

Three names for God

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In Vacation Bible School you don't simply tell Bible stories, you inhabit them. This is the greatest share of the work, creating visual spaces where children can experience a Bible story. This year I made a throne in the sanctuary to help the children visualize the day courageous Esther appeared before the King in an attempt to save her people. (The foam swords added a special touch!)

Making this kingly throne made me think of Calvin's three names for God. A few years ago I read the 1541 edition of the *Institutes* (translated beautifully by Elsie Anne McKee). I liked it better than the bulkier 1559 edition. It felt like reading a clear version of Calvin, before he got too bogged down by life. I noticed that there was a trio of names he used for God: King, Father, and Lawgiver. Other names appeared, but these three Calvin was fond of. They were masculine authority figures of his day, used also in the Bible to refer to God.

On a recent morning walk, I came up with three names for God for me to use. **Friend** is one, for reasons I mentioned yesterday. "I call you not servants, but friends," Jesus says. I am a disciple of Jesus, but also one of his friends. This must be one reason I love the book *Jesus Calling* so; it helps me imagine my Friend Jesus talking to me. A second name is **Breath**. Both Ruah and Pneuma can be translated Breath, and they are used as names for God in the Bible. If Friend points to an intimate relationship with God, Breath speaks to how God inhabits my body and gives me life. My third name for God is **Thou**. Even though it's a pronoun, I think it can function as a name too. Thou is elegant and archaic and tells me religion is an old enterprise, far older than I am. It also reminds me of Karl Barth's comment that the most appropriate pronoun to use for God is You, or Thou.

So Friend, Breath, and Thou are my three names for God. What names for God do you use? At different times in our pilgrimage of faith, we may conceive of God's name and identity in different ways.

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