

CURRENT ISSUES

Bible Study

LEADER'S GUIDE

How Should We Address God?

What we call God reflects who we believe him to be.

A thing's name defines it and clarifies what we think of and helps us talk about it. But a person's is much more than mere definition: it reveals identity, character, and relationship. To many, God is just another concept with a label: Deity, Creator, Judge. But to the believer, he is the single most important person one can know. And we want to know—we need to know—what is his name?

How has God introduced himself to us, and what does this reveal about his identity? What do God's names reveal about his character and the way he has acted throughout history? And how does our use of God's names help us relate to him?

This study assumes God is more than a concept or a construct and searches for the answer to: How should we address God?

Lesson #181

Scripture:

Genesis 2; Genesis 3; Mathew 6:5–15; Hebrews 2:18, Hebrews 4:16, 1 John 2:1

Based on:

"Naming God," by Virginia Stem Owens, BOOKS & CULTURE magazine, January/February 2007, Vol. 13, No. 1, Page 8



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide for each person the article "Naming God," included at the end of this study.

When we first meet someone we tend to want key facts right away: "What do you do? Where are you from? What is your name?" Without at least having someone's name, building a relationship is difficult, if not impossible.

According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, our main purpose in life is to "to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." But glorifying and enjoying God assumes an intimacy far beyond mere job titles and last-known addresses. We need to know who God is so we can relate to him—talk to him, glorify him, and enjoy his company.

Even though God has revealed himself, and told us who he is, sometimes we still get his name wrong. Forgetting that the names we use reveal the nature of a relationship, we often think of God solely in terms of his titles and "job descriptions." Katie Wiebe recalls what J.B. Phillips had to say about reducing God to labels:

In the classic *Your God is Too Small*, J.B. Phillips says we tend to give God many names which aren't actually his names: managing director, puppeteer, magician, resident policeman, fun-hater, pie-in-the sky, and others.

Today we have added "health and wealth bringer" and others.

— Katie Wiebe in the *Christian Leader* (Dec.6, 1989).
CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Vol. 34, no. 9



Discussion starters:

- [Q]** Which is more important, that we call on God at all, or that we use the right name? Does it matter what people call *you*? Why or why not?
- [Q]** How have you addressed God in your thoughts and prayers?
 - How have your ways of addressing God changed throughout the years?
 - What caused the change?
- [Q]** Have you ever noticed your (or others') prayers using the "scatter-gun" approach in naming God? These prayers often begin with something like, "Dear Father-God, Lord Jesus ..." or something similar. Why do you think we sometimes adopt this approach?
- [Q]** We smile at children who struggle to understand God, but how is our concept of God superior or inferior to a child's approach?



Madeleine L'Engle has written, "It seems that more than ever the compulsion today is to identify, to reduce someone to what is on the label. To identify is to control, to limit. To love is to call by name, and so open the wide gates of creativity. But we forget names, and turn to labels ... If we are pigeonholed and labeled we are unnamed" ("Walking on Water," CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Vol. 39, no. 2).

- [Q]** Think back over your recent prayer and thought life. In what ways have you reverted to thinking about God in terms of labels and titles instead of the names he has revealed to us?
- Why do you think someone might start address of God in these terms, and what effect does it have on our relationship with him?
- [Q]** How does a study of God's names help us remain intimate with God?
- What does understanding God's names reveal about who he is—his character, his nature, and his relationship with us?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Names are crucial for true intimacy.

Read Genesis 2 (the creation of Adam and Eve) and/or Exodus 3 (God's call to Moses).

Communicating with God—prayer—is the single most intimate act one can ever participate in. It is a willing baring of the soul, a voluntary nakedness before God. In prayer we bring to him our needs, desires, wants, and even our apathy, and we lay it all down. Often clumsily, sometimes hastily, sometimes even thoughtlessly—especially when we lose sight of who God really is.

Perhaps one prescription to remedy thoughtless prayer is to take seriously the various names God has revealed to us and to intentionally use them in our prayer to remind ourselves that this is how God wants us to know him.

Western cultures do not traditionally attach as much significance or meaning to a person's name as the ancient near East people did. In the ancient near East, to name an unnamed thing was to validate its existence. We are driven to put names to things we do not understand if only to try to grasp them.

