

Tim is a longtime friend of mine who has had experience with church but is living as an agnostic, irreligious person. He is currently 29 years old and lives in New York City. He works as a data analyst. Over the previous 10 years, we have seen each other sporadically but have not had the chance to talk in depth since our years in middle school. He knew that I was a seminary student who had aspirations of going into full time ministry. However, that was the extent of how far his knowledge extended of what this path entailed.

We met on Monday February 20th over lunch and got to discuss on the topic of God and religion. Beginning with the question of church, as he had experience in the past with churches, I had asked him what some of the challenges for him were as he views the church. He shared that he does not have any ill feelings toward the church, but he had never felt the need to go back after the couple of times he went with his friends in the past. The conversation naturally progressed to a discussion about God, as I asked him the prompt “If I were to speak to you or your family about God, how would you like me to represent Him?” His response was thought provoking and showed me the importance of understanding what people look for as they think about God.

Tim’s main point was that he wants to be known. When he thought about the different ideas and depictions of God, from his perspective, God was a judge who had strict standards on right and wrong. He shared that often times, seeing what his Christian friends share about God, it seems so strict and limiting. Especially in the news, all of the ideologies that seem to be purported by Christians seemed too antiquated and unnuanced for him to agree with. He shared that to be known by God would mean that God understood the nuances of life and the difficult

choices individuals go through in arriving at their positions and conclusions. He gave the example of a man who would need to perhaps at times even employ harsh business practices and relationships with his competitors in order to feed his family. That man, in Tim's view isn't necessarily doing anything wrong, as he would be doing it for the benefit of his family.

Tim shared that if I were to share about God to even his family, he would want me to represent God in a way that, although is powerful, is someone that listens to the individual concerns and knows the difficulties and nuances each person is faced with. He shared that, growing up as Chinese immigrants, the collective culture of his family was incredibly important to all those involved. So more than sharing on the individual level, he shared that if someone were to tell his family about God, he would want his family to know that God is someone who can take care of their needs as a family, rather than focusing on the individual concerns of each of his family members. He shared, although the individual is important, the family identity and needs would be more important to his household.

Upon hearing his comments, I followed up with my own input. I thanked him for sharing his thoughts and assured him that the idea he has of who he wants God to be represented as to himself and to his family is not so far off from who God is. I got to share with him the story of Hagar in the wilderness and the God who heard her cries. I shared, often times, the worst examples of Christians get broadcasted through our news systems and media. But as the scriptures remind us, God is someone who knows us so deeply that the psalmist would say "Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether."

Meeting with Tim was an enriching time for both of us. I hope that I cleared up some misconceptions he may have held of who God is. Also for myself, I learned that people truly do have a longing to be known. And God is someone who knows us to the deepest degree.