

## WELCOME TO ANIMATE!

This Facilitator Guide will help you make the most out of the videos and the Journal. As you prepare to dive into this session, keep these things in mind:

- You know your group best. Adjust the activities as needed based on the interests, questions, and background of group members.
- Get ready for creativity. The Journal is meant to be a right brain experience. Think of the animate experience as a journey through the content with many stopping points based on the questions, wonderings, and interests of the group.
- You don't have to know everything. As a facilitator, you don't have to be the expert, or even agree with everything the speakers say. Be ready to spark conversation and see where this takes the group as you explore these ideas together.
- Social media can help. Think of ways to use social media and other online tools to keep the conversation going. How about a Facebook group, a Twitter hashtag, or posts on Instagram or Pinterest?

## SESSION FLOW IDEAS

To get each session started, try this structure:

- Recap previous animate sessions or other learning experiences.
- Update the group on any between-session reflections or research.
- Explore the content on the first Journal spread.
- View the video.
- Dive into the rest of the Journal content together.

## SESSION TITLES

### GOD | FAITH IS A QUEST

#### RELIGION | SPIRITUALITY IS NOT ENOUGH

#### JESUS | THE REVOLUTION OF LOVE

#### SALVATION | ABUNDANT LIFE NOW

#### CROSS | WHERE GOD IS

#### BIBLE | A BOOK LIKE NO OTHER

#### CHURCH | AN IMPERFECT FAMILY

## ICON WATCH

Look for these icons that guide you in activities.








— GROUP ACTIVITIES WITH QUESTIONS DESIGNED TO HELP ANIMATE CONVERSATION.

— INTRODUCTORY AND OUT-GOING THOUGHTS TO SET-UP THE SESSION AND TO KEEP INTERACTIONS GOING BETWEEN SESSIONS.

— LEADER TIPS: IDEAS TO HELP FACILITATORS FACILITATE.

— FACTOIDS: INFORMATIONAL TIDBITS TO SPICE UP THE CONVERSATION.

— QUOTES FROM THE VIDEO AND ELSEWHERE TO GET FOLKS THINKING.

— FOOTNOTES: EXTRA BACKGROUND MATERIAL TO MAKE YOU SOUND EVEN SMARTER.



## FOR BEST RESULTS

- Reproduce the Facilitator Guide in landscape format on 11x17 paper.
- Reproduce the Journal pages in landscape format on 8.5x11 paper.
- For both resources, use a color copier.

## GOD | FAITH IS A QUEST BRIAN MCLAREN

HOW ARE YOU EMBARKED ON A JOURNEY OF  
SEEKING FOR GOD AND KEEPING THE QUEST ALIVE?



Welcome to Animate! You're about to embark on a journey of faith with the help of seven gifted and unique twenty-first century theologians. First up, Brian McLaren exposes our inability to fully comprehend God. He reveals the dangers of our suppositions and helps us to plot a course between them as we continue our quest for and with God.

**PLAY SOME MUSIC**  
that gets people thinking outside the box about God such as "Magnificent" by U2 or the hymn "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise." Set the room with widely differing images of God. Encourage group members to consider these images as they arrive.

**ANIMATE IS ALL ABOUT**  
having animated conversations about faith. If this is the first time your group has met, begin with an icebreaker game or a question everyone can answer about him or herself. As the sense of community develops people will feel free to be themselves.

Brian McLaren has been a source of inspiration for "disenchanted Christians." Read through his bio and the quote together.

- When have you felt "disenchanted" with your faith? What brought you back?
- An old English mapmaker penned the phrase "here be dragons" at the edges of the known world. When it comes to God—what enchants you most, the known or the unknown?
- Read Isaiah 55 together then ask:  
What can you know about God?  
What remains unknown?

# WHO IS BRIAN MCLAREN

BRIAN MCLAREN GRABBED THE ATTENTION OF DISENCHANTED CHRISTIANS WITH HIS BOOK *A NEW KIND OF CHRISTIAN* (2001). LATER, IN 2005, HE WAS NAMED ONE OF TIME MAGAZINE'S 25 MOST INFLUENTIAL EVANGELICALS IN AMERICA. BRIAN'S INFLUENCE HAS BEEN THE RESULT OF HIS WILLINGNESS TO ADMIT THAT HE ISN'T ALWAYS SURE ABOUT HIS FAITH AND THAT HE USUALLY HAS FAR MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS.