- [Q]** Consider the creation account of Genesis 2. How did God choose the name for the first man?
- What, if anything, does this name signify about the nature of the one named, and his relationship to his creator?

Leader's Note: The footnote in the NIV for Genesis 2:7 says: "The Hebrew for man (adam) sounds like and may be related to the Hebrew for ground (adamah it is also the name Adam (see Gen. 2:20)."

- [Q]** After creating man, what was the first task God gave Adam?



- Why do you think it was important for *Adam* to name all the living creatures instead of God?
- How does naming a thing define its relationship to the one doing the naming?

[Q] If names reveal character and identity, how important is it that we learn and properly use God's names as he has revealed them to us?

- What is the danger of using our own titles and names for God instead of his?

[Q] While naming the unnamed is part of how we create identity and understand the world, what happens when you encounter someone who already has a name?

- How do the names we use for people reflect the nature of our relationship to them?
- What happens when you call someone a name that is inaccurate or derogatory, even if unintentional?
- What happens when you meet the supreme authority of all creation—would it be satisfactory to invent a name for the one who named you?

Names go beyond validating existence; names also reveal the identity, character, and nature of the one who bears the name. Moses understood this in Exodus when God appointed him to return to Egypt. Moses asked of God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God's answer, for all its simplicity, is the bedrock for every name he has ever revealed to us:

"I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' ... Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation."

[Q] In this first recorded instance of God revealing his name to man, what does God want us to know about himself?

- What is the foundation of all of God's revealed names?

Leader's Note: *The first thing God wants us to know about his name is that he is who he says he is. He is not who we say he is. He is not what anybody else says he is. He alone has the right to identify himself. He alone has the right to name himself.*

[Q] What are some things you can do to become more aware of the names God has revealed to us?

[Q] What is your favorite mode of address for God?

- Why does this name resonate with you more than other names?

[Q] How do the names you use for God change the way you pray or change the content of your prayers?



- Conversely, how does the content of your prayer affect the name you chose when addressing God?

Optional Activity:

Using a whiteboard or large poster board, have your group call out as many of the names and titles of God from the Bible that they can remember (or find). Afterward, play the song, "He Is," by Aaron Jeoffrey, which highlights titles and ways that God has related to his people from each book of the Bible. This could spark discussion about which names best fit with the different parts of the song, which names people had forgotten about, which names had the most emotional appeal, or which names people might want to try to remember to use more often. Pay special attention to the end of the song.

Teaching point two: God wants us to call him Father.

Read Matthew 6:5–15 (The Lord's Prayer).

Virginia Stem Owens relates that when she goes to pray, she sometimes struggles over which name of God to use in her prayers. She realizes that recognizing God's sovereignty and lordship requires an attitude of subservience and even slavery. On the other hand, calling God Father or even "Abba"—like calling him "Daddy"—highlights her relationship to God as a daughter to her father. Neither approach, of course, is wrong, but she sometimes struggles over which approach is right for the right moment. And she struggles over which attitude is right for her approach to God in prayer.

Jesus' disciples also needed some guidance about prayer. They needed to know how to pray, how not to pray, and what to pray for. In Matthew 6, Jesus provides several guidelines for prayer: fasting, benevolence, and attitudes—perhaps the most well known is "The Lord's Prayer."

[Q] When Jesus opened his prayer with the name, "Our Father in heaven," what was he signifying?

- Do you think Jesus' and his disciples' understanding of fatherhood is different than the American view? If so, how?

[Q] When Jesus instructed us to pray, "hallowed be your name," what attitude is he guiding us toward?

- Why do you think Jesus thought it was important to follow "Father in heaven" with "hallowed be your name"?

[Q] What does it mean for a name to be hallowed—or holy?

- What makes things that are holy different from things that are not, and how does this effect how we handle them?

[Q] When God revealed himself to Moses, he told him that one of his names was "The LORD, the God of your fathers," but in this prayer, Jesus reveals God's name as "our Father." What do you think is different between the two Bible contexts, if anything?



[Q] Dads have an awesome, if not terrible, responsibility to their children, for the role they play and the example they set molds how children see God as Father. How has your view of your father influenced your view of God as Father?

- In what way has your relationship with your father helped or hindered the way you approach God?

[Q] If you are a parent, how have the challenges and joys of parenthood changed the way you view God as Father?

