
10 WAYS GOD REVEALS HIMSELF AS OUR FATHER

INTRODUCTION



“**SAY ‘DADA,’** baby! Say ‘Dada!’” So my toddler instructed our nine-month-old at the breakfast table this morning. He has been helping us coach our little girl in her first word, which, interestingly, was the exact same as his first word. My wife has been a great sport about it. And I recognize it’s not so much that I’m anybody’s favorite parent as it is that the D sound is a lot easier to spit out than the M sound. Even so, it shouldn’t surprise us that so often a child’s first word will be “mommy” or “daddy” (or in our case “dada”). Their first articulation is that of their first conceptualization: parental presence.

In a similar way, the very first thing—the most fundamental thing—that we must acknowledge about God is that he is *the* Father. When you take into account the biblical data, this is the main idea that Scripture sets forth about how we should understand God. As we will see, the concept is introduced in Genesis, and it is the grand theme that carries along the entire Scriptural story until it reaches its close in Revelation. The fatherhood of God informs how we understand this world and where we came from and why we are here. The great moral attributes of love, mercy, compassion, wrath, and justice are all in some way means by which we experience God as Father.

Most profoundly, the message of the Gospel is summed up by Jesus like this: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you

do know him and have seen him” (John 14:6–7). Salvation is about coming to God, not primarily as Creator, or Sustainer, or Judge, but as Father. The Christian is one who sees that God is no longer Father merely in a propositional sense, but he is Father in the most personal sense imaginable. He is *my* Father. And we come to know him in that soul-saving way through faith in Jesus Christ.

It struck me that this scene at the breakfast table was a powerful picture of what it means to know God. There wasn’t anything particularly beautiful about it if you had been there. She had Cheerios stuck to her face, and I’m pretty sure her brother was more demanding than encouraging (“Hey, baby! Say ‘Dada’ already, won’t you!”). But it showed me that there really is nothing more important than one child of God willing another person to articulate with them that most profound and foundational statement: “*Our* Father, who art in heaven...” Consider the following reflections my meager attempt to do just that.

Jonathan Landry Cruse pastors Community Presbyterian Church (OPC) in Kalamazoo, MI, where he lives with his wife and children. He is the author of *The Christian’s True Identity*, *What Happens When We Worship*, and the new worship collection *Hymns of Devotion*.

GOD IS THE FATHER OF ALL



THE BIBLE begins with a birth. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” is simultaneously the most understated and yet most profound birth announcement of all time. Have you ever considered that? The book of Genesis derives its name from this fact: that the entire world and everything in it is *generated* by God. The world came into existence through the will of God, by the power of God, and to the pleasure and glory of God.

I remember carefully inspecting every inch of our first-born as he lay sleeping in the hospital the day I became a dad. Every part of him was a wonder and a delight to me: his toes, his eyelashes, his lips—it was a tiny rehearsal of the Father who delighted ages ago upon light and water and vegetation and mankind, and said of it all, “It is good.” Of course, while I required the conception of my son to become a father, God did not require the creation of the world. He has been Father forever, since for eternity he is the Father of the Son, living in perfect community with the Spirit (but more on that in a later chapter). The point for now is simply this: to know God as Father is to confess that he is “Father of all, over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:6).

So what? What is this meant to teach us? First, it underscores the utter uniqueness of God as Father. “God’s fatherhood is holy, set apart, and singular.”¹ There must be a sense of awe and wonder as we consider this topic—it’s more grand than we perhaps at first imagined. He is the very first Father, “the Father from whom are all things” (1 Cor. 8:6). All other kinds of fatherhood are derivatives of his. We learn what

fatherhood is by looking to him, and we resist trying to impose upon him our expectations of what it means for him to behave in a fatherly way.