**MORE BRIAN TRIVIA:**

- BRIAN WAS A COLLEGE ENGLISH PROFESSOR WHEN HE AND HIS WIFE STARTED A CHURCH IN THEIR LIVING ROOM.
- THAT CHURCH BECAME CEDAR RIDGE COMMUNITY CHURCH AND BRIAN WAS THEIR PASTOR FOR NEARLY 20 YEARS.
- LIVES ON MARCO ISLAND IN FLORIDA WHERE HE RAISES DOZENS OF EXOTIC TORTOISES IN HIS BACKYARD.
- RELEASED AN ALBUM OF ORIGINAL MUSIC CALLED "LEARNING HOW TO LOVE" IN 1978.
- BA AND MA IN ENGLISH FROM UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND.

**BRIAN'S BOOKS:**

- *A NEW KIND OF CHRISTIAN*
- *A GENEROUS ORTHODOXY*
- *EVERYTHING MUST CHANGE*
- *NAKED SPIRITUALITY*

SOMETIMES, WHEN I HEAR PEOPLE SPEAK ABOUT GOD, I FEEL LIKE AN ATHEIST. THE GOD THEY SPEAK OF I DON'T BELIEVE IN: THE GOD WHO LOVES CHRISTIANS BUT HATES MUSLIMS; A GOD WHO LOVES LUXURY ON THE RICH BUT CARES ABOUT THE POOR IS POVERTY; OF A GOD WHO CARES ABOUT HUMAN SOULS BUT DOESN'T CARE ABOUT CONSIDERING AND PROTECTING ONE ARE NO. "IS GOD REAL?" I FIRST HAVE TO ASK, "WHICH GOD ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?" AND WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY GOD?" —BRIAN MCLAREN

WHAT IMAGES OF GOD HAVE YOU LET GO OF?

WHAT IMAGES OF GOD RESONATE WITH YOU?

BRIAN MCLAREN IS ONE OF THE UNOFFICIAL FOUNDERS OF WHAT HAS BECOME THE EMERGING CHURCH, A MOVEMENT OF CHURCHES THAT HAS VITALIZED AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY DURING THE 1990S AND 2000S BY TAKING THE POST-MODERN WORLD SERIOUSLY AS THEY IMAGINE GOD AND CHURCH.

Invite people to share images and pictures of God they've seen throughout their lives. Out loud or in their Journals, have them describe or sketch their own thoughts about how they picture God. Encourage your group to come up with their own picture of God without regard for a "right" answer. Brian confesses that sometimes he feels like an atheist when he hears other people talk about God.

- What confessions could you make about your beliefs about God?
- How has your image of God changed and developed throughout your life?
- What images of God have you let go of?
- What images of God resonate with you?

**SCATTERED THROUGHOUT THIS**  
session is art that's suggestive of things needed to repair a sailing vessel, even while underway if need be. More than just keeping Christianity afloat, Brian has given his life to helping Christians reach beyond the horizons of what they've always believed about their faith.

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger hoped to define the movement in their book, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005). A notorious critique of Brian McLaren's way of thinking of God is D. A. Carson's *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2005).

Scot McKnight breaks through stereotypes in his article, "Five Streams of the Emerging Church: Key elements of the most controversial and misunderstood movement in the church today," *Christianity Today*, Feb 2007. (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/11.35.html>)

Where do we get our God? Here's a study of how young children "inherit" their view of God from their context: "Young Children's Descriptions of God: Influences of parents' and teachers' God concepts and religious denomination of schools," in *Journal of Beliefs & Values: Studies in Religion & Education*, Vol 22, Issue 1, 2001.



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“IF FORTRESS PEOPLE REDUCE GOD TO CONCRETE FACTS, CLOUD PEOPLE REDUCE GOD TO FOGGY OPINIONS. IF FORTRESS PEOPLE TURN FAITH INTO A VICIOUS FIGHT ABOUT WHO’S MORE RIGHT, CLOUD PEOPLE REDUCE FAITH TO A KIND OF INCONSEQUENTIAL LEISURE ACTIVITY, LIKE DOING CROSSWORD PUZZLES OR COLLECTING REFRIGERATOR MAGNETS OR BEING WINE CONNOISSEURS.”