Optional Activity:

*Pass out cardboard nametags and pencils and ask each participant to choose a new name for themselves in the style of *Dances with Wolves*. Ask them to carefully pick a name that truly describes them, and that they would be happy to be stuck with. (For example, the poet in the group might like to be called "Paints with Words."). People should then be given an opportunity to explain why they picked this name for themselves. Then, have everybody switch nametags with somebody else and wear their new nametag while the group breaks for refreshments. During the break, everyone should make a special effort to call others by the name on their new nametag.*

Once you get back together, discuss how it felt to be addressed by a name that didn't "fit." How would it feel to be stuck with the wrong name forever? Then discuss how using the proper name for each individual not only honors that individual, but also honors the name.

Teaching point three: We should call on Jesus' name.

Read Hebrews 2:18, Hebrews 4:16, and 1 John 2:1.

Where there are many titles that can apply to God (Creator, Master, Lord, Almighty), other religions can co-opt those same titles and apply them to their own concept of deity. As Owens notes, the Muslim name for God, *Allah*, is derived from the same words as the Jewish *Eloah* and the Aramaic *Alah*. But the similarities between the Christian God and the Muslim God fall apart soon thereafter.

Christianity, unlike other religions, is based first on a personal relationship with God, not merely a set of moral doctrines and theological theories. Salvation comes through Jesus, and in no other name (Acts 4:12).

This is one name, higher and more personal than any other, that points conclusively to one member of the Godhead, who cannot be mistaken as a mere concept, construct, or idea. This is the same Jesus who walked among us and shared our temptations (Matthew 4:1, Hebrews 2:18), who told his disciples, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (John 14:14), and who continues to intercede on our behalf today (Hebrews 2:18, Hebrews 4:16, 1 John 2:1).

Jeannette Glasscock described her prayers, saying that while she usually prays to the Father, in times of great need, she instinctively calls out for Jesus' help and intercession. She writes:

When I pray, I address God as Father, in Jesus Name.

But, when I'm in a hurry, I just call out for Jesus to help!



For example, while driving a car full of kids in a rain storm one night we began sliding off the road into a river and I shouted: "Jesus! Help!" And the car stopped right on the bank! There is no way that car would have stopped by itself. It was sliding!

— Don and Jeannette Glasscock,
via personal e-mail correspondence (January 30, 2007)

[Q] How do you call out to God when you are in dire straits, and why do you make that particular choice?

[Q] What difference, if any, does it make whether you pray to Jesus, to the Father, or to the Holy Spirit?

➤ If it's okay to pray to Jesus, why or why not also pray to the Holy Spirit?

Leader's Note: While the Bible neither records any prayers directed to the Holy Spirit, nor does it command us to, the Holy Spirit is nevertheless God, just as Jesus is God and the Father is God. Praying to God — any member of the Godhead — is perfectly natural. Since believers are called into fellowship (relationship) with the Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14), and the Spirit is already present when we pray, helping us and interceding for us (Romans 8:26), Praying to the Holy Spirit would certainly not be wrong. Yet the Scriptures probably don't show Jesus or the disciples praying to the Holy Spirit probably because one of his primary activities is to bear witness of Jesus, not to bear witness of himself (John 15:26).

[Q] What Biblical evidence can you find to support praying to Jesus?

Leader's Note: Consider the following passages, note that the Greek term Kyrios is traditionally considered to be a title of Jesus, and is usually translated "Lord," as shown below:

"You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it." (John 14:14)

"with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours..." (1 Corinthians 1:2)

"Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord." (Ephesians 5:19)

"Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart." (Acts 8:22)

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service." (1 Timothy 1:12)

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 2:18)

"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." (1 John 2:1)

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)



"Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:25)

"Come, Lord Jesus." (Revelation 22:20)

"Come, O Lord!" (1 Corinthians 16:22)

Optional Activity:

As a group, close with a hymn or worship song directed to Jesus. You don't have to sing it; you could hand out printed copies of the song and read it in unison as a closing prayer.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Prayer is ultimately about communicating with God, your creator and heavenly Father who named you before you were born. For too many people, prayer has become routine and formal, perhaps even dry and emotionally flat. Virginia Stem Owens seeks to go beyond mere routine, the kind of prayer that talks *at* God and instead talks *with* God.

