

Precious as Silver

Imagining Your Life with God

Bishop George H. Niederauer

Jesus used parables to explain the kingdom of God to the people of his day. These stories continue to speak to us because of the power of the images used and the essential truths revealed in part by those images. Drawing on everyday experiences, popular culture, and literature, Bishop Niederauer uses images that appeal to human experience as a way to shed light on our path to God, on how to live as God's children.

His observations and insights are interspersed with appropriate scripture passages chosen to give a biblical basis for reflection. These Pause & Pray sections contain excellent opportunities for reflection and prayer, some with questions designed to draw you into the reading; be sure to take full advantage of them.

One of his most beautiful images gives the title to the book. Niederauer likens us to sterling silver, cherished and passed on generation after generation, in need of polishing and refining, prone to tarnishing. We are not like stainless steel, hard, with no need for attention. God is always there to polish us, showing us our worth. Using humor at times, Niederauer criticizes false images of God—the harsh “Gawd,” the compromising Jesus—and human misconceptions, such as “Baskin-Robbins spirituality.”

He addresses such fundamental questions as “What is God like?” and “What is God's plan for us?” giving us guidance rather than concrete answers where appropriate. For example, he deals with questions like “How does God let bad things happen?” not by giving an answer to that question but by showing how our understanding of God can make such things bearable.

On other issues he is more precise, insisting, for example, that we are all responsible for the work of the Church on earth, that we are all called to care for each other, and that this call and responsibility requires continual conversion.

With wonderful images to sustain us, this book will help keep Jesus at the center of our lives and help us accept God's grace to give us strength to live God's will.

Suggestions for reading:

Reflect on each chapter title question and write a response before you read the chapter, then answer it again after having read the chapter. Are your before and after responses different?

Questions for Reflection/Discussion

1. What images of God do you have? Are they helpful to your faith? What images in the book have you found most striking?
2. What does God reveal through the words of Jesus about how God sees us? If we are God's construction sites, whom are we allowing to be the construction manager?

3. What is your experience of the “Middle-Class Beatitudes?” Look at your life in light of the gospel values on a regular basis; are these false beatitudes creeping in?
4. Is the idea of continual conversion a new one for you? Niederauer lists some stumbling blocks to conversion: pride, F.O.E., procrastination. What stumbling blocks have you encountered? How do you deal with them?
5. Are you comfortable with the image of prayer as a park bench activity? Are you instead addicted to stress? What type of prayer are you drawn to?

About the Author

Raised in a devout Catholic family in California, George Niederauer studied at St. John’s Seminary in Camarillo, California, continuing for advanced degrees in literature at Loyola and USC. He combines his love of literature and ministry in his current role as Bishop of the Diocese of Salt Lake City.