Second, since God has created all things as a Father, he controls them as a Father, too. The way the world works is a sign of his fatherly care, both to the natural order and to mankind specifically. God keeps the earth spinning and the seasons changing. Why? According to the Heidelberg Catechism, “He is able to do this because he is almighty God; he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.”² Similarly, while taking in the scenic landscape of Lake Ontario as he walked along the New York shore, Maltbie Babcock was moved to pen words of praise to God, not as the maker, but as the Father:

*This is my Father’s world,
He shines in all that’s fair;
In the rustling grass I hear him pass;
He speaks to me everywhere.³*

Third, if it is true that God is the “Father of all,” that means that all people have equal claim to his love, compassion, and salvation. God does not relegate his fatherly pleasure to a particular people group or to a certain ethnicity. He is the Father “from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named” (Eph. 3:15). Because God is over all, He is open to all. Through faith in Jesus Christ, everyone is invited to experience the fatherhood of God in the most personal way imaginable—including you.

1 Scott R. Swain, *The Trinity: An Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 70.

2 Question and Answer 26.

3 Maltbie D. Babcock, “This Is My Father’s World,” 1901.

2

GOD IS THE FATHER OF ADAM



WHEN READING the genealogy of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel, which starts with Jesus and works its way back in history, we find it has a startling conclusion. He is “the son of Adam [who is] the son of God” (Luke 3:39). Previously, we saw that God is rightly termed the Father of all creation. But in a more significant sense he is the Father of mankind. This is because unlike mountains, trees, or animals, Adam actually *looked like* God.

God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). Fast-forwarding just a few chapters we confirm that the terms of *image* and *likeness* are directly related to sonship: “When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth” (5:3). Adam was God’s firstborn son, the head of a human race that would be, by extension, God’s children.

What does it mean for man to “look like” God? It can’t be in any sort of physical resemblance, for God is a spirit. Rather, the idea is that man would *be like* God and *live for* God—much like a child doesn’t need to physically look like their parents for the relationship to be abundantly clear. Character traits, habits, speech patterns, aims and goals in life are all aspects of resemblance.

Man was like God in that he was formed with the divine attributes of knowledge, holiness, and righteousness (cf., Eph. 4:24; Col 3:10). Adam was made with a true knowledge of who God is, which is the beginning of all wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). He is holy in that he is formed without sin or defect, and set over and above all other creatures. And man is righteous—made “upright” in the words of Ecclesiastes 7:29—with the ability to discern and choose between right and wrong.

But the image of God is more than just *being*, it’s also about *doing*. As God’s son, Adam was given a commission to live in light of these attributes. Everything he did was to be for God and further promote and manifest God’s glory in the world. In God’s design, he would bestow upon his faithful son the blessing of enjoying full life and fellowship with him for eternity. But we know how that plays out: “Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—’ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken” (Gen 3:22-23).

The son failed his Father. He rejected the house rules and preferred life as an outcast and orphan, marring in all our hearts the resemblance we have with our Father. This is why another attempt from yet another son failed. After Adam, God passes the mantle of sonship onto the nation of Israel, saying, “Israel is my firstborn son” (Ex. 4:23).¹ But Adam’s sin has transmitted a terminal defect in all our souls: the first human father corrupted our relationship with the heavenly Father. So Israel fails at the commission to be like God and live for God, too. And every one of us falls far short of living for our Father the way he deserves (Rom. 3:23). The blessings of life in the heavenly home of God are seemingly unreachable, for there can be no salvation without an obedient son.

With that in mind, one struggles to think of a more exhilarating way to begin a biography of Jesus than this: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, *the Son of God*” (Mark 1:1).

1 G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 402.

3

GOD IS THE FATHER OF JESUS



MANY OF us have at times wished for a direct revelation from God to guide us in life—something remarkably clear, like a booming voice from heaven. Interestingly, there are only two times where the Gospels record such a miraculous phenomenon, and each time God had the same thing to say: “Jesus is my beloved Son.” It happens at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:17) and also at his transfiguration (Matt. 17:5). Imagine how important something must be for it to occasion God grabbing a megaphone and shouting down to us from heaven—*twice!*

We have seen the ways in which both Adam and Israel were considered God’s sons, and yet Jesus is God’s “beloved” Son. This preeminent title is reserved for Jesus because He alone came and fulfilled what every other image-bearer of God failed to do: He lived a life entirely devoted to God. His forty days in the desert and overcoming the temptation of the Devil (Matt. 4:1-11) is a triumphant contrast to how Adam fared against the serpent in the Garden of Eden, or how Israel fared as they wandered in the wilderness. And this was not a momentary success story—Jesus sealed his commitment to God in blood, being “obedient to the point of death” (Phil. 2:8).

