

*The*  
MOTHER  
HEART  
*of*  
GOD

*Unveiling the Mystery of the Father's  
Maternal Love*

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New York Boston Nashville

The people interviewed gave the author permission to share their stories and/or comments. Their viewpoints may not necessarily reflect the position of their denominations or synagogues.

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## CHAPTER 1

# The Journey Begins

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil.

*Hebrews 6:19 NASB*

VINCENT VAN GOGH preferred to paint people rather than cathedrals because he said the eyes reveal the inward soul, whether a poor beggar or a street worker.

As a journalist, I am also drawn to the eyes of the people I interview.

Whether meeting musicians or murderers, scientists or six-year-old children, I not only listen to the voices and wait on the words, but stay on the unspoken in the eyes. What lies behind those transparent windows to the soul?

The first pair of eyes that hold me are my mother's.

I am seven years old, cuddling with Mom in church and running my fingers over and over again in circles across her soft velvety fur coat. I imagine she is a fuzzy mother bear. She is a short, bosomy, fun-loving woman with brown lustrous curls and big blue eyes like Bette Davis.

Sitting on the hard wooden pews and hiding under her luxurious fur coat, I feel totally safe in her warmth. I listen to sermons

about the love of God, spending hours with my eyes transfixed on a large wooden cross hanging midair above the pulpit. It is powerful stuff for a young girl looking around at the stained-glass windows with scenes of people being healed and Jesus holding little children on his lap.

I know without a shadow of doubt that God loves me.

My mother prods me to be a missionary when I grow up.

“Well, I don’t know about that idea, Mom,” I say quietly, already acutely aware in my few years of life there is a nonconforming side to my personality.

She hugs me anyway.

A soft-hearted woman, Mom rescues abandoned children who are in need of a loving home because she believes love conquers all evil.

With arms open wide to embrace the rejected in society, our house may best be described as a noisy multicultural carnival. In addition to raising me and my three biological brothers, my parents open our home to an array of foster kids.

Mom also gives free respite to the weary parents of a severely disabled girl. Little Jody continually screams and bangs her head. Not surprisingly, it is chaos in our kitchen where all the action is.

My parents end up adopting two little boys—Johnny, an Asian youngster, and Louie, a Native American boy who suffers from fetal alcohol syndrome. They are innocent, live-wired boys. While they may not have grown inside her own womb, Mom assures the boys they were formed in a much, much better place.

“You see, my wonderful, precious boys, you’re so special I actually chose you to grow in my heart!” she says. “See!” She points under her amply endowed bosom.

“You grew right here inside my heart. Right here!” she says as she kisses the top of their foreheads and elevates their position to the top of the family hierarchy. It is completely fair according

to “Mom’s Rule of Justice” that these boys, who had been abandoned, would be so luxuriantly pampered in our home.

The whole family buys into that love.

It is the way of God’s compassion.

Mom loves these ragamuffin orphans with great kindness, and as I watch her shower them with love, I too feel the exhilarating, liberating power of love.

Little Johnny had been discarded by his real mom and dad and tossed back and forth between three foster homes by the time he was eleven months old. The brown-eyed boy steals Mom’s heart as soon as he moves in.

“Never again will you feel alone,” she says to him.

We all nod. Johnny is Mom’s boy to stay.

She feels every one of his tears of pain. As he grows to be a teenager, she tells the social workers that Johnny needs a good counselor because he keeps getting into trouble with the law. He crashes a car. His teachers kick him out of class. Meanwhile, Mom prays to God to help her be as patient with him as God is.

She never stops loving him.

Mom worries helplessly, year after year, trying to get him help. But she is stymied by a social system that ignores his developing identity crisis and struggle with homosexuality. Finally, at age twenty-five, he is HIV positive and commits suicide.

Anguish now dims the bright blue in my mother’s eyes. . . .

Nine months after Johnny died—just about the time it takes to conceive, carry, and deliver another child—Louie, my other adopted brother, dies in a car accident.

