

## WHO IS THIS GOD WE PRAY TO? Revelation 1.9-18

How do you picture God when you pray?

“Whatever idea of God is in your mind as you talk with Him will influence the way you pray. It's possible that millions of Christians across the world who think they're praying in Jesus's name are in fact praying in the name of someone else, to a God that the Bible knows nothing of.”

~ PAPA PRAYER,” Larry Crabb

### WHO IS THIS GOD WE PRAY TO?

in the **midst** of the lampstands one like a **son of man**  
**clothed** with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest

The **hairs** of his head were white, like white wool, like snow.

His **eyes** were like a flame of fire

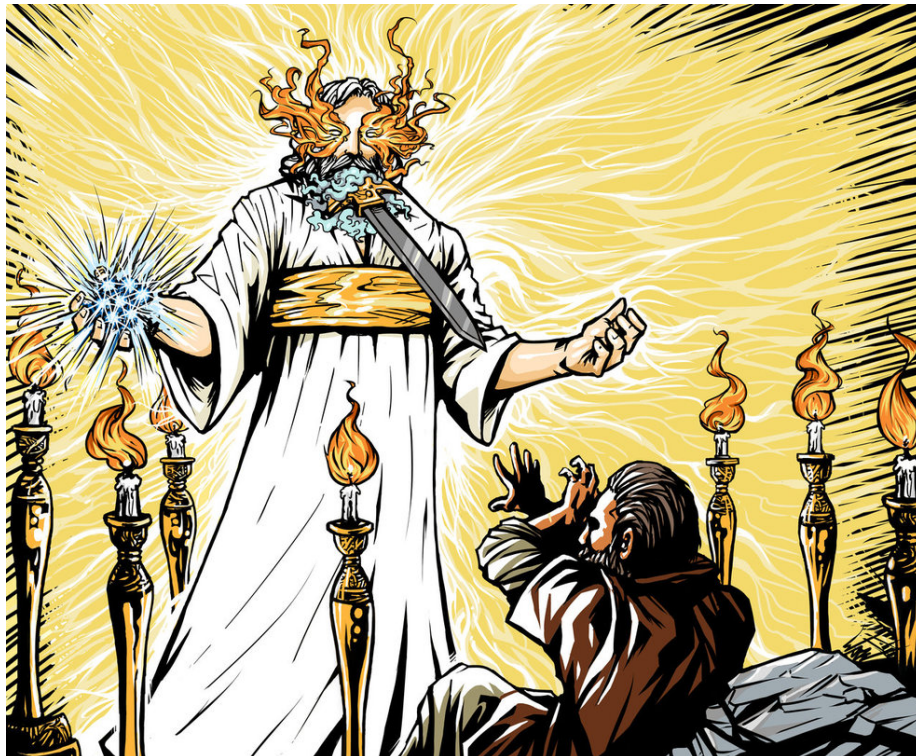
his **feet** were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace

his **voice** was like the roar of many waters.

In his **right hand** he held seven stars

from his **mouth** came a sharp two-edged sword

his **face** was like the sun shining in full strength



## TEN COMMON IMAGES OF GOD (Larry Crabb “The Papa Prayer”)

### 1. SMILING BUDDY

He's there for you the way a good friend should be. He is with us but not above us - a God who just likes hanging out. No demands. No rules. Just a good time. If you think of God as a smiling buddy, then prayer will become nothing more than asking favors from a chum.

### 2. BACKROOM WATCHMAKER

This is the way I most often think of God. At times, I'm a functional deist. It's like I've been wound up to keep ticking by a craftsman who never leaves the shop. He made the clock. Now He has other things to do. When things don't go as I think they should, I sing, “Que sera, sera. Whatever will be, will be.” Why bother with prayer? The clock keeps ticking. This picture of God at times makes my prayers dull and lifeless, as I try to accept whatever happens as somehow good.