So as the first and only faithful Son of God, the voice of God comes from heaven to let the whole world know he has met with fatherly approval. Of course, “Jesus did not become Son of God because he had divine approval, but he had that divine approval because he had always been Son of God.”¹ Jesus of Nazareth was the embodied second person of the Trinity, who has for all eternity been the Son of the Father. John stresses that this in the opening of his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father,

full of grace and truth” (1:1, 14).

Perhaps this Father-Son relationship is the most basic thing that the New Testament wishes to tell us about God. Jesus himself identifies his mission in terms of his obedience to his Father: “For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me” (John 5:36). The Apostle Paul loves to highlight that the predominant way we are to know God as Father is by knowing him as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:6; cf 2 Cor. 1:3, 11:31; Eph. 1:3; Col. 1:3). Most importantly, Jesus tells us salvation hangs upon this relationship between him and his Father: “As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me” (John 6:57; cf. 14:11).

So, if you are wanting a voice from heaven to give you direction, hear the one that is recorded for us in the Gospels twice over: God wants you to know more than anything else that Jesus Christ is his Son. Why is that fact so important? Because, as C. S. Lewis memorably put it, “the Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.”²

1 J. Gresham Machen, *The Person of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2017), 38.

2 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 178.

4

GOD IS THE FATHER OF ADOPTION



WHILE JESUS is the only *begotten* Son of God, He isn't the *only* son of God. In fact, the gospel is about Christ coming to earth "so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:5). He gives us his very Spirit so that we are enabled to call upon God the way that he does: as "Abba! Father!" (v. 6). Prior to receiving this "Spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:15), we were nothing more than "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), destined to eke out a pathetic existence on the sin-streets of this world, as orphans of the heavenly Father. But after accomplishing the task of sonship, Jesus returns to the Father, bringing with him "many sons to glory" (Heb. 2:10).

Have you basked in the sheer privilege that is ours to be children of God? Imagine how big the heart of God the Father must be. He has forever and always known the presence of the perfect Son. There is no good thing lacking from the Father-Son relationship within the Trinity. And yet, even so, the Father delights to enlarge his family! He desires to love us with the very same affection with which he loves the pleasing Son. Yes—*us*! Unruly children who can only fall short of our Father's will and consistently fail him.

It seems too good to be true, and yet it *is* true. Jesus's prayer to the Father is that "the love with which you have loved me may be in them" (John 17:26). What a staggering thought! It is no wonder that John Calvin would include in his last will and testament this line: "I have no other defense or refuge than his gratuitous adoption, on which my salvation depends."¹

There is perhaps no privilege greater for the Christian than adoption—"the entire Christian life has to be understood in terms of it."² What a dignifying thought to know that God intends us to sleep in his house and feast at his table the rest

of our days (Psalm 23:6)! Nothing sin or Satan says can change that. Therefore, the grace of adoption should lift our hanging heads and set sail our sinking hearts as we journey towards Home.

With increased joy and security comes increased responsibility. The Christian who knows they have been saved from a life of hell-bound orphanhood will not rest until the Father has every ounce of their love. Offering anything less is unimaginable. In a hymn that traces the journey from slave to son, Charles Wesley asks with piercing conviction, "And shall I slight my Father's love, or basely fear his gifts to own? Unmindful of his favors prove, shall I, the hallowed cross to shun, refuse his righteousness to impart, by hiding it within my heart?"³

By giving us his Spirit, God is taking back, recovering, and renovating that which he had formed for himself at the creation of the world. He is our Father and we are his children so that we would be like him and live for him. Adoption doesn't ease that duty, but enhances it. In the words of commentator William Hendriksen, "He recreated what he had created, so that we are his in a double sense, and therefore all the more owe him our full devotion."⁴

1 As quoted in David Garner, *Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2016), 311.

2 J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, reprint), 209. According to Packer, adoption is "the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification....Adoption is higher, because of the richer relationship with God that it involves." (206-7).

