



Discussion Guide: Wil Gafney

Biblical Language for a God Who Transcends Gender

Reflect

- Male-centered language for God dominates most Christian hymns, liturgies, and prayers. Have you ever found this type of language problematic? Why or why not?
- Gafney points to several scripture passages that use feminine language for God. Discuss what you learn about God from each of the passages below. Which is your favorite? Why?
 - Genesis 1:1–2 (“Spirit” or “wind” is feminine in Hebrew)
 - Numbers 11:10–15 (Moses uses mother language for God)
 - Isaiah 49:14–16 (“Compassion” shares a Hebrew root with the word “womb”)
 - Hosea 11:1–9 (God like a mother to Israel—called “Ephraim” here)

Respond

- Dr. Gafney suggests that Jesus used a multiplicity of language to meet the people he was addressing. How can the language we use for God open up, or close off, conversations about faith?
- Most English translations of the Bible utilize masculine pronouns for God (he, him, his). Do you do the same? How about your faith community? How do you feel about using feminine pronouns for God or avoiding pronouns altogether when referring to God?
- Gafney concludes by saying, “The language you use about God tells me what you think about me.” Do you agree or disagree? Why? What is the connection between the language we use about God and how we see others?