



## S1.Lesson 18: Characteristics of God

### Middle School Lesson Plans

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**Supplies:** Journals; TV and DVD to watch the Nooma video: *She* (currently available at Amazon, [HERE](#)); construction paper; markers; magazines to cut images from (libraries often have supplies they are willing to donate)

### OPENING PRAYER

**WATCH** Nooma Video: *She*

### ASK

- When you think of God, what images come to mind?
- Often times, when someone is talking about God, they'll refer to God as "he." What do you think about Rob Bell suggesting we also think about God as "she?"
- Do you think God protects us just like the mother goose protected her goslings from Rob Bell?
- Bell talks about mothers who walk hours for water both ways for their children. Do you think God does work like this for us? If yes, in what ways do you think God does work for us?
- Are there other ways in which you think God mothers us?

### TELL

- There are a number of important ideas that Rob Bell raises in this video.
- Today, let's focus on two of them.
- One of those important ideas is when Bell quotes Isaiah speaking for God to the Israelites: "As a mother comforts a child, so will I comfort you."
- It's rare occurrence when God actually intervenes in a person's life like the Mother Goose who went after Rob Bell, spitting at and hissing at and attacking those who oppress you.
- But what God *will* do is comfort us and remind us of who we are and remind us that those who oppress us do not speak the truth about us.
- Another important idea that Rob Bell brings up is this idea that the more images and pictures and metaphors we have of God, the better we can understand who God is and what God is like.
- So if we have one image of God as a mother, and another image of God as a father, that's helpful, not contradictory, because that gives us two understandings of God.
- We're now going to read another image of God, offered to us by a Psalmist.

### READ Psalm 23

*First, read from the New Revised Standard (a direct translation):*

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; 3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they

comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

*Second, read from the Message (an interpretation of the translation)*

1 God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. 2 You have led me to lush meadows where I can rest and eat; you find me quiet pools to drink from. 3 True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction. 4 Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure. 5 You do all of this right in front of my predators. You revive my drooping head; my cup is filled with blessing. 6 Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. Every day, when I let you catch me, then I'm at home in the house of God.

### **ASK**

- So what image of God is being offered in this scripture? (one of shepherd)
- What gender do you give the shepherd in your mind? If you change the gender of the shepherd in your mind, does the scripture passage seem at all different to you?
- If God's the shepherd, who are the sheep?
- And according to this Psalm, what does a shepherd do? (the shepherd leads the sheep to food, drink, safety and rest)
- Is there any imagery in this version of Psalm 23 that surprises you? That you like or dislike?
- Verse 3 says that God leads us in the right direction. Is it surprising to you, then, that the right direction might involve Death Valley (verse 4)?

### **TELL**

- Rob Bell reminds us that "Spirit has no shape."
- With that in mind, we want to remember that the images we use to understand God are not what God looks like, but instead describe characteristics of God.
- When we pay attention to God, we learn of these God-characteristics by experiencing them.
- And after we experience these characteristics of God, then we can share our understandings of who God is with others.
- And that's the Good News for today.

### **If there's time...**

Using markers and construction paper (and pictures to cut out from magazines, if you have any) create an advertisement that showcases one or more characteristics of God that you either believe to be true or have experienced to be true. For instance, if you believe that God leads us, what is an image you could use to show that?

We'll then present our advertisements to the class.

### **CLOSING PRAYER**