3 Charles Wesley, "Where Shall My Wondering Soul Begin?"

4 William Hendriksen, *Ephesians* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 187.

5

GOD IS THE FATHER OF GENEROSITY



IN THE remaining reflections, we want to tease out more of the benefits and realities that are ours now that God has become our adoptive Father through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Knowing God as Father means to know him as the great gift-giver. Like any parent, God delights to drop presents in our lap. He smiles to make us smile. “Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship [of adoption],” writes J. I. Packer.¹ And of course that’s true. Adopting a child is one of the most generous things a person can do in this life. We know God’s generosity in that we are given a house key to heaven, where previously there was only a sign that read “No Admittance.”

Thus the greatest gift we receive as children of God is so big that this world can’t even contain it. It’s what the Scriptures refer to as our “inheritance”—something that is “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, *kept in heaven* for you” (1 Pet. 1:4). Looking at Romans 8, we see that Paul connects the ideas of adoption and inheritance: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (vv. 16–17). The inheritance of heaven that belongs to the Son of God by right is shared with us by grace.²

A Father who has already promised us everything in our inheritance will not be stingy until we acquire it. Far from it! In the meantime, we are daily recipients of his generous and good providence. We receive good gifts because we have a good Father: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,

coming down from the Father” (James 1:17). I love the totality with which James speaks. *Every* good gift. Not some, or most, but all of the gifts of this life are signs of our Father’s pleasure, kindness, and generosity.

God’s generosity should generate at least two responses in our hearts. The first response is *to give*. If all things come from God, and therefore nothing is truly “yours” to begin with, you can start holding on less tightly to what you have. You will become generous as He is generous. And moreover, you will especially delight in giving gifts *back* to your Father. As C. S. Lewis illustrates, “It is like a small child going to its father and saying, ‘Daddy, give me sixpence to buy you a birthday present.’ Of course, the father does, and he is pleased with the child’s present. It is all very nice and proper, but only an idiot would think that the father is sixpence to the good on the transaction.”³ In other words, God doesn’t gain anything by receiving back that which was his from the start. But He rejoices to see us give it to him, and our hearts are better for it.

The second response to God’s generosity is *to pray*. According to Jesus, the point of knowing a gift-giving Father is to rest assured that He will hear our requests. “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:11). The generous heart of the Father is bursting to bestow blessings on his children—you just have to ask. And if all things are already your inheritance in Christ, could you ever ask too much?

¹ Packer, *Knowing God*, 207.

² See Jonathan Landry Cruse, *The Christian’s True Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), 70–72.

³ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 143.

6

GOD IS THE FATHER OF COMPASSION



Psalm 103 says, “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust” (vv. 13-14). One of the ways we experience the fatherly care of God is through his compassion. In the context of the psalm, God looks upon us in our sin, knows the judgment we deserve, but instead He shows us mercy. He has “pity” on us (KJV). Parents are pained to see their children suffer, even when it’s a result of the child’s own foolish decision or disobedience. The parental bond of love is so strong that it often produces compassion in the place of wrath.

We could say that the psalmist is describing God as a *gentle* Father. Gentleness is handling something that is fragile according to its nature, so that it doesn’t break, or so that there isn’t even the threat of it breaking. In fourth grade, my class experimented on the best way to protect an egg that was dropped from a second-story window. Of course, the best way to handle the delicate nature of the egg would have been to not drop it in the first place! Psalm 103 tells us that God handles us according to our nature. He remembers that we are made out of the dust, and therefore treats us accordingly.

Here again we see another connection between God as

Father and God as Creator. The Lord knows how we are made, for he is the One who made us. Having a finite human nature is like being dressed in a “handle with care” label. So, “Father-like he tends and spares us, well our feeble frame He knows. In his hands he gently bears us, rescues us from all our woes.”¹ We cannot bear an infinite burden, because we are finite creatures. We have limitations and shortcomings. What a sweet relief to know that the God who marks out our path, who providentially decides every single thing we will encounter every single day, knows exactly what we can handle.