God wants us to have a vital, dynamic relationship with him, but his infinite character and nature cannot be captured with one name and one way of relating to him. He is what he is. And he is at once both Master and Servant, God the Father and Jesus the Son, Liberator and Judge, Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.

In all of his ways and by all of his names, let us truly get to know, the great "I Am."

Action Point: Jesus stressed that we are to have a childlike attitude in our faith. Try going deeper with God as your heavenly Father by addressing him as Daddy, Papa, or Abba for the next week or two. Jesus did it, and Paul encouraged it (Mark 14:36, Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6). See how this change of address influences your relationship with God and the way you pray.

*— Study prepared by Rich Tatum, freelance writer, preacher, and blogger
at <http://tatumweb.com/blog/>*

Additional Resources



ChristianBibleStudies.com

-Knowing God Through His Names



Aaron Jeoffrey, by Aaron and Jeoffrey Benward (Starsong/Emd, 1995; ASIN B000005KUK)











All the Divine Names and Titles in the Bible, by Dr. Herbert Lockyer (Zondervan, 1988; ISBN 0310280419)



Every Name Of God In The Bible, by Larry Richards (Nelson Reference; Illustrate edition, 2001; ISBN 0785207023)



-  *God's Name God's Nature*, by Jill Briscoe (Chariot Victor Publishing, 1988; ISBN 0896935841)
-  *Knowing God by Name: Names of God That Bring Hope and Healing*, by David R. Wilkerson (Chosen, 2003; ISBN 0800793420)
-  *Lord, I Want to Know You: A Devotional Study on the Names of God*, by Kay Arthur (WaterBrook Press, 2000; ISBN 1578564395)
-  *Names of God*, by Nathan Stone (Moody Publishers; New Ed edition: 1944; ISBN 0802458548)
-  *Names of God, The*, by Ken Hemphill (B&H Publishing Group, 2001; ISBN 0805424369)
-  *Names of God, The*, by Andrew Juke (Kregel Classics, 1967; ISBN 0825429587)
-  *Praying the Names of God: A Daily Guide*, by Ann Spangler (Zondervan, 2004; ISBN 0310253535)
-  *Names of God, The*, by Lambert Dolphin (Accessed: 01/25/2007, <http://www.ldolphin.org/Names.html>)



CURRENT ISSUES

Bible Study

ARTICLE

Naming God

How should we address him?

By Virginia Stem Owens, for the study, "How Should We Address God?"

At night, when I get down on my knees beside my bed and lean my head on my folded hands in the posture of prayer I was taught as a child, there's always a moment's hesitation while I fumble for the first word to launch into the cosmos, a name that will find the infinite mystery I want my words to reach.



Doubtless my attention to the question of what to call God has been heightened by the violent clash between partisans from the world's three major monotheistic religions. Muslims call upon Allah, ideally, five times a day. The Qur'an lists the ninety-nine names of God, e. g., "He is Allah, the Creator, the Originator, the Fashioner, the Exalted in Might, the Wise." The name *Allah* itself is the Arabic transliteration of the Hebrew *Eloah* (cf. *Elohim*, one of God's names in the Hebrew scriptures) or Aramaic *Elah*, meaning "Mighty One" or "One Worthy of Praise." But the Qur'an also says that Allah has names that he keeps to himself, an option I find strangely appealing.

Jewish prayers most often address God as "King of the Universe." Rabbi Yochanan, who salvaged the Torah when Jerusalem was destroyed in ad 70, instructed his fellow exiles, "Any blessing which does not include mention of [God's] sovereignty is not a blessing." During my nightly hesitation over what to call God, I often envy Jews that substantial prescription. On the other hand, while it seems appropriate for an acclamation, it lacks the kind of intimacy my Christian ears seek in prayer.

So what are my choices? Do I address myself to Father? If so, should it be preceded with Our or My? Should I say Lord, perhaps with a prefatory Dear, like the greeting of a letter? What about Jesus, Holy Spirit, or just plain God? If I say Father, is it because I am a child, seeking comfort and certain assurance? Do I say Lord because I feel strong enough to approach as an adult, yet humble enough to acknowledge servanthood? Can I, this night, transcend the barriers of time to experience the personal presence of the resurrected Jesus, the one who has "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows"? Should I appeal to the Holy Spirit, feeling the need for firing up by that life-giving but elusive essence? Or do I take the easy way out and just say God, the generic term for whatever is infinitely bigger and better than I am?