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IT WILL ALWAYS HELP YOU TO WATCH

the video once or twice in advance to develop your own thoughts and questions. As you listen to Brian, consider your group’s theological range. Will any feel like the villains in Brian’s presentation? Position Brian (as well as the other animate theologians throughout this course) as a helpful contributor to your conversation but not as the last word.



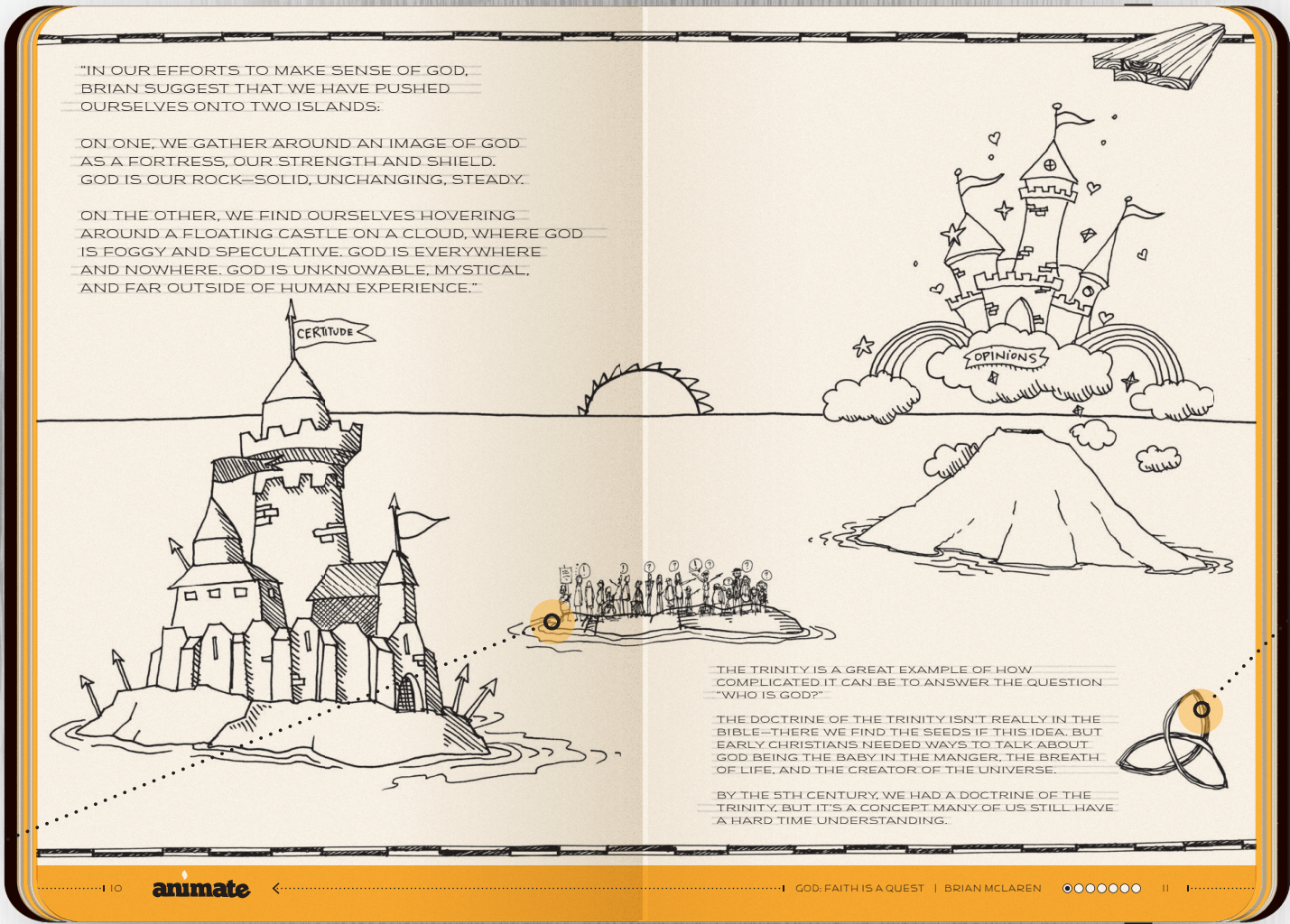
Watch the video together.

