

# Finding God

Our response to God's gifts

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## 3 minute RETREAT

### The God of Our Desires

**We may not expect to find God in our desires, but they're one of God's favorite hiding places.** God invites us to know our own hearts, and lures us there with desires. What is your heart's desire? Sometimes we have to wade through quick answers like the winning lottery ticket or a personal chef before we arrive at that place where God dwells.

Try this. Sit quietly and pray Psalm 20:4 as you breathe slowly and deeply, in and out: *May God grant you your heart's desire, and fulfill your every plan.* Repeat over and over. Let this prayer lead you deep into your own heart, closer to the desires that reside there. Close with a prayer of gratitude. ■

For a daily online 3-minute retreat, go to [www.loyolapress.com](http://www.loyolapress.com)

## God Shows Up in Unexpected Places

**In a troubled world, many find themselves asking, "Where is God in all this mess?"** Maybe we're looking for God in all the wrong places. Jesus, who became human in order to make God known to us, offers us clues to some surprising places where we can experience the presence of God.

**In vulnerability.** The story of Jesus' birth pits two kinds of "kings" against each other. King Herod lives in a palace, is a master of political intrigue, conspires with foreign invaders, and is willing to destroy innocent life to maintain power over others. Jesus is vulnerable and was born in a manger (a food trough). Jesus is willing to empty himself of all power to save us. Contrary to our expectations, God arrives not in the palace but in the manger, offering himself as spiritual food for the world. Look for God in vulnerability.

**In compassion.** In the healing stories of the Gospel, Jesus acts when he is moved by compassion for those who are poor, afflicted, or brokenhearted. Even when he challenges the Pharisees, it is compassion that moves him.



He sees our pain—and even our sins—and responds with loving kindness. When we experience compassion, the spirit of God is near. Find God in compassion.

**In emptiness.** Jesus appeared powerless on the cross. People jeered and taunted him. And yet he was never closer to his Father, the source of all real power. And he was never more fully who he was called to be than in his faithfulness even unto death. The emptiness he felt on the cross is matched by the emptiness of the tomb, which could not contain him. In the emptiness of the tomb, Jesus offers the fullness of life. Experience God in emptiness.

We may have faulty expectations about how God acts in the world and thus miss seeing the many ways God supports us, sustains us, and calls us to life abundant—even when life seems a mess. ✠

Tom McGrath is the author of [Raising Faith-Filled Kids: Ordinary Opportunities to Nurture Spirituality at Home](#) (Loyola Press).

## Compass Points

### Recognizing God

**When a zebra foal is born, it first staggers to its feet and runs in circles around its mother's legs.** Nature's way, no doubt, of getting those spindly newborn limbs strong enough, quickly enough, to flee from predators.

But then, exhausted, the newborn foal collapses in a weary heap and lies back, simply gazing, for hours it seems, at its mother. *How very cute*, I think. But this isn't cuteness; it's something else altogether. This is the foal memorizing its mother's stripe pattern.



Imagine! Every single zebra on this planet has a unique stripe pattern. Memorizing its mother's pattern is the foal's first act of bonding, its first defense against getting lost in the herd.

I believe that God paints a unique pattern of presence in each human life. We discover this pattern as we reflect on what is actually happening in our everyday experience. It is there that we will notice God's personal relationship with us unfolding minute by minute. This reflection becomes an attitude of mindfulness, an ongoing act of bonding, and it holds us in an unbreakable connection with the source of our being through every moment of our living. ■

*Margaret Sif is a retreat director and speaker in Ignatian Spirituality. Her books include [Inner Compass](#) and [Compass Points](#).*

## Sometimes God Is in the Ice Cream

**O**ne day, a father and his six small children trooped into the thrift store in single file. The tops of the little ones' heads were staggered in four-inch intervals of height, like stair steps. We clerks exchanged glances, doubting whether one lone man was sufficient to keep 12 little hands off the breakables, but we needn't have worried. The children followed along behind him to the back of the store and waited patiently while he began searching the clothing for their sizes. Watching this scene, an elderly shopper handed our cashier a ten and told her, "Whatever that father buys, use this to pay for it." Then he left.