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Then there's Yahweh, that most open-ended of all divine names, written in Hebrew today using only the windy consonants Y or H. Perhaps the name that God revealed to Moses was chosen especially for its exhalation. It is the very breath of God breathed into our ears. By omitting the open vowels in the written name, the Jewish scribes signaled their readers that the name of God is too holy to have on their unclean lips. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the unspeakable name revealed to Moses is variously translated as "I am who I am" or "I will be who I will be" or even "I am becoming who I will become."

It has been left to the foolhardy Christians to stick in the vowels and dare to pronounce aloud, albeit with a certain awkwardness, the name Yahweh. Even so, we speak this name most often when reading aloud certain contemporary translations of Scripture or in a few praise songs.

But unless I want to spend all night dithering, eventually I have to get on with my prayer, hoping the Great Unpronounceable will understand my struggle. So I plunge in to address him.

The name I often plunge in with these days is Father. Father is what Jesus called God. In fact, the Aramaic word he actually used, "Abba," is more akin to our homely English equivalents—Daddy or Papa, simple two-syllable names ending in open vowels easy for toddlers to pronounce.

But why would someone such as myself, a 64-year-old grandmother, suddenly want a father? Maybe because a child is what I often feel like these days. Fearful and impotent, and in need of comfort. I'm not ashamed of slipping into the persona of child when I kneel there at my bedside. I want a Parent. I need a Parent. Someone who cares for me as unfailingly as the mother I lost two years ago.

As for my father, World War II kept me from meeting him until I was four years old. Unfortunately, this meant we never formed a close natural bond. Moreover, at 88, my father has become the child while I have taken on the role of parent in caring for him.

In some ways this blank spot in my psyche has been beneficial. Many women have trouble with God because they identify him with an oppressive earthly father. For them, patriarchal oppression is a problem. But calling God Father at this point in my life doesn't put my ideological nose out of joint. I don't spurn or suspect any fatherly consolation he's likely to offer. In fact, crawling into God's lap and going to sleep in his arms seems about the best ending to a day—or a life—I can imagine.

Still, to be honest, Father has to be a conscious choice. "Lord" is the mode of address that automatically springs unbidden to my lips. In my experience, it is also the name most often used among Christians to speak about the lump-sum Trinity.



Why is *Lord* so routinely spoken? After all, it is an archaic word, one we never use outside of a religious context unless we're British. Such a word doesn't fit in our contemporary culture, except in certain kinds of science fiction and fantasy (The Lord of the Rings, for example). Like Father, Lord puts us in a position of dependence. But Lord implies even more. Not only do I depend on this Great Unknowable for my very breath, but with that word I acknowledge a kind of feudal relationship in which I play peasant to his patron.

Yet I've never been in such a relationship. Our word "boss" is about as close as we commonly come to Lord, but the ties between employer and employee in our capitalist democracy are not nearly so close or strong as those between Lord and liegeman. So should I call God Boss? It would be our own Americanized way of acknowledging God's sovereignty, or at least his right to be in control.

But Boss carries its own baggage, not all of it good. There's a whiff of irony, even sarcasm about the name. Boss means, "Okay, you're in charge here. Do it your way. Just don't blame me when it doesn't work out." Calling God Boss shuffles all the responsibility for my flaws to him. Which I'm already all too tempted to do.

So I'm back to Lord. Even though it isn't native to our times or tongues, it leaps unbidden to our praying lips. It's the name which most of us have heard most frequently, both in and out of prayer, whether talking to or about God. Because Lord, either in lower- or all uppercase letters, stands in for several Hebrew divine monikers, it appears more often in Scripture than any other name. We often use Lord in offhand colloquial expressions such as, "The good Lord willing and the creek don't rise." We take our troubles "to the Lord in prayer." And I use such exclamatory phrases as "Good Lord" with no hesitation whereas I would shrink from using *God* in the same mode.

One synonym for Lord is Master. This hits me on a deeper level. Slaves have masters. Trained animals have masters. Disciples of whatever craft or discipline have masters. Much more than Lord, calling on my Master puts me in a place I know instantly and instinctively. My personal history connects with that name as it must for anyone who grew up in the segregated South. The history of the slave-master relationship sets up internal seismic shock waves.