- What inspired you in the video? What challenged you? What concerned you?
- When have you been able to relate to Brian’s frustration: that the God he hears about from some Christians is NOT a God he believes in?
- Do you feel more like a Fortress of Certainty person or a Castle of Opinions person? Describe.



Brian helps us map our theological territory by providing two extremes—absolute certainty and total relativism. In their Journals, have group members mark where their beliefs lie between the islands. Perhaps they’re solidly on one side or another. Perhaps they’ve gone back and forth throughout their lives. Perhaps they’re stuck on the island in the middle or even sailing off into the horizon.

- What are the benefits of having beliefs about God that are absolutely certain? What are the drawbacks?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of having beliefs that are entirely relative and theoretical?
- Where did you mark yourself on this spread? Why?



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“THE IDEA OF THE TRINITY, SO CENTRAL TO TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDINGS OF GOD, TAKES A GREAT DEAL OF IMAGINATION. THROUGH HISTORY, PEOPLE HAVE USED IMAGES LIKE THREE DANCERS MOVING IN A CIRCLE, OR THREE LEAVES OF A CLOVER, OR THREE STATES OF WATER TO TRY TO CONVEY THAT ONE GOD CAN EXIST IN THREE PERSONS OR THAT THREE PERSONS CAN CONSTITUTE ONE GOD.”

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In the video Brian uses the doctrine of the Trinity as an example of how complicated it can be to answer the question, “Who is God?” Invite group members to write the three persons of the Trinity at the points of the symbol in their Journals.

- How does this symbol represent how the Trinity is interconnected?
- How have you pictured the Trinity?
- What does the Trinity tell you about the nature of God?
- Can either castle claim that doctrine as its own? Why or why not?
- How would you describe to someone unfamiliar with the Trinity how God is three AND one?



Brian says that he feels like an atheist when he hears how some Christians describe God. (See the quote on the previous spread.) Bring in the atheist experience by engaging the ideas of people who do not believe in a god of any kind.

- What arguments have you heard against the existence of God?
- How do you react to those arguments?
- How do you process these ideas within your own beliefs about God?
- What argument would you make for the existence of God?

NEO-ATHEIST WRITERS LIKE SAM HARRIS, RICHARD DAWKINS, AND CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS HAVE ATTACKED BELIEF IN GOD ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT IS NOT COMPATIBLE WITH SCIENCE AND A MODERN WORLD-VIEW; AND THAT RELIGIOUS PEOPLE MAKE THE WORLD WORSE.

Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2004); Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 2006); Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette, 2007).



Walk through the images of God in the Journal under “kataphasis.” Have group members mark or cross out the images they see and don’t see in their view of God. Then talk about the theological non-negotiables in your group. Invite group members to share one image, idea, or view of God that they won’t concede. For example, “I can flex on a whole lot of things, but God as parent is most important to me.” Have a volunteer write these non-negotiables on chart paper. Talk about how those different ideas can co-exist and work together in one faith.

KATAPHATIC THEOLOGY SEEKS TO UNDERSTAND GOD USING FAMILIAR IMAGES AS METAPHORS. IN BRIAN’S WORDS, “OUR IMAGES AND WORDS REALLY CAN HELP US TO CONCEIVE OF AND RELATE TO GOD.”

THIS WOULD BE A GOOD TIME to introduce Bible study tools like printed or online concordances, which are helpful in finding where exactly God is referred to as a “mother bear” for example. Note: Not all the images on this page are Biblical images.

What sketches don’t seem to fit on this page? If you’re thinking the coil of line and the cleat, then maybe the group ought to think again.

- What’s the purpose of these items, nautically speaking?
- How does that fit in with your conversation about the images of God?
- Hebrews 6:19 uses similar imagery when describing what it’s like to “look behind the curtain” between us and God.



APOPHATIC THEOLOGY (ALSO KNOWN AS THE VIA NEGATIVA) UNDERSTANDS GOD THROUGH THE SUBTRACTION OF IMAGES. IN BRIAN’S WORDS, “GOD CAN NEVER BE REDUCED TO IMAGES OR CONTAINED BY WORDS.”

