How God reveals Himself

- God's actions, appearances, and _____ in human story and experience

3. Metaphor - How Scripture describes God

- Human _____ and imagery used to make the divine accessible to our understanding
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The Proper Flow of Bible Study

Step 1: Observation

"What does the text _____?"

- Careful reading to identify facts, structure, and literary features without interpretation

Step 2: Interpretation

"What does the text _____?"

- Using historical context, grammar, and literary analysis to understand the author's intended message

Step 3: Correlation

"How does this _____ to its truth and others in Scripture?"

- Is there a command or enduring principle that applies to us today?
- Cannot contradict Scripture or abandon the passage

Step 4: Application

"How should we _____?"

- Drawing appropriate implications for contemporary faith and practice based on sound interpretation

Warning: When we skip _____ and _____ to rush toward application, we risk building our spiritual lives on unstable hermeneutical ground.

Five Portraits of God as a Lover

Biblical writers employed the _____ metaphor with remarkable consistency and depth across both testaments, revealing something essential about God's relational nature and divine intention toward humanity.

1. The Pursuing Lover

- God actively seeks _____, initiating connection
- Clear in His intent
- **Example:** Hosea 2:14 - "Therefore I am now going to _____ her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her."
- Jeremiah 31:3 - "I have loved you with an _____ love; therefore I have drawn you with loving-kindness."
- God is willing to pursue as a result of _____ - not only for Israel, but for all men
- God chose to save those who believe because He _____ them, not because they deserve it
- This love is offered to all men (John 3:16, 12:32-33; Romans 5:8)

2. The Joyful Bridegroom

- _____ commitment expressed through wedding imagery
- Promising exclusive devotion and celebration
- **Example:** Isaiah 62:5 - "As the bridegroom _____ over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."

3. The Providing Husband

- Generous care that anticipates needs, supplies abundantly, and delights in _____ the beloved
- **Biblical Examples:**
 - Creation and New Creation (Genesis 1-2; Ephesians 1:3-14)
 - Feeding in the Wilderness (Exodus 16-17; Deuteronomy 8:3)
 - Provides through Covenant (Deuteronomy 7:9)
 - Provides due to mercy (Philippians 4:19)
 - Continues to provide in eternity (Revelation 7:16-17; 21:3-4)

Four Types of Provision:

- **Material:** Daily bread, clothing, shelter - basics of physical existence
- **Emotional:** Comfort in distress, joy in celebration, companionship in loneliness, _____ of worth
- **Spiritual:** Purpose, meaning, connection to transcendent story, _____ beyond present circumstances
- **Relational:** Community, belonging, family identity, inheritance, and _____ that outlasts mortality

4. The Wronged Spouse (Jealous Husband)

- Deep pain at _____, righteous jealousy for exclusive relationship, and fire over unfaithfulness
- **Three Key Aspects:**
 1. **Righteous Jealousy:** Ezekiel 16 and 23 use shockingly explicit language of betrayed husband confronting an _____ wife
 2. **Grief and Anger:** The pain is personal, relational, heart-deep. _____ isn't merely breaking rules; it's infidelity that wounds the divine heart (Zechariah 8:2)
 3. **Redemptive Intent:** Even in confrontation, the goal remains _____. The wronged husband doesn't simply divorce and move on. Despite having every right to end the relationship, God pursues reconciliation, absorbs the _____ of betrayal, and works toward renewed intimacy (Ezekiel 39:23-29)

5. The Relationship Fixer

- Persistent _____ who refuses to abandon the relationship
- Working tirelessly to _____ what's broken
- The entire biblical narrative can be read as God's relentless campaign to fix what we keep breaking

Note: Each portrait reveals not just God's actions but God's _____ - the emotional investment, vulnerability, and fierce commitment that characterize divine love.

Three Essential Approaches to Applying Scripture

1. Replication

- Directly _____ specific biblical commands or actions
- Suitable for explicit divine instructions
- Requires discernment for culturally specific contexts

2. Principalizing

- Extracting _____ moral, theological, or ethical principles from specific narratives or laws
- Seeks the enduring truth
- Allows application across diverse _____ and _____

3. Trajectory

- Discerning the progressive _____ and development of a biblical theme throughout Scripture
 - Attempts to understand where God is _____ His people as revelation unfolds
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Three Arenas of God as a Lover

The lover metaphor isn't confined to personal piety or individual salvation. Scripture applies this _____ framework to surprising areas of life.

1. Political Arena

- Prophetic critique of nations flows from _____ relationship language
- Justice isn't simply abstract principle but relational _____
- Sin constitutes betrayal of the divine lover's values and character
- **Contemporary Application:** Viewing politics through the lover metaphor challenges both progressive and conservative Christians. The prophets remind us that God takes national faithfulness _____.

