

Two
--Looking Upward--
Discovering God

What we tend to overlook: There is a God who hears the cries of his people. Behind the scenes he's been carefully preparing a qualified rescuer; 40 years in the palace, 40 years tending goats in the desert. This real God is about to expose the humanity of the Pharaoh who runs the slavery machine that grinds you down. God will reside with you in a large pillar of smoke and fire as you make your way across the wasteland toward the land of promise.

What we tend to focus on: God doesn't seem to care, given years of slavery, beatings, and a dictator who thinks he's a god. "Granted, you parted the Red Sea, but it feels like you brought us out here to die of thirst, boredom, and bland food. You've kept Moses too long up on the mountain. So we're going to make a golden calf we can touch and carry around with us."

Thousands of years later, we still tend to gravitate toward the second paragraph. We grumble and pout like the children of Israel when what we get from God fails to match what we expect.

We want a cosmic-genie God. Give us what we want when we want it, with sprinkles. We revert to this childish notion that we can control God by reciting contrived prayers with abracadabra precision. But, think about it. What if faith worked like this? We'd become entitled with God as our enabler.

Think about God's great visitations on our planet. Old Testament—any given morning, throw back the tent flap and there was God in the middle of the camp in a towering pillar. New Testament—reach out and touch God in the flesh. He's the one hanging out with lepers, tax collectors, and sinners. Both places, the grand prize was having God with us.

Sure, let's be grateful for the "stuff" we do have. But it's God's "withness" that brings us internal peace and joy. I'm sick. God is still here. I did something really bad. God is still here. My world is falling apart. God is still here. My best friend thinks I'm garbage. God is still here. I'm in the middle of a global plague. God is still here with me.

This distinction may or may not be a paradigm shift for you. If it is, it changes everything. We stop trying to control God and start enjoying life with him in the moment. Our focus turns from presents to presence. Prayer doesn't beg God to

come close. It acknowledges he is already here. God is not our Santa Claus. He's our traveling partner. God is no longer a fixture in our religion. He is the divine half of an actual, vibrant relationship.

Things to consider:

1. What *presents* have you expected from God during this plague?

2. Describe times you've recently known God's *presence*.