

## READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

# *Wearing God*

## Clothing, Laughter, Fire, and Other Overlooked Ways of Meeting God

by

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### CHAPTER 1:

#### THE GOD WHO RUNS AFTER YOUR FRIENDSHIP

1. Lauren F. Winner comments that sometimes God feels like an abyss, other times the father she always wanted, and on some days she doesn't picture God at all (p. 2). How do you picture God?
2. What metaphors for God have enhanced your understanding of who God is? What metaphors beckon you "to go somewhere toward and with God" (p. 14)?

3. What do you think of the metaphor “friendship with God” (p. 23)? What strengthens your friendship with God? How is your friendship with God the same as or different from your friendship with loved ones?

## CHAPTER 2:

### A SHORT NOTE ON GENDER AND LANGUAGE FOR GOD

1. “How we talk about God matters because how we talk always matters,” Winner notes (p. 26). What are your own practices around gender and language for God? Do you agree with Winner that always using masculine pronouns for God has an impact on how we imagine God? Why or why not? What does it feel like to you to use a feminine pronoun for God?

## CHAPTER 3:

### CLOTHING

1. Prior to reading this chapter, how would you have described what it means to be clothed with Christ (p. 36)? In what small or big ways would your life be transformed if you considered wearing God each morning when you woke up?
2. “Jesus is not the kind of clothing that creates social divisions but the kind of clothing that undoes them” (p. 50). When have you found this to be true? Have you seen boundaries erased between people? How did that affect your connection with that community?

3. Winner writes about the connection between shame and the intimacy of God-as-clothing. What does it mean to you that God wants to “nestle up close” to your shame and tenderly stitch clothing of God’s self for you (p. 60)? Do you truly believe that you are lovely in God’s sight?

#### CHAPTER 4: SMELL

1. In the Hebrew Bible, the practice of incense sacrifices was pleasing to God. It had the power to calm and appease God’s anger and was an important mode of communicating with God (p. 69). Winner later writes about how the smell of our prayers can connect us to God (p. 72). How does this sensory metaphor broaden your understanding and draw you into a deeper communion with God?
2. It’s not uncommon to hear people talk about seeing God or hearing God. What does it mean to you to “smell” Jesus (p. 76)?
3. Paul writes that we are the aroma of Christ. How does your aroma direct people to its Source, to Jesus (p. 80)?

## CHAPTER 5: BREAD AND VINE

1. Winner elaborates on the bread metaphor, showing that God is not only our provision but also our delight—“enjoyment and necessity, sustenance and pleasure” (p. 95). When have you experienced Jesus as your provision or your delight? What kind of bread is Jesus?
2. The mystics in the Middle Ages compared the soul that is in union with God to bread that soaks up and grows (pp. 115–16). Like bread, how have you expanded with Jesus when you have drawn closer to Him?
3. Winner likens the bread of life to bread that sustains oppressed people on their journey through dangerous terrain. When have you been in dangerous terrain, and how have you experienced God sustaining you?
4. In the Song of Songs, inebriation is a common metaphor. “This is why Jesus is hymned not as grape juice but as wine: because He is dangerous and excessive,” Winner writes (p. 131). Have you experienced divine intoxication (p. 127)? What did that look like?

## CHAPTER 6: LABORING WOMAN

1. How does it feel to consider God as the laboring woman, groaning in anguish and struggle? What do

the birthing images, as well as the images of God as midwife and nursing mother, suggest about God and our friendship with God?

2. “Jesus is the mother in labor saying, ‘I cannot do this anymore.’ Jesus knew that new life would be born out of His suffering on the cross, yet He still asked God to take away the cup” (p. 148). When in your life have you labored and asked God to take away “the cup”? How did God respond?
3. When you picture the Crucifixion, in what ways does the metaphor of the laboring woman add to your understanding of God’s struggle for redemption (p. 154)?
4. In this chapter, Winner notes the ways her own biases limit how she thinks about biblical metaphors for God. “When the scriptures depict God doing something people do—such as nursing babies—I automatically go to an image of a middle-class white person’s doing that same thing and reason backward from that picture to God” (pp. 170–71). How do you think your image of God reflects the particulars of your own life? How in this chapter does Winner try to stretch beyond her own biases? How might you do the same? How might reading the Bible in community with other people reinforce or challenge your biases?

## CHAPTER 7: LAUGHTER

1. Prior to reading this chapter, what things did you think would make God laugh?
2. Like Sarah, when have you laughed scornfully at God's unfolding plan in your life (p. 185)? Were you transformed by this laughter? If so, how?
3. Winner writes that God laughs in the face of injustice. "God provokes us to laugh as testimony—testimony to our belief in a God who is ruling over a calamitous or oppressive situation, despite all signs to the contrary" (p. 190). In what situations today can you practice this holy laughter?
4. When have you experienced laughter as a tool of God's redemption (p. 200)?

## CHAPTER 8: FLAME

1. Winner asks us to consider whether the Bible's imagery of fire shows that God's destruction is also regenerative (p. 211). When has God's flame refined you, removed fear, or melted away hardness and sin?
2. "To encounter the blazing God is to encounter the God who can hold, and wants to hold, our gaze" (p. 215). When was the last time you passed an hour or two with God without distraction? How did God captivate you

like fire? Did God's flame focus your attention on a particular truth about yourself or about the world?

CHAPTER 9:  
IN THIS POVERTY OF EXPRESSION,  
THOU FINDEST THAT HE IS ALL

1. Some philosophers say that “the only true things you can say about God are what God is not—God is not unjust, God is not finite—because to say anything positive is to limit a limitless God” (p. 228). Do you agree? Do the words you use to describe God limit, shrink, or falsify God?
2. Winner points out that our language is limited when we talk about God. “I cannot describe God in the same way that I cannot describe a picture I am holding millimeters from my eyes” (p. 235). As you have explored the different metaphors for God in this book, how will you now enter this “dance between the saying and the unsaying” of this God of whom you long to speak?