Have your group critique the claims they made when talking about their kataphatic views of God.

- How do your images fall short of the actual God?
- How do ALL images fall short?
- How does it help to know God is beyond your human imagination?

“FOR WE EXPLAIN NOT WHAT GOD IS BUT CANDIDLY CONFESS THAT WE HAVE NOT EXACT KNOWLEDGE CONCERNING HIM. FOR IN WHAT CONCERNS GOD TO CONFESS OUR IGNORANCE IS THE BEST KNOWLEDGE.” (SAINT CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, IN HIS CATECHETICAL HOMILIES)

Try the kataphatic-apophatic balance Brian suggests in the video. Look up the image of the nursing mother God in Isaiah 49:13-16.

- How does this metaphor help you understand and connect with God?
- What are the metaphor’s limitations?

Next, follow Brian’s lead: “[The insight of Apophatic Theology] means that reverent loving silence is sometimes the most eloquent form of theology.” Take a moment for meditation. Consider lighting a candle as a focal point for your group.

- What did you discover in the silence?
- How has the indescribable God appeared in your life?

MEMBERS OF YOUR GROUP COULD use this same approach on their own between sessions. On the kataphatic side, have them choose an image of God to do more research on, then report to the group by way of social networking or when the group comes back together. On the apophatic side, encourage them to make time for silence and meditation, emptying their mind to quest for God.

Contemporary theologians reflect on apophasis in, *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation*, ed. Davies and Turner (Cambridge Press, 2002).



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“SOMETIMES I HAVE EXPERIENCED GOD IN EXTRAORDINARY WAYS—IN DRAMATIC SURPRISES OR SOUL-EXPANDING INSIGHTS OR UNEXPLAINABLE MYSTICAL ENCOUNTERS. MORE OFTEN, I HAVE FELT GOD’S REALITY IN THE SIMPLE ENCOURAGEMENT OF A FRIEND, IN THE GENTLE INSPIRATION OF A SERMON, OR IN THE FAMILIAR RITUAL OF THE EUCHARIST, AND I’D BE LESS THAN HONEST IF I DIDN’T ALSO SAY THAT AT TIMES, I’VE FOUND MYSELF IN THE SPIRITUAL DOLDRUMS, CAST ADRIFT, WONDERING IF THE WIND WOULD EVER BLOW AGAIN.”