### 3. PREOCCUPIED KING

Despite assurances that no sparrow falls to the ground without God knowing, we sometimes picture God as preoccupied with more important matters than what school we choose for our kids or whether to visit a dying father we don't like. He's absorbed with evangelism, crusades, political battles over abortion, and which church plant will become the next megachurch. Our prayers feel small, petty, not worthy of our preoccupied king's attention. But we pray anyway, though we are not sure the King is listening.

### 4. VENDING MACHINE

The most common image of God that we don't admit to but still hold is akin to Santa Claus or to a smiling buddy, with this difference: you don't have to relate to a vending machine. Just put in the coins and collect your treat. We think of our prayer and worship with the same sentiment felt by a satisfied consumer walking away from a vending machine, biting into his Snickers candy bar. We pray right. It works. The parking spot opened up. The lump disappeared. The new job came along. Let's pray more. Let's insert more coins. God is good.

### 5. STERN PATRIARCH

This one often develops out of experience with religious fathers or legalistic churches. Carry the biggest Bible you can find to school. Walk away when someone uses a bad word. Place your napkin on your lap when you sit for dinner and wait quietly till Father arrives. Take a bite before he blesses the food and you'll be sent to your room without eating. With this picture in our minds, God can be obeyed but not enjoyed. The idea of dancing with the Trinity (a favorite of mine) is near blasphemous, at least ridiculous. Prayer is stiff, rigid, the result of a God who is above us but not God with us. Worship lacks passion. Petitions are offered in a shy voice.

### 6. KINDLY GRANDFATHER

Parents do the discipline, grandparents do the fun. Our job is to let them skip vegetables and go right to the ice cream. Prayers to a kindly grandfather sound like the whiny pleadings of an insufferably adorable child. A little girl hugs your neck. A little boy playfully pokes your arm. "OK, you can have candy before dinner. But just one piece. Well, maybe two."

### 7. IMPERSONAL FORCE

This is the "blank stare" image of God. Not the watchmaker who has already done what he's going to do. Not the king who's preoccupied with concerns more important than yours. Watchmakers and kings at least are people who can be persuaded. But this idea of God is a power that cannot be harnessed. It's the image of an impersonal force. Straight from Star Wars. We don't respond with the fatalism of a deist. We feel more the despair of an impotent person in a world of uncontrollable power. If God wants us to have cancer, we'll get cancer. We'll pray for healing, but with no excitement, no real hope. Nothing we do makes a difference. God is more a thing than a person. Prayer, at best, might redirect the flow of electricity, but it never connects you to someone who loves you. There is no relational connection in this view.

### 8. CRUEL TYRANT

It's hard at times to not see God as cruel. He directed Satan's attention to Job, a good man, and then turned the devil loose to torture him. It sometimes takes real effort to call God good. And when you doubt His goodness, sin seems very reasonable. Why not? Find a little pleasure in a world run by a God who has no interest in looking out for you. Is that so wrong? Prayer? Pray (to whom is unclear) that the cruel tyrant will have a change of heart. Or try to believe He's good deep down and needs a little coaxing to display His better side.

### 9. MORAL CRUSADER

In this one, what God hates most are visible sins, the sins of culture-abortion, pornography, gambling, same-sex marriage, racism, political corruption, and adultery, to name a few. Personal spiritual formation is a secondary concern. Turning the national tide back to God is the first thing. That needs to be the passion of our prayers, at all-night vigils, prayer conferences, and stadium events. Mobilize resources and raise money. Make something happen. Devote your best spiritual energy to praying about the things that matter most to the moral crusader we worship.

### 10. ROMANTIC LOVER

God loves us, as individuals. What else needs to be said? What else matters? He longs to satisfy our hearts, to communicate how profoundly He loves us so that we can feel valuable, special, and cherished. Center your life on pursuing the experience of deep connection to God. Pray for it. Whatever comes into your life that provides an experience of ecstasy, of soul connection, thank God for it. Whatever creates misery, run from it, into the arms of your Lover. With this understanding of God, prayer is reduced to the narcissistic yearnings of the self-worshiper, one who values the experience of internal satisfaction now above all other goods.