Columns
Spirituality



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by Stephanie Peirolo

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My granddaughter, Ruby, is 4. She likes to play chase games. Sometimes, we chase her; sometimes she chases us. Shrieking with delight is involved either way.

Her parents aren't churchgoers, but they like me taking her to church. It gives them some time with her baby brother and gives Ruby some one-on-one time with Nana and Coco.

Talking about God to a child growing up in a house with different ideas about God than I do is a great exercise. She leaned over and pointed to the pictures of angels on the front of the bulletin one Sunday.

"What are those?" she asked.

"Those are angels," I told her. "Some people believe …" I use that phrase often. Some people believe. I believe. I think.

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She's down with the whole God thing, generally. When I told her God is inside us, she didn't like that at all and rejected it out of hand. "God's *next* to me," she said, pointing to the space next to her car seat. "God's next to all of us," she said.

Recently, I was talking to some priests from another denomination, and we were talking about how people connect with God. I assumed since these women were priests, they felt connected with God. One of them said no, the topic interested her because she wanted to feel more connected to God.

Not all of us have that felt sense that the Divine is right next to us. If we do, how do we communicate that to others, especially others who believe differently than we do? I like the idea of "attraction rather than promotion," a 12-step concept where people in recovery don't advertise or proselytize, they just show up and live in a way that attracts others to be curious and ask about their path.

My best friend doesn't believe in an interventional God. She is an observant Jew, and we've shared many Shabbat dinners. Her spirituality is very mature. When difficult

things happen in her life, she says she will sometimes pray to Stephanie's Interventional God. She has used the phrase so often that we made it an acronym, SIG or Siggie. Something about my interventional God is attractive, so she borrows it.

Tonight, my best friend and I were talking with some other friends, all women, about our various beliefs and spiritual practices. My best friend said that when I described the "dark night of the soul" to her, she read about it and then read St. Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle. "Me, a Jew, reading this super Catholic book and getting something out of it!" she exclaimed.

To which another friend responded that my being spiritual and approachable, being open to any and all beliefs, makes my friends want to learn more and read books I read. They are attracted to my connection with the Divine. I felt really good about that. Maybe saying, "Some people believe … " and then asking, "What do you believe?" with Ruby has been good practice.

What does promotion look like in terms of getting us to connect with God? Too often, the promotion is directive. Do this, be that, believe this, and you will be connected. Don't do this or that, or God will turn away from you. As if spirituality were some kind of formula or algorithm. We know it's not. Even the holiest have periods of desolation, and even the most profane can feel spiritual consolation. My spiritual director, a Catholic nun, says we are all connected to the Divine but are often separated from that felt sense, sometimes by religion.

Some of the formulas and directions I've been told aren't helpful. Many people carry deep woundedness and feel cut off from God because they can't be or do or believe what other people tell them they must to connect with God.

My father was a physicist, but I don't know much about physics. I don't understand gravity. I know what it is; I don't understand how it works. But gravity still keeps me connected to the earth. My lack of knowledge or understanding doesn't mean I suddenly fly up into the sky, exempt from gravity.

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I think it's the same with God. We're all connected to the same source, we're all connected to the Divine. And we can't be unconnected any more than I can be

exempt from gravity. No error, no mistake, no lack of belief can sunder that linkage. It can be sullied, obscured, buried, but not severed.

What if we just went around attracting love in a way that was so radically hospitable, so deeply welcoming, that everyone was included? I was drawn to my community by their love, welcoming and the deep joy that saturated everything they did. Later, when I learned about their charism and constitutions, I was interested and intellectually engaged, but it was the love that drew me in.

It's always the love that draws us in. C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Screwtape Letters*, "God cannot ravish. He can only woo." We don't often pay attention to the intensity of the wooing. God is coming after us, welcoming us, yearning for us. All of us. No matter what.

Yesterday, when we were driving home from church, Ruby said. "I was running around the house. I was playing chase games with God." And I thought, yes, that's it, we're all playing chase games with God. And all we have to do is stop, turn and wait to be caught.