

## Healing our image of God

Read the extract below from the book '**Good Goats - Healing our image of God**' by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn & Matthew Linn. Notice if anything about this story strikes you. In this extract, Dennis is writing:



*I am half German. Although I don't want to stereo-type all Germans, like many of my ancestors I was born a self-righteous German. ... I saw all the mistakes and errors in everyone but myself.*

*For years I tried every kind of healing prayer in order to be rid of my self-righteousness. Although these prayers healed me of many things, my self-righteousness did not change. I often wondered why, when I prayed so hard, God did not heal me.*

*Then one day, I noticed that my self-righteousness had nearly disappeared. Why, I asked, after so many years of struggle, was there suddenly and almost automatically such a wonderful change in my life?*

*I changed when my image of God changed. Most of us recognize that we become like our parents whom from early on we adore, even with all their faults. We may not realize that we also become like the God we adore.*

*Unfortunately,, the God I grew up adoring was German. My God was a self-righteous German who sat on his (at that time my God was all male) judgment throne. Being a self-righteous German, my God could see all the mistakes and errors in everyone else. If my self-righteous God did not like what he saw in other, he could even separate himself from them by sending them into hell. And if my God could be a self-righteous German, then no matter how many healing prayers I prayed, I would probably never change. I became like the God I adored.*

*In every aspect of our lives, we become like the God we adore.*

Take time to ponder, using the images and descriptions of God you found came up with the Window on God and what emerged as you explored the matters of 'This side of heaven'.

Are there aspects of yourself you find you long to see change, that are part of the 'image of God' you live with?

Now read this extract from Good Goats, which tells the story of how the change in the image of God for the writer came about.

*One day Hilda came to me crying because her son had tried to commit suicide for the fourth time. She told me that he was involved in prostitution, drug dealing and murder. She ended her list of her son's "big sins" with, "What bothers me most is that my son says he wants nothing to do with God What will happen to my son if he commits suicide without repenting and wanting nothing to do with God?"*

*Since at the time my image of God was like Good Old Uncle George, I thought, "God will probably send your son to hell." But I didn't want to tell Hilda that. I was glad that my many years of theological training had taught me what to do when I don't know how to answer a difficult theological question: ask the other person, "What do you think?"*

*"Well," Hilda responded, "I think that when you die, you appear before the judgment seat of God If you have lived a good life, God will send you to heaven. If you have lived a bad life, God will send you to hell." Sadly, she concluded, "Since my son has lived such a bad life, if he were to die without repenting, God would certainly send him to hell."*

*Although I tended to agree with her, I didn't want to say, "Right on, Hilda! Your son would probably be sent to hell." I was again grateful for my theological training which taught me a second strategy: when you don't know how to solve a theological problem, then let God solve it. So I said to Hilda, "Close your eyes. Imagine that you are sitting next to the judgment seat of God Imagine also that your son has died with all these serious sins and without repenting. He has just arrived at the judgment seat of God. Squeeze my hand when you can imagine that"*

*A few minutes later Hilda squeezed my hand. She described to me the entire judgment scene. Then I asked her, "Hilda, how does your son feel?" Hilda answered, "My son feels so lonely and empty." I asked Hilda what she would like to do. She said, "I want to throw my arms around my son." She lifted her arms and began to cry as she imagined herself holding her son tightly.*

*Finally, when she had stopped crying, I asked her to look into God's eyes and watch what God wanted to do. God stepped down from the throne, and just as Hilda did, embraced Hilda's son. And the three of them, Hilda, her son and God, cried together and held one another.*

### **God Loves Us at Least As Much As the Person Who Loves Us the Most**

*I was stunned What Hilda taught me in those few minutes is the bottom line of healthy Christian spirituality: God loves us at least as much as the person who loves us the most. God loves us at least as much as Hilda loves her son or at least as much as Sheila and Matt love me.*

Bring yourself before God, as shown by the image of the Father of the prodigal son, or Jesus who does not condemn the woman taken in adultery, or Jesus who longs to gather people as a mother hen under her wings, or the God who puts his arms around Hilda and her son.

Let yourself stay resting under the shelter of God's accepting unconditional love.

Notice any shifts in how you feel about yourself and God after you have done this.