WHY IN THE WORLD
THE REASON GOD BECAME ONE OF US
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SESSION 1

To Communicate and Demonstrate

Whether or not you're a Christian, at some point in your life someone probably made a connection in your mind between God and fear. Maybe a Sunday school teacher told you God was angry at your sin. Maybe you heard someone preaching fire-and-brimstone to apathetic students in the quad at your university. Maybe you were told that if you wanted to go to heaven instead of hell, you had to pray a prayer to accept Jesus as your personal Savior.

God is mysterious. He's difficult to figure out. He's not a white-bearded old man up in heaven. He isn't a human being at all. In Isaiah 55:8–9, God says:
“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the Lord.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

It's no wonder people sometimes see God as distant and even scary. We fear what we don't understand, and we can't fully understand God.

Many people become Christians because they want to make a favorable deal with a God they assume is full of wrath and vengeance. Their decisions have little to do with love and a lot to do with fear. For a lot of people, the foundation of their faith is a feeling that God exists and that he is at least aware of them, even if he's angry or disappointed.

But Jesus didn't come so we could be certain that God knows we exist. It's much better than that. Jesus didn't claim to have the best explanation of God. He claimed to be the best explanation of God.
DISCUSSION STARTER

What, if anything, do you do to feel close to God? What is it about that habit, practice, or approach that makes you feel God's presence?

VIDEO OVERVIEW

For Session 1 of the DVD

The Gospels record an unusual conversation between Jesus and his disciples. It happened after Jesus' resurrection. His followers were excited because they assumed he was back to stay. But Jesus told them he was going to leave them. And then he said:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.” (John 14:1–4)

The disciples were confused. They didn’t know what Jesus was talking about. More important, the idea that Jesus would leave them wasn’t in alignment with the political and cultural revolution they assumed would follow Jesus' return.

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are
going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered,

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to
the Father except through me. If you really know me, you
will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know
him and have seen him.” (John 14:5–7)

That is a bold and controversial statement. If you’re going to re-
ject Christianity, that statement is why you should reject it. If anything
offends you about Christianity, it should be Jesus’ claim that he is the
only way to the Father. That is offensive. It is narrow.

But it was vital that Jesus made that bold, controversial, and
offensive claim. He knew something about human nature: we’re in-
clined to try to figure out God by looking in all the wrong places.

**We look to our circumstances.**

We constantly try to piece together events to identify God’s ac-
activity in our lives. The problem is we’re terrible at interpreting our cir-
cumstances. We see God where we want to see him, and ignore him
in other circumstances when that interpretation doesn’t fit with who
we want God to be in our lives. Or we assume we know what God is
up to, and then our worlds are rocked when our circumstances sud-
denly change.
We look to our religious traditions.

If you were raised in a church, you have some beliefs and some thoughts about God that were ingrained in you as a child. Based on your religious tradition, you have built-in assumptions about what God values, which sins most displease him, and which he doesn't get worked up about. Usually, God is more lenient with us than with outsiders. Others' sins are offensive to him, while ours are no big deal. The problem is traditions systematize, customize, overemphasize, and fossilize. All traditions do this.

We look within.

The other place we look to try to figure out God is within. The problem with looking within is that it'll only get you so far. Within is limited to what's within. God's bigger than whatever is within you. And here's the other thing we know: the 16-year-old version of within is different than the 30-year-old version of within, which is different than the 65-year-old version of within. Which one is God?

We look to nature.

Nature is great. Nature can teach us some things about God at the macro level. But the problem is that nature is like flying over a
big city in a jet. The view is beautiful when you’re in the air, but the streets can be dirty and dangerous. Nature from a distance is magnificent. Nature up close can kill you. Which represents God?

We don’t have to look to our circumstances, religious traditions, within, or to nature to find out what God is like. God wants us to know him. He became one of us to communicate and demonstrate what he is like. Isn't that powerful? It means that if you move past Jesus, you’re moving away from God. If you stop short of Jesus, you stop short of insights about God that would help you in your life and further your understanding of what God wants for you.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways have you seen people look in the wrong places to discover what God is like? How did it shape the ways they view God?

2. Do you tend to feel closer to God when your circumstances are good or bad? Why do you think that is the case?

3. Read John 1:14. What do you think it means that Jesus is “the Word”? What does it tell us about Jesus’ connection to God?

4. During the message, Andy said, “Jesus didn’t claim to have the best explanation of God. He claimed to be the best explanation of God.” Respond to that statement. In what ways do you find it challenging, disturbing, or offensive?

5. Talk about some of the wrong places you’ve looked to find out what God is like—religious traditions, your circumstances, nature, within yourself. What limitations did you discover in these attempts to find God?

6. At the end of the message, Andy challenged you to read the four Gospels with this question in mind: What do we learn about the Father from the Son? Which gospel will you begin with? What can this group do to help you follow through on this homework?
MOVING FORWARD

Pick one of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Matthew has the most references to the Old Testament. Mark is the shortest. Luke is the most chronological. John is the most personal. Pick whichever one you want and begin to read it with this question in mind:

*What do I learn about the Father from the Son?*

CHANGING YOUR MIND

*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us,*

*and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

*John 1:14 NASB*
PREPARATION FOR SESSION 2

To prepare for Session 2, use these devotions during the week leading up to your small group meeting.

Day One
Read John 14:1–4. Think about the things that currently trouble your heart. How might Jesus' promises in these verses change the influence those things have over your emotions and decision making?

Day Two
Read John 14:5–7. Consider the ways you look for direction from God. How does Jesus' answer in verses 6–7 differ from the kind of answer you usually want from God? Why do you think Jesus would offer himself as an answer to a question about direction?

Day Three
Read John 14:8–14. Think about what Jesus tells you about God's character and values. Is there anything you wish you knew about God that you can't discover in Jesus? If so, why do you think God chose not to reveal that about himself?
Day Four

Read John 14:13. How difficult is it for you to believe what Jesus says in this verse? If what Jesus says is true, what does that say about the way God views you?

Day Five

Read John 9:1–34. Read this story two or three times, familiarizing yourself with its details. As you read, try to put yourself in the shoes of the blind man. Then try to experience the story as one of the Pharisees experienced it.