Perhaps your experience with your father lacks this gentle aspect. You think, “As a father shows compassion to his children?” Yeah, right. Not *my* father!” If that’s your situation, I am deeply sorry. But it is important to keep in mind that even the best human fathers can’t hold a candle to the character of our heavenly father. Furthermore, our dads aren’t the primary way we are to interpret or experience God as Father. Jesus is. He is the One who invites us into the compassionate character of God: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28–29).

1 Henry F. Lyte, “Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven,” 1834.

7

GOD IS THE FATHER OF PROTECTION



IT WAS 1589 and the French Protestant army was facing a debilitating onslaught from the fierce Catholic League, under the leadership of the Duke of Mayenne. The Huguenots were holed up in the city of Dieppe, and had lost the advantage of their artillery due to heavy fog. It seemed like the French Wars of Religion were about to come to a close in favor of the Catholic forces. As his men were nearing despair, King Henry IV called out to them, “Come, lift the psalm. It is full time.”

What was “*the psalm*”? The voices began to rise over the din of battle in song: it was Psalm 68, a song of military triumph that exults in God as the true champion of his people. “God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered; and those who hate him shall flee before him!” (v. 1). The psalm spread through the Huguenot ranks, injecting hope and instilling confidence in the soldiers. The fog cleared and soon the cannons were firing to the beat of the singing. Their enemies were indeed scattered.¹ The French army was rallied by the same truth that comforted the Israelite armies of old: if God was on their side, who could be against them?²

Interestingly, this psalm celebrates God’s military success as a corollary to his fatherly character, for it goes on to state “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation” (v. 5). What is this psalm teaching us? It is teaching that even those who stand virtually no chance against their foes—the helpless and oppressed—find in God a mighty

defender. A good father protects his family, and even those who lack such paternal protection from their earthly fathers find this and more in God. He is the father to the fatherless.

And as such, He guards us from the greatest threats that sinners face. He protects us from the world, promising that “no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, declares the LORD” (Is 54:17). He keeps us even from our own sinful flesh, sending the Holy Spirit into our hearts to kill the sin that lives there and to dress us in his own armor (Ephesians 6:10-18). Finally, even our adversary the Devil himself, who “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” is no match for our guardian God (1 Peter 5:8). He has been roundly defeated at the cross (Col. 2:15). All threats are silenced by our Father.

To have God as father is to have him as your personal protector. This is who he is. Again, Psalm 68:5 says that “the father of the fatherless ... *is God in his holy habitation.*” To see God at home is to see him fulfilling the role of a protective father. What peace there is to dwell in this house! Matthew Henry says that “repenting sinners, who are helpless and exposed more than any fatherless children, are admitted into his family, and share all their blessings.”³ Is the blessing of his protection yours?

¹ See James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 41-106*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 553.

² See Numbers 10:35-36.

³ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-concise/psalms/68.html>

8

GOD IS THE FATHER OF DISCIPLINE



THE BOOK of Proverbs is unique in Scripture. It is not written as a record of national history, or as a biography, or as a collection of poetry. Neither is it a correspondence between friends or from a pastor to a congregation. In Proverbs we get to listen in on an intimate communication from a father to a son: “Hear, my son, your father’s instruction,” writes King Solomon (1:8). These chapters are a father’s plea that his son walk in the way of wisdom.

And in this treasure trove of wisdom, Solomon instructs that the good life requires a proper response to the afflictions that God will inevitably send to his people in this life. He writes, “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (3:11-12). Interesting how Solomon helps his son to understand the way of God by drawing upon an analogy between their relationship. It’s as though he writes to his son, “My boy, just as you know from time to time I have to discipline you, and this is a sign of my love for you, so too God will discipline us as his people.” We need to hear this, too, because our natural response to discipline is largely negative.

For one thing, we are not “despise” the Lord’s discipline. That is, we are not to bear it begrudgingly, as though our lives would be better without it. The opposite is true: it is through discipline that our sin is both revealed to us and put to death by the Spirit. It’s a means of sanctification, which is an exclusive privilege of adoption. Paul connects our sanctification and adoption in the opening of Ephesians: “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ” (vv. 4-5). How can we despise that which makes us better people? Discipline is not for our hurt, but for our holiness.