2. Marriage Arena

- Human marriage holds unique status in Scripture as the relationship that most directly _____ the God-humanity bond
- Not merely analogy or loose comparison - Ephesians 5 calls marriage a "profound _____" specifically because it reveals Christ's relationship with the church

Four Key Aspects:

1. **Covenant Not Contract:** Marriage mirrors God's _____ commitment, not business arrangement dissolvable when terms dissatisfy
2. **Mutual Self-Giving:** Christ's self-sacrifice for church establishes pattern - love that _____ self for other's flourishing
3. **Sanctification Through Relationship:** Marriage serves as primary arena where God shapes _____, reveals sin, and cultivates Christlikeness
4. **Joy and Celebration:** Sexual union reflects the _____ of divine-human communion - embodied pleasure pointing to spiritual ecstasy

3. Salvation Arena

- When we frame salvation primarily through _____ metaphors (guilty pardoned, debt paid, sentence commuted), we risk missing the relational heart of redemption
- The lover framework reveals salvation as fundamentally about _____ restored, intimacy renewed, union consummated

Four Movements:

1. **Recognition of Loss:** Sin is primarily _____, not merely legal guilt. We've lost fellowship with the one for whom we were made. The deepest problem is relational rupture.
2. **Divine Pursuit:** God doesn't wait for us to return but actively seeks, woos, _____. Salvation begins with divine initiative - the lover coming after the beloved who has wandered away.
3. **Costly Reconciliation:** The _____ reveals love absorbing full cost of betrayal. God doesn't demand payment from us but pays the price personally, removing every obstacle to restored relationship.
4. **Transforming Union:** Salvation culminates not in simply escaping hell but in _____ relationship with God. We're brought into the beloved community, given new identity as bride of Christ, invited into eternal love.

Implications for the Church

Viewing God as lover provides both theological foundation and practical wisdom that challenges conventional church practice.

Leadership as Embodied Love

- Authority rooted in _____-giving service
- Leaders model the pursuing lover's humble initiative and costly care
- **The Lover-Leader Model:** Jesus explicitly contrasted kingdom leadership with secular power: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles _____ it over them... Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your _____" (Matthew 20:25-26)
- Leadership rooted in the divine lover image creates church cultures of commitment, honesty, growth, and missional engagement

Marriage as Visible Gospel

- Christian marriages serve the church by making God's _____ love visible, tangible, and believable
- **Four Practical Approaches:**
 1. **Pre-Marriage Formation:** Preparation focuses not just on compatibility or conflict resolution, but on understanding marriage as _____ in God's love story
 2. **Marital Discipleship:** Ongoing discipleship treats marriage as a primary _____ arena
 3. **Crisis Intervention:** When marriages struggle, church response mirrors God as relationship-_____
 4. **Community Support:** The church surrounds marriages with prayer, practical help, and relationships that model covenant _____

Growth Through Relationship

- Discipleship happens primarily in connected _____, not through information transfer or program completion
- We grow by experiencing the pursuing love of God mediated through Christ's bride

Five Key Practices:

1. **Pursuing the Disconnected:** Churches mirror God's _____ by actively seeking those on the margins
2. **Creating Room for Honesty:** Authentic community requires environments where people can share struggle without _____ or quick fixes
3. **Long-Term Accompaniment:** Formation takes _____, not weeks. We commit to sustained presence through seasons of growth and regression
4. **Speaking Truth from Love:** _____ that flows from care, confrontation rooted in relationship
5. **Celebrating Transformation:** Joy at each step of growth, delight in progress, appreciation for who people are _____ in Christ

Conflict as Sanctification

- Church conflict is _____ - Scripture assumes it
- The question isn't whether we'll experience relational breach, but whether we'll respond by mirroring God as relationship-fixer

Four-Step Process:

1. **Acknowledge the Breach:** _____ the conflict honestly without minimizing. God doesn't pretend everything's fine when covenant is violated.
2. **Pursue the Other:** The offended party takes _____ - mirroring God who seeks us. We don't wait for perfect apologies before moving toward reconciliation.
3. **Create Space for Repentance:** Confrontation that invites _____ rather than punishes. We make room for the other to acknowledge their part, to experience genuine remorse, to choose different path forward.
4. **Bear Reconciliation Costs:** Forgiveness is costly - requires _____ debt rather than demanding full payment. The cross reveals that relationship restoration involves someone bearing the weight of injustice.

Conclusion

The forgotten picture of God as lover challenges our sanitized versions of Christian faith. It reintroduces passion, vulnerability, jealousy, fire, pursuit, and ecstatic joy to our understanding of the divine-human relationship.

This isn't comfortable imagery for those who prefer their religion tidy and controlled.

But it is biblical.