A few minutes later, when the family came up to the cash register, they were told that it was not only covered, but there was \$1.50 left over. The father looked at us in surprise and then looked at his children and said, "Come on, kids, let's get another shirt for each of you." They were all for that, and the orderly line returned to the clothing racks.

At this point one begins to believe seriously in angels.

A woman customer, overhearing, whispered to our cashier that she would cover whatever else the father decided to purchase.

When the family returned to the checkout and found that their additional clothing was also free, the father looked incredulous for a moment. But then a huge smile broke over his face. "Kids," he said to them, "We're going for ice cream!" 🍦

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*Jane Knuth lives in Portage, Michigan. She enjoys oil painting, teaching math to eighth graders, volunteering at a thrift shop, and writing stories. She has a book coming out in September, by Loyola Press, about her experiences in a St. Vincent de Paul store.*

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*"God's image dwells in all of us. It is part of the stuff of which we are made; it is reflected in our lives, however imperfectly."*

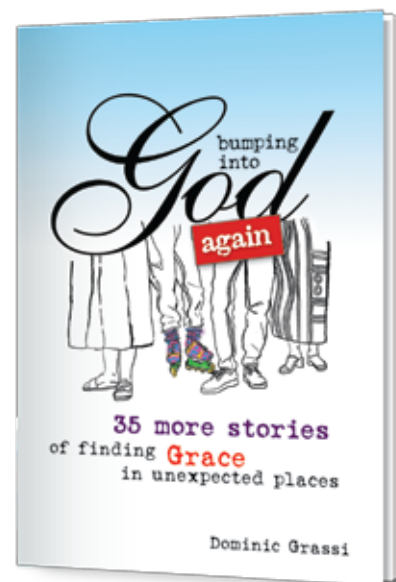
—Fr. Dominic Grassi / *Bumping into God Again*

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Fr. Dominic Grassi helps us recognize the graces we experience every day in *Bumping into God Again*, available at [www.loyolapress.com/store](http://www.loyolapress.com/store)

### Did you know . . .

**The St. Vincent de Paul Thrift Shop where I volunteer is across the street from a family homeless shelter. One of our unbreakable rules is that we must meet the people we help face-to-face because that is where we will meet Jesus. Saint Vincent once said, "We do our work to find God in it, rather than just to get it done." ■**



Finding God:  
Our Response to God's Gifts  
A newsletter for parents and families  
by Loyola Press  
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Scripture quotations are from the *New  
Revised Standard Version* ©1989 Division  
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Council of Churches of Christ in the  
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The newsletter is published seven times a  
year (including issues for Advent and Lent)  
by Loyola Press.

**LOYOLA PRESS.**  
A JESUIT MINISTRY  
3441 North Ashland Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60657  
[www.loyolapress.com](http://www.loyolapress.com)

For activities, quick tips and other resour-  
ces to encourage faith-filled family living,  
visit [www.loyolapress.com/family-fun](http://www.loyolapress.com/family-fun)

ISBN-13: 978-0-8294-3270-1  
ISBN-10: 0-8294-3270-1

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## Your Role at Mass, Part 1: Show up

**W**e go to Mass to experience Jesus' Real Presence. But what about our own? Will we be fully, truly present? Or will our minds be elsewhere—thinking about today's football game, last week's unresolved problems at work, next week's big test, or a thorny personal issue.

Your first task at Mass is to be fully present—body, mind, heart, and soul. Your work begins even before the church bells toll. During the prior week, notice the movement of God in your life. Recognize your shortcomings and how you need to rely more on God. Clear your family's schedule of overcommitments so that you arrive at Mass ready to participate in this sacred mystery.

