

Limits

God is everything
or nothing.

Nothing? God
can't be nothing.

Nothing can be
so complex,
so real
and come from
nothing.

God is everything
so he's in charge.

Of everything.
What does that
leave for me?

Nothing.
Except
everything.

Who's Your Daddy?

Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another? – Malachi 2:10 (NIV)

Jesus called God “Abba,” roughly the equivalent of “Daddy.” That’s all well and good. It can call to mind the loving relationship of a caring parent, the support system we not only long for but desperately need our whole life through. Like a loving parent, God cares for us individually, feels protective of us but allows us to make decisions – including mistakes – necessary for growth. God stands ready and willing to have a personal relationship with us but knows the perils of a controlling parent-child relationship and avoids that. God is not a puppeteer, pulling our strings, but a director guiding our drama if we choose to take the cues. He’s a parent providing the support and directions necessary for development, and a suzerain.

The term suzerain today defies easy understanding, for no such legal relationship exists in modern jurisprudence. The closest description might be that the suzerain is the sovereign of a protectorate. In medieval times, the feudal lord stood in a suzerain-like role; more recently, the company store/town fulfilled somewhat the same function. Both those examples fail, though, for they have such a negative connotation. We see the vassal as downtrodden, a pawn on the board of the callous feudal lord. The company town or store earned by example the reputation for taking advantage of the employee’s family, keeping them impoverished and at the company’s mercy. The suzerain relationship existed in

the ancient world, and the covenant between God and Israel was such an unbalanced relationship, not a partnership between equals. Unlike the feudal lord or company store, though, the ancient suzerain's role was the kind protector, graciously seeing to the needs of his people.

What if the protector doesn't protect but acts like the stereotypical lord or company store? What if the daddy instead of being Jesus' daddy commits acts of violence – physical or mental, psychological or emotional – to the child? Surely this cannot be a picture of God, our Father.

Intellectually, we know this to be true. What of your inner child, though? Is "Father" a term of comfort or the harbinger of fear? What do the terms of the church mean to you? Are they barriers between you and God, or a bridge? When you understand the emotions words cause, you can discard the unhelpful verbiage and find God in the truth remaining.

Slimming Steps

Write freely about these words. What emotions do you feel? What comes to mind? Don't look for the church's definition. Look at your heart's understanding and your inner child's reaction.

Power greater than ourselves

Power

God

Supreme Being

Creative Intelligence

Spirit of the Universe

Realm of Spirit

All Powerful

Guiding

Creation

Presence of God

Bridge of Reason
New Land
Reason
God of Reason
Great Reality
Broad Highway
Presence of Infinite Power
Presence of Infinite Love
Maker

The listed words are capitalized in Chapter 4 of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, "We Agnostics."

to my sponsor's god

you didn't do bad
last night i told you thanks
for a lousy day and you
didn't get mad
i asked you to keep me clean
just today and somehow i am
i asked you to stop my dumb
mouth at the boss
he grinned when i left
said i'd done good
so thanks for a not bad day
can you do it again
i'd be much obliged

Who Are You To Ask?

The LORD said to Job:

“Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him?
Let him who accuses God answer him!”

Then Job answered the LORD:

“I am unworthy – how can I reply to you?
I put my hand over my mouth.

I spoke once, but I have no answer —
twice, but I will say no more.”

Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm:

“Brace yourself like a man;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.

“Would you discredit my justice?
Would you condemn me to justify yourself?

Do you have an arm like God’s,
and can your voice thunder like his? – Job 40:1-9 (NIV)

Job had to be shaking in his sandals. Don’t you know he hated that he ever got into the conversation? Don’t you know he treasured it the rest of his life and forever?

In the movie *On the Waterfront* Marlon Brando’s character says, “I could have been a contender, I could have been somebody, instead of a bum which is what I am.”

Self-confidence is good. We’ve been told that often enough. Many of us who suffer as compulsive overeaters believe it not from the actual experience of self-confidence – we’ve sought it all our lives, most often unsuccessfully. But as a goal, it’s the Holy Grail! If we could just be as sure of

ourselves as we're sure other people are sure of themselves.... If we just had self-confidence, we'd be fine. We could be contenders. We would win, for sure!

But I, at least, found self-confidence a fleeting illusion, a whimsy intimation of materiality but wispy and so ephemeral my fingers scattered its particles, slicing through it. Self-confidence was a ghost of birthdays past, and a phantom of birthdays to come. Today? Self-confidence was nothing, nada, zip, zilch, absent.