I recognize instantly the tone of the Syro-Phoenician woman's retort to Jesus when he turns aside her request to heal her child: "even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." She is abasing herself by acknowledging, bitterly perhaps, her despised position while also acknowledging his power. Jesus himself often names the most powerful character in his parables "the master." Sometimes this is a kindly figure; at other times the master in the parable can seem arbitrary and capricious. In other places in the New Testament, master refers to a slaveowner, and not just metaphorically. Several of the pastoral letters admonish both slaves and masters to treat one another well. Master is also what his disciples often called Jesus.



Yet Master is not a name one hears addressed to anyone often these days. Nor, despite its emotional freight, do I call upon it often. Its demands scare me. Whether we're talking about slaves or wild animals or students or disciples, obeying seems to be the operative ingredient in the relationship.

But when his disciples call Jesus Master, they are not groveling before him. They use the Greek word for teacher (*didaskalos*) to address him. They are showing him the respect due a teacher by recognizing his superiority of knowledge or skill. Those fascinated with God, whatever manifestation of faith they find themselves in, have historically called their spiritual teacher Master. Who better to call Master than Jesus?

I have an elderly cousin who sometimes addresses her prayers directly to Jesus, adding the shockingly familiar accolade, "You're just so precious!" This woman has been throughout her long life a better Christian than I'll ever be, yet I cringe when she says it, picturing her tweaking Jesus' cheek.

On the other end of the spectrum, I once heard a radio preacher claim that we are not to pray to Jesus but rather, following his divine example, we should address our prayers to his father in heaven. I wonder what that preacher has to say about the Kyrie, one of the church's oldest prayers. Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy.

Which brings me to the way the names Jesus and Christ are frequently linked. Christ, of course, is the translated equivalent of Messiah. Or at least it started out that way. Children, however, often take it for his last name. And scholars debate the nuances, some suggesting that Jesus was only his earthly name and Christ his heavenly designation.

I rarely open up my heart with Jesus' name—no doubt a sad loss to my spiritual life. Of such seemingly minor distractions are stumbling blocks compounded, a fact that should make us all wary of our words. There is more than one way to take the Lord's name in vain.

As for the generic term, god, talk about God can get by with that designation, but addressing God directly seems to require something more. Prayer bonds us to God with a peculiar intimacy. It is what brings us to the point of actually needing to name this Person in whose image we are made.

If God is no more than concept or, as some theologians like to say, construct, then there is little point in naming him. One does not cry out to a concept or a construct. One may respect or admire it, even preach about it or advertise it, trying to attract converts to its cause. But one does not expect an answer if one were to address it or try to communicate with it. Only a person can do that. Calling God's name in the expectation or maybe just the hope that he hears, the supplicant recognizes God, if only fleetingly or even unwittingly, as a person, a person who can respond.



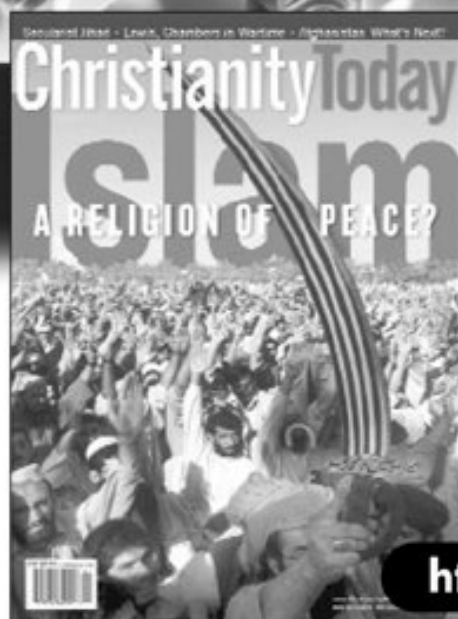
Getting that initial address right seems important to me, not because I imagine I can really capture this source of all being in a verbal container. But the name I call to God with determines the guise in which I come to this task, duty, privilege of prayer. In naming God, I am in some way—far beyond my incomplete understanding—determining my own identity. Naming God ends up defining not him, but me.

Virginia Stem Owens lives and writes in Texas. Her book And the Trees Clap Their Hands: Faith, Perception, and the New Physics was recently reissued by Wipf & Stock.

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