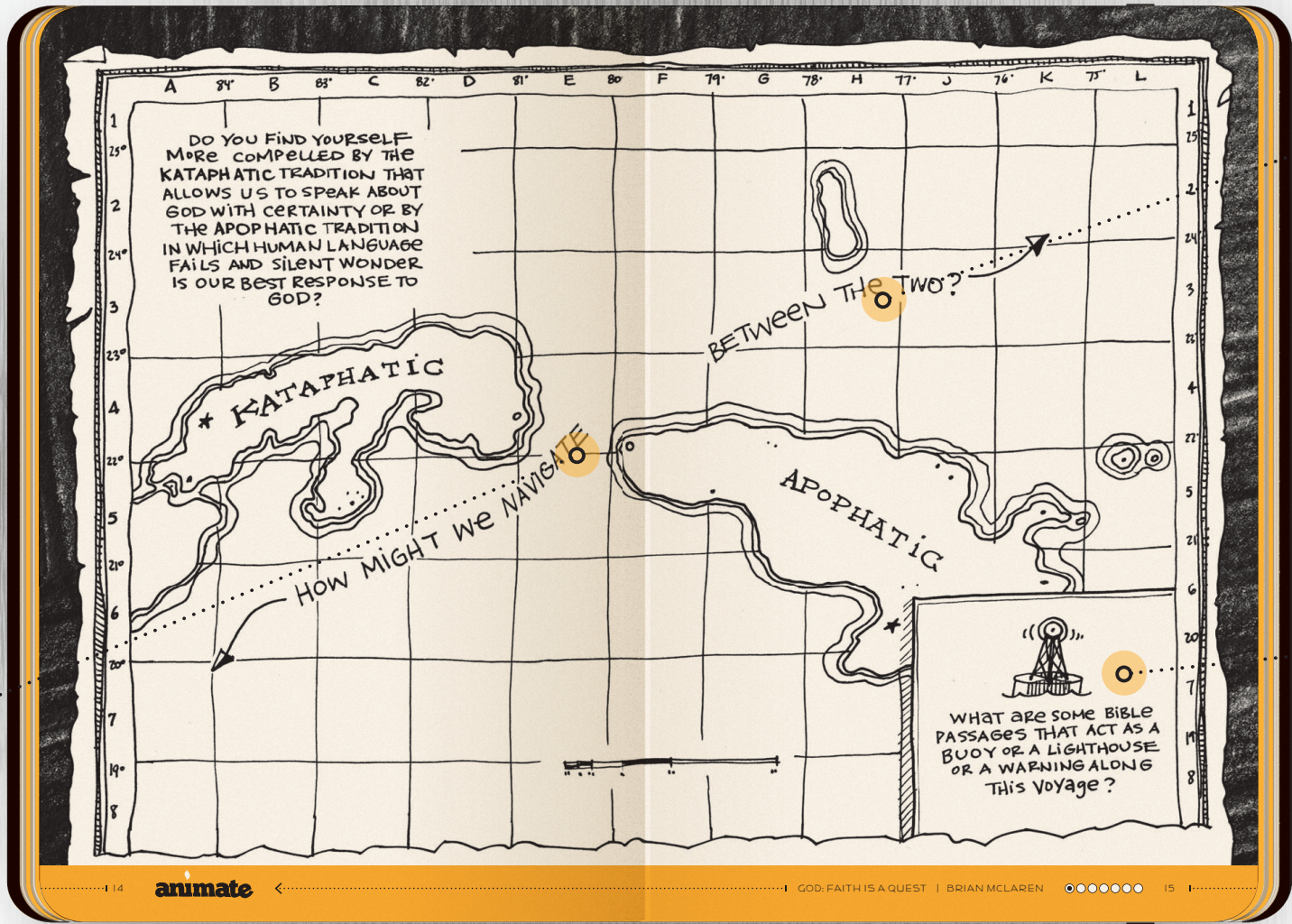
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THE LONG TITLE OF BRIAN’S BOOK REVEALS A LOT: A *GENEROUS ORTHODOXY: WHY I AM A MISSIONAL, EVANGELICAL, POST/PROTESTANT, LIBERAL/CONSERVATIVE, MYSTICAL/POETIC, BIBLICAL, CHARISMATIC/CONTEMPLATIVE, FUNDAMENTALIST/CALVINIST, ANABAPTIST/ANGLICAN, METHODIST, CATHOLIC, GREEN, INCARNATIONAL, DEPRESSED-YET-HOPEFUL, EMERGENT, UNFINISHED CHRISTIAN* (MINNEAPOLIS, MINN: YOUTH SPECIALTIES BOOKS, 2004).

Display the extended title of *A Generous Orthodoxy* so everyone can read it.

- How can a person be all those things?
- What does it look like to be a Liberal/Conservative? Depressed-yet-Hopeful?
- To unpack the term “unfinished,” read *Philippians 1:6* and *2:12-13* together. How is God at work in you?

CONSIDER THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SCENE, WHERE EACH PARTY HAS A PASSIONATE AND CERTAIN (AND OFTEN EXTREME) “BASE.” CHURCHES HAVE THAT DYNAMIC, TOO. IN HIS MINISTRY, BRIAN HAS HOPED TO DEFY THAT STEREOTYPE AND BRING OPPOSITES TOGETHER BY MARRYING GENEROSITY WITH ORTHODOXY.



Take two minutes to brainstorm some faith practices members of your group have engaged. Have a volunteer write them on an enlarged version of the chart in the Journal. Mark practices as being more apophatic or kataphatic.

- How do your faith practices reveal how we view God?
- How do your faith practices contribute to our faith as a quest?
- How do you use your faith practices and other faith encounters to navigate between your kataphatic and apophatic self?

“IN BETWEEN THESE EXTREMES, THE REST OF US NEED A THIRD ALTERNATIVE. WE DON’T WANT FAITH TO BE A FIGHT, AND WE DON’T WANT FAITH TO BE A FOG. WE WANT OUR FAITH TO BE A QUEST: A QUEST FOR GOD, AND WITH GOD.”