As you arrive at church, greet your fellow parishioners quietly, then go to your place and greet the Lord. Tell God how you are right here and now, and ask for the grace to be open to the messages God wants to offer you today. As the procession begins, sing out as part of a community making its way once again toward the God who loves us. ✠

*Adapted from Your Role at Mass, a segment of the  
[Come and See DVD](#) that is part of the [God's Gift](#)  
sacramental preparation program from Loyola Press,  
written by [Joe Paprocki](#) and [Tom McGrath](#).*

### Did you know . . .

**Dipping your fingers into the holy water recalls your Baptism, which is the gateway to life in the Spirit and membership in the church. Through Baptism, you now share in the mission of the Church, which is to bear the light of Christ to the world. ■**



## The Whispering God

1 Kings 19:11–13

He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

—1 Kings 19:11–13

The volume of the TV seems to go up mysteriously during commercial breaks. The advertisers want our attention, and being loud does the trick. The fact is that our lives are loud, metaphorically and literally. Only the loudest, the flashiest, the urgent, the shocking gets our attention. There is barely quiet time in our lives. In fact, we have grown uncomfortable and even afraid of silence.

We tend to look for God in the loud moments of our lives: in a particularly difficult moment, when we suffer a loss, or when we feel lost. And we do well in talking, in praying to God at these times. We

wish that God would answer us in an even louder way. We want God to be a strong wind to blow away our problem or an earthquake to shatter our pain. But often it is in a gentle breeze that God makes himself present. A few minutes of quiet prayer and reflection, perhaps at the end of our day, will allow us to embrace the silence and hear in it the tiny whispering sound of God active in our lives. ■

*Santiago Cortés-Sjöberg is the supervising editor of Parish Life Resources at Loyola Press and author of two books of Scripture reflections.*



## Isn't the idea of finding God in all things—such as nature—some kind of New Age thing?

It's important to know that when we say that we can "find God in all things" that we are not equating God with any one thing or object. A beautiful rock or crystal can reflect the beauty and majesty of God, reminding us of God's presence and majesty. That does not mean that God is in the rock or that the rock is sacred. Someone following a New Age "spirituality" would conclude that such a rock, stone, or crystal not only reflects God's beauty and majesty, but actually is part of God and therefore possesses healing power or divine energy. This is a heresy known as Pantheism, which concludes that God and the world are one. To find God in all things means to see the world as a mirror that reflects various qualities of God. When we learn to see this way, we develop a deeper respect for all of God's creation and for one another because we realize that these are all opportunities to recognize God in our lives. 🍀

## 5 things I learned from . . .

WEB • BOOKS • MUSIC • MOVIES • TV

### Albus Dumbledore

Albus Dumbledore, as most 12-year-olds can tell you, is the headmaster of Hogwarts, the wizard school that Harry Potter attends. At times, Dumbledore sounds to me like a great spiritual teacher. Here are five of my favorite Dumbledore quotes; judge for yourself:

- "It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, just as much to stand up to our friends."
- "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we are, far more than our abilities."
- "Curiosity is not a sin. But we should exercise caution with our curiosity . . ."
- "Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery."
- "Numbing the pain for a while will only make it worse when you finally feel it." ■



Joe Durepos is the author of [A Still More Excellent Way](#).

Movies are modern-day parables. In *Movies that Matter*, Richard Leonard, SJ explores 50 important films through a lens of faith. Visit [www.loyolapress.com/store](http://www.loyolapress.com/store) for more information.

## Family as a Spiritual Path

### God in My Dirty Socks

Laundry is not a favorite chore in my family. We put it off as long as possible. The result is a daylong commitment to sorting, folding, and putting things away. One laundry day, I found myself making a mental list of all the things I would rather be doing—great spiritual endeavors. I would love to walk in the woods, take photographs, and write beautiful stories. Maybe I could even attend one of those silent, laundry-free retreats where you find God. I settled on this peaceful thought as I grabbed the last sweatshirt to fold. Out of my daughter's pocket tumbled a tattered bookmark. It

was wrinkled with soft edges telling of its journey through the spin cycle. Turning it over in my hand, I was struck still. Amid smiley faces and brightly colored flowers were the words, "Smile! God Loves You." I did smile. I did not need to seek God on wooded trails or in silent retreats. That day he was waiting for me in a pile of laundry. I was reminded that God is where love is, and he has a sense of humor! ■

Denise Skomer is an editor and writer in the Chicago area and co-founder of Bound By Grace Press, [BoundByGracePress.com](http://BoundByGracePress.com)

