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### *Who's God?*

A few years ago a study was conducted by Baylor University. The study explored religious beliefs among Americans. The scale and scope of the project Baylor undertook were vast. The sample was large and diverse – covering all ages, races, geographic locations, both genders, and many cultural groups. And the results were fascinating.

Put simply ... we Americans are highly religious people. Nearly 90% of us have some religious affiliation, though our beliefs are far from uniform. Yet, here is a curious finding: despite the religious affiliation we claim (Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, etc.) we tend to fall into one of four categories in terms of how we understand God. We either believe God is authoritarian, benevolent, distant, or critical.

That's a very provocative finding. That means that some Christians will have more in common with some Jews (or Muslims or Hindus or Buddhists) than they will with other Christians. We may agree wholeheartedly with our co-religionists, or then again, we may not!

Now maybe our concept of God does not, at first blush, seem to be very significant. After all, there are many aspects to the living out of one's faith, and the specific concept held of God is only one of them. But the Baylor study noted some interesting correlations. The concept one holds of God appears to color one's politics, moral choices, and sense of obligation toward other people. In other words, it matters in significant and practical ways, just who we think God is.

So we invite you to ask yourself... who is God? If you are like us, you have stories from your religious heritage and scriptures that tell you something about God. And you also have personal experience. Perhaps visions you once held of God no longer apply, and your concept of God has changed. Perhaps the concept and identity you know for God has strengthened over time, and taken on new depth. Whether static or changing, whether inherited or newly acquired, it is reasonably certain that who you understand God to be has significant repercussions in your life.

So we hope you will explore the identity of God and God's influence in your life. Because it is surely true that for as long as humanity has debated God's existence, God's nature has also been debated. And how humanity settles that debate may determine how human cultures, communities, nations, and families will live together.