Have the group play with the chart. What course has their faith been on? Where would they draw dragons and other navigational hazards? Is it clear sailing with God for them, or has their faith been close to shipwreck a time or two? Perhaps they could even mark some things on the map that they treasure about God.

Select a few of the following scriptures and talk about how they serve as buoys or lighthouses along our faith quests.

Kataphatic Scriptures: Father (The Lord’s Prayer in *Matthew 6:9*), a vintner (*Isaiah 5:1-35*); a husband (*Jeremiah 3:31-34*); a king (*Revelation 4:1-11*), a hen (*Luke 13:34*), and shepherd (*Psalms 23*).

Apophatic Scriptures: *Romans 11:33-36*, *1 Timothy 6:16*; *John 1:18*.

Encourage members to share others that have offered significant guidance for their voyage to and with God.



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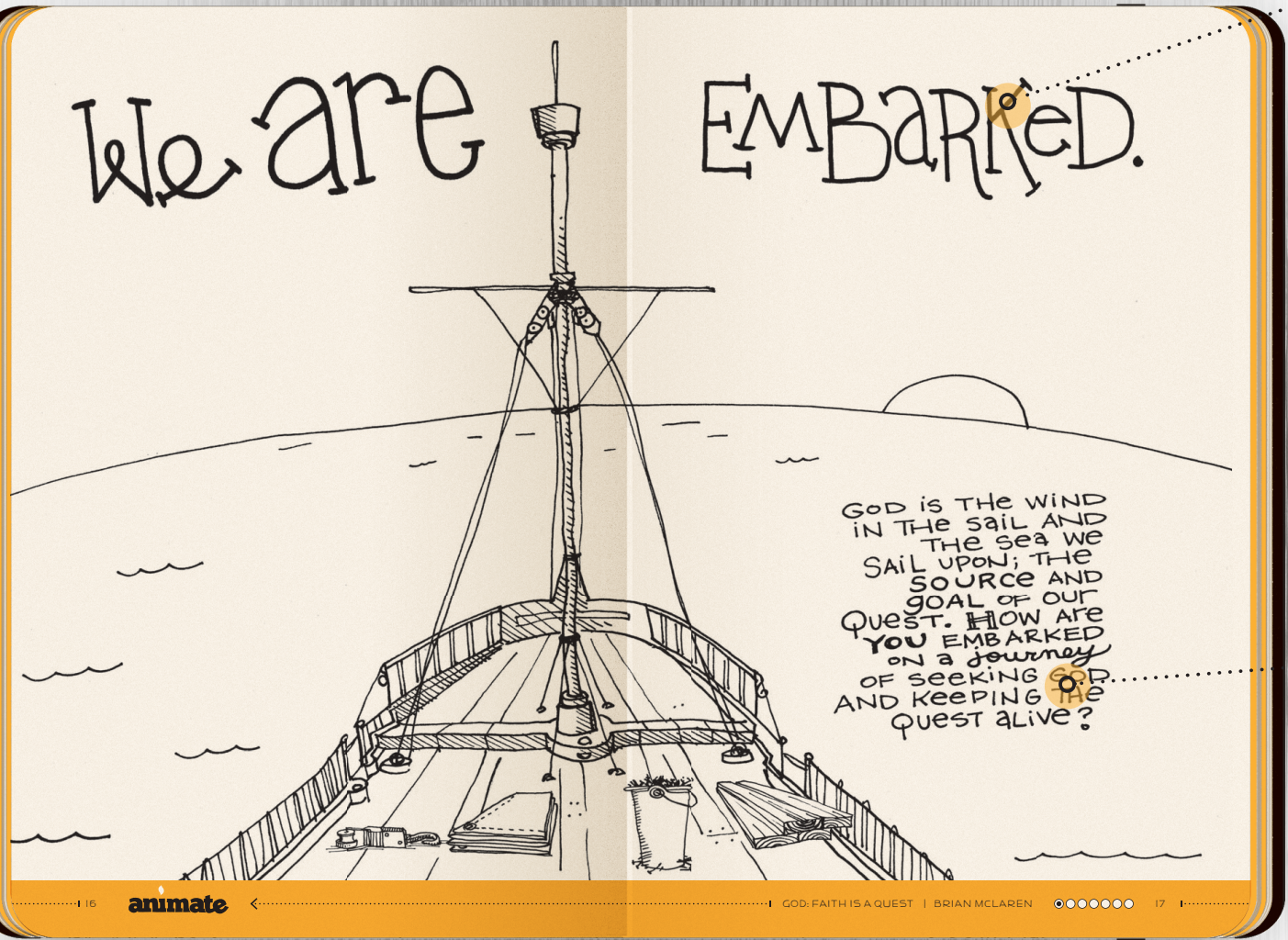
“WHICH DO YOU SEE AS THE GREATER DANGER IN TODAY’S WORLD AND IN YOUR OWN LIFE: FAITH AS AN EMBATTLED FORTRESS OR FAITH AS A CASTLE UP IN THE CLOUDS?”