Louie, whose heritage includes a long line of alcoholics, is twenty-one years old and drinking beer with a carload of friends, skidding along the Fraser Canyon Highway. Crashing boulders claim the neural endings of his brain, a sensitive, kind young man whose legacy is a fatal brain injury. Mom had tenderly loved this boy too, nurturing him with hefty cheek kisses and hugs, warning him not to drink because his genes carry the alcoholic weakness.

Another part of Mom's all-embracing heart collapses.

Yet she carries on. Still her faith remains strong.

"God knows our hearts," she says as she tries to make sense of the tragedies. She continues to trust in the God of love and justice who will eventually wipe away all sorrow and all tears and make the crooked things of this woeful world straight.

"All things will pass away one day," she says. "We are only here on Earth for a very short time, so while we still have life in us, we must never stop loving others."

As she comforts me, I realize much later in life that she had modeled in her own special way the kindness of God who comforts us in all of our afflictions.



Thus begins this story.

When the pink blossoms fall once more in another season, I am an investigative journalist breaking news stories, exposing political scandals, and writing human-interest stories.

I am continually inspired by "Mom's Rule of Justice."

Pursuing the truth with compassion drives my work as I try to treat people with respect and kindness, and my news stories often rescue victims of physical and emotional suffering, discrimination, and other social injustices. For twenty years, I help shut down dishonest politicians and report evidence that jails criminals and pedophiles, and I play a critical role in closing the doors of corporations involved in unethical practices.

How?

By simply exposing the truth in print!

Words are powerful motivators in the pursuit of justice.

I am faithfully pursuing the passions of my heart as a journalist when God hands me a new assignment—one that seems almost impossible to fathom. It happens one day with no advance notice or fanfare while I am on a winter holiday and too tired to write any

more. Relaxing on the island of Maui on a sun-drenched morning, I am looking forward to snorkeling with the yellow butterfly fish and working on nothing more strenuous than my sorry-looking tan.

Political controversies are far from my mind.

Reading the Holy Bible that warm morning during my study and prayer time, I am impressed by Genesis 1:27 in which Moses beautifully portrays how the male and the female together are made in the image of God, *Imago Dei*.

As I think about this, it suddenly strikes me that the woman, therefore, must reflect the nature of God in some mysterious way—no less than the man.

The feeling that washes over me is warm and electrifying.

Why had I not noticed this before?

I think about my father's strength and his enterprising energy and how his paternal kindness is modeled by my kind heavenly Father. Then I start wondering if my mother's compassion might be a hint there is also a maternal side to God's love. Leaning back in an open place, I take a deep breath.

“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

*Exodus 3:5 NIV*

Placing my sandals by the door, I step into a holy place and remain quiet for a very long time. Months meld into years of prayer as I immerse myself in the study of the Holy Bible that has left me in complete awe of the *God of my salvation*.

It is not humanly possible for a foolish person like me to expand on the common understanding of God. Expand on the Infinite? Impossible! Yet I feel God quietly impressing me to interview leaders from the major Christian faiths of the world. But I resist this idea. I find excuses. *I cannot afford to take time off my job. Who will talk to me about such a controversial subject? Lord, I don't think I'm good enough to do it.*

More than a dozen years pass by. I attend a Women of Faith conference and once again hear that immortal voice as I kneel down in the room with the red-and-white checkered tiles and close my eyes.

*“Lord God, I can’t approach faith leaders on this subject and write a book. Look at me. Here I am talking to you, carrying nothing but my hiking backpack, a notebook, and a pen. That’s me. Not at all stylish like Oprah Winfrey. I really don’t think I can do it.”*

Another year goes by.

One summer day, during a hike on Mount Baker, the grandeur of the mountain peaks and the snow contrasted by the clear blue sky causes such a deep exhilaration to well inside me that I spontaneously break out singing:

“Over all the Earth, you reign on high,  
Every mountain stream, every sunset sky,  
But my one request, Lord, my only aim,  
is that you reign in me again.”<sup>1</sup>

The song gives words to the overwhelming happiness I feel inside as I begin hiking down a long, narrow trail on the other side of Table Mountain where the geography always reminds me of the Great Wall of China. This part of the hike is raw and risky because it is basically one huge rock slide covered by small broken stones.

What happens next defies explanation.

