IS GOD TWO-FACED?

R

oy Williams, aka The Wizard of Ads, is now touting what he calls persona-based writing which he swears is “outperforming yesterday's demo-targeted ads by an average of 81 percent.”

This next-generation tactic focuses on your target’s “*self-definition*, that life-long process by which we determine who we are.” In diapers we start asking, “Who am I? Where do I fit?” We reply: I’m the Center of the universe, or the Protector, the Bully, a Victim, a Loser, or the Clown. Then, based on that self-perception, we choose our surroundings, friends, clothing etc., to support or suppress it.

On the back of these notes, take 30 seconds now and write a one-sentence self-definition of yourself. (PAUSE)

Mark Twain said if you ever spot a turtle on a fencepost, you can bet the turtle had some help getting there. For me, at each turning point in my life, God hoisted me up, usually using people and circumstances along the way. **So, that’s my self-definition: I’m “a turtle on a fencepost.” What’s yours? (DISCUSSION)**

We may wish we were mind readers, but all of us are *face*-readers. Others’ expressions telegraph what they think of us. Imagine, for a moment, looking up through the ceiling right into the face of God. **On the back of your notes, in a sentence or less, describe the look on God’s face as He peers back at you. (PAUSE)**

**What was God’s expression as He saw you? (DISCUSSION)**

Ever said, “I’ve got to find myself?” Shouldn’t be tough since wherever you go, there you are. Everybody’s on this search at some point. Some of us just stretch it into extra innings.

### The Four Faces of God

Besides “Who am I,” life’s other biggie is “Is there a God?” A Gallup poll\* finds that Americans have four views of God. 92% believe in “a higher power.” 11% have no religious ties. 5% are atheists. Are we “one nation *under God*” or *under delusions?* The views are:

### The Distant God: His Gone Fishing Face

Some 24% of us think a “cosmic force” created the world, then left us on our own, with no access to Him. That’s the big idea out West.

### The Authoritarian God: His Game Face

31% of us, especially Southerners, see God as behaving badly, irate at us for sinning, ready to whup sinners, and involved in our lives.

### The Benevolent God: His Grace Face

Some 23% want government to promote “Christian values.” They say God sets absolute standards for us, but is forgiving. Midwesterners top the nation in this opinion.

### The Critical God: His Frowning Face

16% of us size up God as the Fear Factor! Especially folks out East, They say God knows what’s happening down here, but won’t punish sinners, or comfort the hurting, or haggle over right and wrong.

**Which of these four is your take on God? (DISCUSSION)**

***“Will The Real God Please Stand Up?”***

How would God define Himself? Googling the Bible reveals that ….

1. ***God is Knowable.*** We can have an intimate Parent/child relationship with the One who made us. While God may *seem* distant, even AWOL, by not ending all wars, disasters, illness, etc., He tells us that because no sin can enter heaven, in the end He *will* be, literally, forever distant from those who refuse His forgiveness, sentencing them to suffer endlessly in what the Bible calls a “lake of fire.” **Let’s read Hebrews 9:27-28 (p. 491, The Message). And Jeremiah 9:23-24 (p. 572, NIV).**

1. ***God is Approachable.*** We can talk to Him anytime, about anything. We don't have to shape up first. It’s “come as you are.”

**Let’s do Psalm 145:17-21 (p. 470, NIV) and 1 Timothy 2:1-7 (p. 462, The Message).**

3. ***God is Creative.*** He who named each star invites us to rely on Him in all of life’s mundane, insane, profane, inane ups and downs. **Let’s check Psalm 147:1-11 (p. 471, NIV).**

4. ***God is Forgiving.*** He carved laws into stone on Mt. Sinai, rules impossible to fully obey. But rather than toss us onto some galactic landfill, He sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to go willingly to the cross for you and me to pay for our pardon. **Let’s read Romans 1:18-25 (p. 319, The Message).**

Going our way instead of God’s is what He calls sin. But He loves us madly, and will delete *all* our sin from His hard drive. In its place He’ll cut and paste all of Christ’s sinlessness when we say “yes” to Him as our Savior. **Go to Romans 3:10-28 (p. 838, NIV).**

5. ***God is honest.*** Forget wiretaps because He’s openly disclosed who He is and what His plan is. And you can take His word to the bank. Jesus said of His Father, “Your Word *is* truth” (John 17:17). He also said, “I *am* the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). **Let’s read Galatians 3:9-12 (p. 412, The Message).**

### Paul Faces The Nation

Ancient Athens boasted the world’s best and brightest at Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum. It birthed Western civilization, shaping culture and art. Named for the goddess Athena, this mental mecca had more temples and idols than Walgreen’s has stores.

In mid-1st century A.D. God’s Johnny Appleseed makes tracks for Athens’ city council (the Areopagus) in the Amphitheatre (shown below) on Mars Hill, near the Parthenon. Here Paul uncorks an oratorical gem, facing off with the fatalistic Stoics and the ya-ha Epicureans, tackling secularism, humanism and paganism. Like Socrates 450 years earlier, Paul gives these Greeks a new idea to mull over. **Let’s read Acts 17:16-34 (p. 289, The Message).**

Next Paul turns west for Corinth, weary after presenting God’s truths to folks who loved bloviating while coming to no decisions. **Let’s read 1 Corinthians 2:1-16 (p. 356, The Message).**

So, isGod two-faced or four-faced? He’s *three*-faced: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. **Let’s do 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 (p. 355, The Message) and 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 (p.366, The Message).**

### Saving Face? Or Saving Faith?

God’s gone to the mat to prove His extravagant love for us. If you’ve never accepted it, tell Him, “God, I’m tired of straddling the fence. You’re right; I am a sinner and need a Savior. Thank You for dying for *my* sins, Jesus! Here’s my heart and my life, Father. I’m Yours.”

\*Gallup poll released September 2006

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