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A more physical way to open this conversation is actually to put two stones (or things that looks like stones) out in the room representing Scylla and Charybdis. Picture one as a lock-down fortress and the other as an airy castle. Have your group walk the path toward or between these rocks. Then picture the other Scylla and Charybdis dynamics of your experienced faith life.

- What are the rocks we steer between? Are there other dangers?
- Is there anything that has helped or can help us steer clear?
- Whether you are talking a car or a ship, it’s a lot easier to steer if you don’t look right in front of you. What’s on the horizon of your quest? Is God calling you toward some new direction?

HOMER MYTHOLOGIZED TWO NAVIGATIONAL HAZARDS, A WHIRLPOOL AND ROCKY SHOALS ON EITHER SIDE OF THE STRAIT BETWEEN ITALY AND THE ISLAND OF SICILY, AS A PAIR OF SEA MONSTERS THROUGH WHICH ODYSSEUS HAD TO PASS ON HIS QUEST. OVER TIME THE LATIN PROVERB, *INCIDIT IN SCYLLAM CUPiens VITARE CHARYBDIM* (HE RUNS ON SCYLLA, WISHING TO AVOID CHARYBDIS), SPUN-OFF ENGLISH VARIATIONS LIKE “BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE” AND “BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA”—ALL OF WHICH SERVE TO ILLUSTRATE A DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, CHOICE. BUT IS CRASHING INTO ONE OR BEING CAPSIZED BY THE OTHER THE ONLY COURSE FOR CHRISTIANS WHEN IT COMES TO QUESTING FOR AND WITH GOD?



BRIAN’S PICTURE OF FAITH AS A QUEST HAS GOOD COMPANY. SOME OF THE MOST FAMOUS WRITINGS IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY FEATURE DRAMATIC JOURNEYS. DANTE’S *DIVINE COMEDY* AND JOHN BUNYAN’S *PILGRIM’S PROGRESS* ARE TWO CLASSICS.

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- Brian’s words steer us away from passive, disinterested, academic theorizing.
- If you “are embarked,” what is at stake in your quest for God?
  - How important has your relationship with God been to you?
  - Are you comfortable with that level of value? How would you work to change it?
  - Sketch or describe your thoughts in your Journal.

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“THE GREAT FRENCH PHILOSOPHER BLAISE PASCAL SAID IT SIMPLY AND WELL: ‘WE ARE EMBARKED.’ IN OTHER WORDS, WE AREN’T JUST THEORIZING ABOUT A HYPOTHETICAL JOURNEY OR PLANNING A POTENTIAL VOYAGE FOR SOMEDAY IN THE FUTURE. WE ARE ALREADY AT SEA, ACTUALLY UNDERWAY, IN A WILD ADVENTURE OF SUN AND SEA AND TIDE.”

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Discuss Brian’s question. Then picture the blessed space between. Work together to build a devotional practice based on the quest for life “in between the extremes.” Plan the way a person might come before God in both an image-rich and a humble, image-shedding practice. What habits of devotion would help us steer between the two rocks into that blessed quest Brian describes?

Before close your first session together, ask questions about today’s experience with Animate. Build your next session based on group feedback. Remind the group to explore their Journals in the time between now and your next session. What parts of the Journal did you spend lots of time discussing? What parts were simply touched upon? Encourage members to go deeper and share their findings the next time you gather.