We tremble at the possibility of God's actually speaking to us, at his believing in us enough to throw a crumb to us. We believe in our hearts we could be contenders if only... but the if-only's get in our way and trip us so we never move into the presence of God.

Who am I to address God? I am God's creation. I am his child. I am his dearly beloved. I'm okay, 'cause God doesn't make junk. And he's ready and willing to talk to me.

And to you. Look at Matthew 7:7. Ask. Seek. Knock. Just like that teacher you were afraid of, God really welcomes a response. So talk to him.

Slimming Steps

What do you want to know? Write a letter to God, asking all the questions you can think of. Tell him how you feel. He can take it. Pour out your anger or your joy, your curiosity or your awe. Talk to God like you're writing a letter to your favorite aunt or best friend.

A Kids' Meal God

[B]ut when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. – I Corinthians 13:10-12 (NIV)

My friend Karen is a writer, editor, publicist, a worker with words. Mid-thirties and a mother herself, she's made a discovery. The mother she knew as a breadwinner, disciplinarian, and homemaker writes as well! Karen has seen how even the childhood discipline – copying words and definitions from the dictionary – and certainly the books they shared were tools in skillful hands developing potential with an oh-so-gentle touch.

I've recently come to an understanding of my own mother. A talented, intelligent woman, except for brief periods in protected environments, she had lived with her parents or with her husband for thirty years before I was born. That birth marked a turning point and found her far from home with an infant and a four-year-old, alone while my father traveled from Monday morning until Friday evening. Two years later, another baby arrived. She is and was a good mother, but, overwhelmed and insecure, she passed on to me not only her talents and intellect but self-doubt.

In 1952 J. B. Phillips' classic book *Your God is Too Small* was published. It's been reprinted, the latest being 2004. I read it in the early '70s, and I particularly remember a

passage about whether or not God understands radar. Maybe today the question is microchips or nuclear fission or how to program a DVD recorder. The answer – no matter what the question – is “of course.” But that’s not the question *or* the answer. The question is *What is your understanding of God?* Like Karen, do you assume you’re the first to write poems, that the concept would be foreign to your parent? Is the God of your understanding the one you met in Sunday school, sitting on a rug at the teacher’s feet? Just how big *is* your God?

In restaurants, given the choice of regular-sized, child-sized, or bigger-than-you-should-be-able-to-eat-sized meals, all too often we compulsive overeaters have chosen the third option. Twice. Maybe the smaller portion meal makes more sense for us. What if the option wasn’t food, though? If you’re stuck with a child-sized God because you never looked at him again after you learned everything you needed to know about him – it’s time to opt for huge.

Slimming Steps

Consider the prayers of Tevye, the Jewish lead character in *Fiddler on the Roof*. He asks impertinent questions, such as, “Dear God. Was that necessary? Did you have to make him lame just before the Sabbath? That wasn’t nice. It’s enough you pick on me. Bless me with five daughters, a life of poverty, that’s all right. But what have you got against my horse?” If you were as blunt as Tevye, what would you say to God? What would he answer back to you? Write it down.

Good Affliction, Lesson Learned

It was good for me to be afflicted
so that I might learn your decrees.

The law from your mouth is more precious to me
than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. – Psalm
119:71-72 (NIV)

At an OA meeting a friend made an interesting comment. It wasn't original, but I'd never heard it – it might as well have been. "You hear often, 'Thank GOD for OA!' Yet, we could say with the same earnestness, 'Thank OA for God!'"

Blasphemous? No. Really, it's not! It's like thanking the person who introduced you to your spouse. Not that I needed an introduction to God, *exactly*. Maybe an apt comparison would be an artist's painting a picture so realistic it shows what you never saw in the subject painted, though you're intimately familiar with it. Or...or what? It's the situs of the knowledge. My head is, was, and will continue to be full of the knowledge of God, of the scriptures, of history, theology – of religion. The difference is transmigration from status as an acquaintance to that of a friendship. That's it! I thank OA for allowing me to discover God as my friend, mentor, caretaker, and constant presence. Thanks, OA!