Stupid me. Dumb me. I trip over my own two feet, stepping over the ledge into midair, swaying sideways—rolling down the mountainside like a crazy carpet! Heading downward into a frightening 1,500-foot drop to what appears to be certain death with large jagged granite boulders awaiting me at the bottom. No time to think. In a split second of chilling panic, I see one large rock jutting out of the ground, about three feet wide, come into view as I roll sideways.



A voice shouts in my head: “*Grab that rock. Now! Or you’re dead.*”

With all the strength, energy, and life I have in me, I lunge and splay my body across the rock and grab it as hard as I can with both hands and legs. I grab it hard. I feel solid pain. I grab the pain. The rock holds.

My body stops rolling. Gasping, I hang on to the only rock on this part of the mountain slope large enough to hold me! I don’t move. My heart beating, my left knee bleeding, I feel the bones in my hands, fractured and sprained, throbbing in excruciating pain.

“Lord, I know I don’t deserve what you just did to save me.” Shaking and stunned, I went from singing to screaming; walking to falling; living to almost dying, in less than five seconds. “Thank you dear Lord, Rock of my Salvation!”

“*Now, Trudy, are you ready to do what I’m calling you to do?*”

“If it’s the last thing I do in my short, silly, sorry life, Lord, yes.”

The following year, I arrange to take a sabbatical from my job and start setting up interviews to converse with Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish experts all around the globe to sort out the question about the nature of God by asking:

What does the Bible really say?

Are we missing half of the picture of God?

I pursue a global investigation with pen and notebook in hand interviewing biblical scholars and celebrities from North America to the Middle East and spend the next five years researching the Scriptures and meditating on God’s Word.

What is God really like? What sacred evidence does the Bible reveal?

What emerged is a new, engaging picture of the God I thought I knew!

## The Quest to Know God

In all, more than fifty leaders of faith agree to enter into a conversation about the so-called gender of God. Some theologians, however, decline to be interviewed. And a few critics tell me I should not explore this question because it is too difficult to understand. Others sidestep the question completely.

When I interview Rev. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, a well-respected biblical scholar, he is civil, but quickly dismisses my queries about the possible gender of God. He is the coeditor of the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* and is professor emeritus of Biblical Studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

He tells me the question is a waste of time.

I feel uncomfortable. He insinuates I might be some kind of a wacko-feminist. I laugh and assure him that I am a devoted believer in God, just like he is. I tell him that I'm definitely not a feminist. But I am looking for answers. That's why I am trying to talk to as many Bible experts as I can.

"You happen to be a scholar I respect, Reverend Fitzmyer."

Thankfully, he continues our conversation.

God has no feminine attributes, he says with an air of certainty. Later during our dialogue, he admits the Lord God's devotion to us is sometimes described in the Bible as distinctly maternal in nature, quoting a verse in Isaiah 66:13.

However, he is reluctant to give much weight to this passage.

"This is clearly a Scripture where God speaks of Himself like a mother," he says. "But that is the exception, not the rule."

Feeling confused, I later try to set up an interview with a well-known biblical scholar in England. She makes it clear that she only wants to talk to me about the world-famous feminist Mary Cady Stanton and the revising committee that wrote the *Woman's Bible*.

Feminism is definitely not my focus, I tell her respectfully.

She hangs up.

Her anger stings me. Feeling dejected, I fear my investigation is going nowhere as I walk along the well-worn pathway in my back woods with my Bible in hand. Sitting down on my favorite fallen birch tree, I read in the Scriptures that God is delighted to answer my questions and to satisfy the deepest spiritual yearnings in my heart to know Him. *Right now, to be honest, dear Lord, I don't understand what I should do next.* He leads me to a promise in the Old Testament.

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever.

*Deuteronomy 29:29 NIV*

Making a commitment, I promise God that no matter what happens I will be faithful to His calling and will try not to get discouraged. I write a little sticky note over my computer desk to remind myself that I am working for the *King of Kings*.

I know I will never receive the wisdom of God through my own human power or intelligence. But “the Spirit probes all things, even the profoundest depths of God” (1 Cor. 2:10 CJB) and generously grants to us, mere mortal human beings, the promise of the immeasurable gift of growing in relationship with our Redeemer.