What, then, of the despair that brought me to OA? To have softened enough to facilitate receptiveness, I first had to reach the point of insanity. When I arrived at these doors I had given up, admitted I stood trampled by life, overcome

by the obsessions for food, computer games, anything to dull the pain. Pain brought me to OA. Agonizing, excruciating, endemic pain. But without the pain, I could never have reached the point I thought a bunch of addicts – either alcoholics or food addicts – could have anything to teach me about ANYTHING, but especially about God! I'd studied New Testament Greek, earned degrees from two church colleges, taught Sunday school, taught teachers how to teach Sunday school, preached, and been on the staff in three churches. What could addicts tell me about God? Nothing!

But oh, what they *could* do about leading *me* to learn about God! Wow.

The Big Book *Alcoholics Anonymous* "Appendix II" speaks of two kinds of spiritual awareness – the sudden transformation and the slow revelation. I didn't have a Paul-on-the-road-to-Damascus confrontation, not recently, not ever. I almost felt like the Ethiopian meeting Philip, though. I was reading the right stuff, just didn't know who it was they were talking about, not really. (Acts 9 and 8.)

God existed in my head. Through the fellowship of OA and the wisdom of speakers and writers on recovery, he's firmly and permanently moved down from the mental processes to the center of my being, to my essence. That's natural, of course I see now. God *is* my essence.

And I appreciate the intermediary who made the introductions. Thank OA for God!

Slimming Steps

Is your God a God of the head or of the heart? How do you relate to him? How would you like to relate to him?

The Search

When I was just a young man
and lived in Bethlehem
I craved a setting bold, grand,
alive – Jerusalem!

I left the town of David;
the city wasn't far.
I thought the Temple splendid,
the town a grand bazaar.

I thought "How true to my luck"
that soon as I had gone
from east there came a show such
as few had come upon.

And then King Herod's army
was marched into the town.
They wrote a bloody history
by cutting children down.

*It's power, glory, mystery,
to soar above the heights,
to be a part of history
that I've sought all my life.*

Jerusalem was central
to those of Israel
but life was uneventful,
its glory old and pale.
Now boats and men from far lands
sailed into Antioch.
And those who walked in its sands
would know what's new, what's hot.

I left the Holy City
one year at Pentecost
with pilgrims hot and gritty,
yet happier than most.

They spoke of dead men rising,
of ghosts that came on wind.
I mused about my missing
encountering their friend.

*It's power, glory, mystery,
to soar above the heights,
to be a part of history
that I've sought all my life.*

Well, Antioch was booming
but not so much as Rome.
I soon found myself fuming
to make that city home.

I left the sandy seashore
and sailed for Seven Hills.
This time I knew I was sure
and Rome my thoughts did fill.

Some on the boat were sailing
to Cypress and to Crete.
The tale that they were telling
seemed strange, beyond belief.

A ranting man from Tarsus
spoke of a group of Jews,
said one had come to reach us,
no matter what our views.

*It's power, glory, mystery,
to soar above the heights,
to be a part of history
that I've sought all my life.*

And now I am an old man,
a denizen of Rome,
I earn what little I can
but still my mind does roam.

My work is guarding prisoners
and one's a man I've known.
We once were fellow travelers,
for Paul has come to Rome.

The ranting now makes more sense,
but maybe it's just me.
He speaks of love, repentance,
of peace that makes men free.

It seems that I was looking
for what I failed to see,
that miracles were breaking;
that history called to me.

*It's power, glory, mystery,
to soar above the heights,
that God's brought into history.
God's sought me all my life.*

Step Three

Made a decision
to turn our will and
our lives over to the
care of God as we
understood Him.

When Is a Decision More than That?

As Jesus was starting out on his way to Jerusalem, a man came running up to him, knelt down, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked. “Only God is truly good. But to answer your question, you know the commandments: ‘You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. You must not cheat anyone. Honor your father and mother.’”

“Teacher,” the man replied, “I’ve obeyed all these commandments since I was young.”

Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. “There is still one thing you haven’t done,” he told him. “Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” – Mark 10:17-22 (NLT)

Are you a good citizen? When did you last commit a felony? A misdemeanor? An act of moral turpitude? If you did one out-of-character act in your youth you may still be wracked with guilt over it. A serious act of misconduct would probably result in terminal remorse. So. You’re a good Christian, right?

The answer is yes! You’re a good person, a person who believes in Christ, a good Christian. Right? Right!