Praying daily for the Spirit of God to lead me, I begin to interview hundreds of people in every walk of life—from scholars to janitors, from the boardroom to the living room—as a powerful spiritual principle starts to emerge.

I am engaged in a deep conversation with Billy Graham's daughter, Ruth, when she does not hesitate to tell me that her study of the Bible convinces her that we have been missing an important aspect of God's love for many centuries. I am surprised. She encourages me to press forward in my quest for answers.

Meanwhile, sociologist Tony Campolo advises me that the an-

swer to the question will bring emotional and spiritual healing for both men and women.

As I interview leaders of various Christian faiths, I discover the teaching throughout history that the nature of God is “only masculine” poses a serious “disconnect” for many faithful believers. To illustrate why the question of the so-called gender of God is relevant and meaningful today, I sometimes ask men to imagine what it would be like if the following what-if scenario came to pass:

“What if you are a little boy or a young man who faithfully attends a church or a synagogue every week? You are taught that you are made in the image of God, just like the girls are. But, you wonder how? The girls can certainly identify with the Creator. But, you ask yourself, what part of you, corresponds to God?”

### **A Global Investigation**

A paradigm shift is occurring all over the world.

“Everywhere you go, the public is raising gender questions about God,” says Father Thomas Hopko, a prominent Orthodox scholar living in New York.

“*This is the issue of our day,*” he tells me.

The nature of God is a significant theological question being asked today by many devout men and women of faith, and the people I meet along my journey are recovering ancient biblical truths that have long been forgotten.

They find these truths relevant for today.

I took a journalistic approach to this question with an open mind and from the point of view that God is real, God is love,

and the Holy Bible is true, the inspired Word of God, answering the deepest spiritual questions asked by each new generation.

That was my starting point and remained the focus throughout my investigation.

Therefore, this book is unequivocally and unapologetically Christian in tone and content. I also sought the opinions of Jewish scholars to seek the understanding of those who study the same Scriptures. While they may disagree about Jesus, their foundational understanding of God the Father and *Yahweh* start in the same place.

To be sure, what you hold in your hands is not a typical book.

By weaving elements of personal narrative and solid biblical facts with the interviews I had with fifty leaders of faith, my journal highlights many short stories, linked together by the one controversial question.

You might consider this a world-wide panel discussion.

But it is also the story of my own personal journey to know God.

I took a fourteen-month sabbatical in 2007–08 to interview leaders of various faiths around the world, either in person or by phone. When I felt confused on any point, I'd go back to the scholars with phone calls or e-mails as they patiently answered my follow-up questions. I also spent five years carefully studying the Scriptures to make sure what I was learning met the litmus test of biblical truth.

For the reporter in me, I have to admit some questions still remain.

My own spiritual journey is weaved throughout this book—not because I started out to do that, but this is what happened. I share my story, not necessarily in a straight chronological timeline—but more as a montage of experiences, whether good or bad.

The scholars inspired me in more ways than one.

I don't claim to have interviewed an exhaustive list of experts,

but I certainly conversed with a relevant sample. Neither do I believe this book will be the last word on such a controversial subject, but I pray it will serve as a valuable resource. The people I interviewed in this book shared their love for God with great enthusiasm and wisdom.

Their stories stand on their own.

To be clear, my investigation does not downplay, neither does it overemphasize the so-called gender of God because our loving, benevolent Creator is infinitely greater than any human mind can ever fully comprehend. All of the sacred titles for God in the Scriptures are to be revered. The will of our majestic Maker is clear in the third commandment:

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain,  
for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name  
in vain.”

*Exodus 20:7 ESV*

His name is as holy and everlasting as His law is. The stories in this book are in the context that God reveals Himself as our *heavenly Father*, the *King of Kings*, and *Almighty God*, and He instructs us to pray in His holy benevolent name.

But what is the truth about the possible maternal side to God?

I invite you to join me on a journey to find out why the question about the so-called gender of God is suddenly igniting into relevance today.

That is the question I will now turn to.