Do you feel like it? Probably not. Even if you avoid murder, refrain from adultery, steer clear of taking anybody

else's stuff, even to the extent of taking back what you accidentally carry off – if like the rich young ruler you have dutifully obeyed the commandments since your youth, you may still know something's lacking. "What must I do?" is your earnest prayer.

Don't assume because of Jesus' answer voluntary poverty is the solution. Don't suppose the rich cannot find the comfort of the Kingdom of God. Look deeper at what's happening. Jesus knew the man standing before him, knew his Achilles heel. The man's wealth was more important to him than the peace and joy he sought. He was willing to follow Jesus but on his own terms, not Jesus'. He couldn't relinquish all. He could only relinquish most.

How much control can you relinquish? Don't ask God to be your assistant. Don't seek God as an equal partner. Don't buy into the "God is my co-pilot" crowd. Make yourself God's assistant, his employee, *his* co-pilot.

Slimming Steps

If you had a conversation with God and asked him what you had to do to find the peace of heart that can take the place of comfort food in your life, what answer would you fear most? What word would make you tremble if God suggested it had to go? Your reputation? Your intelligence? Educational status? Financial security? What would you not be willing to give up to be slim?

Like a Little Child?

Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." – Matthew 19:13-14 (NIV)

Walking with a toddler's fist wrapped around your finger brings comfort even when the act of bending far enough for it to happen shoots pains through your back.

Fingers the size of macaroni cling tight for a while, but a shiny bauble in cement, a slug inching along the path, or a sunray brimming with dust mites may loosen the fingers as the child, unconscious of the disconnect, wanders toward the prize.

It's easy for our rigatoni fingers to resemble the macaroni ones. We seek God's hand for protection and guidance, for the security that comes from trust. This is especially true when danger presents itself, or fear or despair claims us. Yet our attention drifts away easily at the slightest distraction.

Jesus said the kingdom of heaven – peace, serenity, joy, heaven on earth – belongs to those such as the children. Is a short attention span and easy distractibility sufficient for credentials?

Not really. What we need to reach for – besides God's hand – is the trust and confidence a child places in the adult. When the trust relationship has been established, the child's reaction to "come on" is simple obedience. The questions

“Where?” “Why?” and “How?” never occur. Instead, all will be okay as long as the child is with the adult. Safety abounds “there” without the need to know where “there” is.

We don’t need to understand more than just that we’re going to depend on God like a child would rely on a trustworthy adult. Then we can expect God not only to lead us where we need to go, but to kindly and gently pull us back in that direction each time baubles and slugs pull us off the path he’s set.

Slimming Steps

Describe a child you know. How can your being like that child help you to turn your will and your life over to God’s guidance and direction?

Speaking of distractions, you’re keeping a food record daily, aren’t you?

Beginning

“Love yourself.”
Easy advice?
An infant does.
How natural, how right.
“Love yourself as you are.”
Damaged goods.
Ugly surface.
Gruesome inside.
“If you don’t love yourself fat
you won’t love yourself thin.”
How about pride? Will haughty do?
“Love yourself.”
Others love me. Others hold me high.
“Love yourself.”
I love what I’ve done, what I’ve given,
what I am.
“Love yourself as you are.”
The Master said to
become as a little child.
I love myself.
Lord, let it be true.
I am young.
I am new.
I can learn.

Leave It and Walk Away

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. – Mark 1:16-18 (NIV)

The fifth chapter of Luke tells a longer story, about fishing all night fruitlessly, the nets teeming with fish. The result was the same, though. Luke does note they pulled their boats up on the shore, then they left it all, following a stranger.

By the time we get here to OA, God’s far from a stranger for most of us. We’ve heard about him all our lives, even committed our lives to him, often before puberty. We’ve claimed his providence, asked his blessings on our endeavors, and wailed to him of our failings – his, we think. Do we know him well enough, though, to accept his invitation to leave it all and walk with him? Don’t the “stranger – danger” warnings flare in our minds?

How comfortable are you in the passenger seat? Two men drove 400 miles to Galveston, the childhood home of the passenger. He’d made the trip – his pilgrimage – many times, developing habitual stops along the way, taking the same route religiously with a set place to stop for pie, favorite service stations, and absolutely avoiding being “in” Houston. But he’d asked the other man to drive! Going, they entered the city of Houston to the chagrin of the Galvestonian. Returning, they didn’t take the Interstate off the island! All plans for evacuating Galveston in the event of hurricanes start with getting the people across the causeway bridge