We are also not to “be weary” of God’s fatherly reproof. God’s hand can be heavy upon us for lengthy seasons. So

Hebrews exhorts us, “It is for discipline that you have to *endure*” (Heb. 12:7) We don’t enjoy discipline, but we must endure it. To reject the affliction that God sends is to reject his fatherly care. It’s to act as though we would rather be orphans than be the adopted children of God. Though discipline is difficult to endure at times, we must remind ourselves even through it that God does not treat us as our sins deserve—He treats us as sons deserve. He gives us all the privileges of children: the safety of his home, the promise of his love, and the correction of his discipline. Hebrews goes on: “God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons” (vv. 7-8).

If we want to be children of God, we must receive his discipline. And we cannot think of it as though we are taking the bad with the good. Discipline itself is another form of blessing of being a child of God! It’s a sure sign that He is indeed our Father. Does it sting at times? No doubt. But it is ultimately for our good. It is a means of Son-shaping us or glory. It is this reality that makes sense of the psalmist’s exclamation: “It is good for me that I was afflicted” (119:71). May God give us the grace and humility to say the same.

9

GOD IS THE FATHER OF MERCIES



WHEN EXTRAORDINARY discoveries or scientific advances are made by singular individuals, society honors them by crediting them with the designation “father of _____.” For example, Albert Einstein is considered the father of modern science, Adam Smith the father of modern economics, and Henry Ford the father of the auto industry. Without the contributions of these pioneering individuals and others like them, particular fields would be underdeveloped—or in some cases entirely nonexistent—and our lives would be profoundly different. Can you imagine where we would be without O. Raymond Knight, the father of Canadian Rodeo?

In a similar but far more significant way, the Scriptures crown God with the title “the Father of mercies” (2 Cor. 1:3). This quite simply means that without God there would be no mercy. He is the source of it; it flows from him. Mercy is not simply something that God has, but it is something that God is. When declaring his name and attributes to Moses, God said that he is “a God *merciful* and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex. 34:6). This reality should provoke at least three responses from God’s children.

First, we should *seek* mercy from him. To tell us that God is the Father of mercies is to tell us where mercy can be found. When you feel the burden of your sin, or the exhaustion of living in a world shot through with suffering, don’t seek relief from anyone or anything apart from God. It is a worthless endeavor, and yet one we engage in quite often, to seek relief *from* the world *in* the world. But “there is no solid comfort but what comes from him,” says John Gill. “Whatever consolation the saints enjoy they have it from God the Father.”¹ While we may debate whether Freud or Wundt is the father of psychology, or if Newton or Galilei is the father of modern science,

there is no question that God is the Father of mercies.

Second, we should *expect* to find mercy with him. “If mercy is to be found anywhere, it is there.”² The promise of God is that when we seek good things from him, we shall find them (Matt. 7:7). Coming to the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort is not an exercise in futility, it’s an exercise of faith, and one that God delights to reward. He never turns his children away, so we have every reason to set out towards him!

Third, we should *praise him* for his mercy. Psalm 130:4 says, “But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.” God’s mercy should produce nothing but deep reverence in our hearts for God. His mercy is not leniency. His mercy is not license to sin. His mercy is love, displayed through the agonizing death of his only begotten Son. Even eternity will be too short to praise him for such love.

¹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/2-corinthians-1-3.html>

² Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 65.

10

GOD IS THE FATHER OF FAITHFULNESS



WHEN REFLECTING upon the fatherhood of God, it is nearly impossible not to make comparisons with the fathers or father figures in our own lives. We must keep in mind, though, that his fatherhood is the original. He is the first Father, and all others are derived from him. Many struggle to believe and be warmed by the good news of God as Father, and the fatal mistake is interpreting the original through the copy. We assume that if our father was abusive, absent, or in any other way sorely deficient, God will be, too.

In this instance, we must permit the facts of Scripture to combat and conquer our fears. God is called “the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” The imagery here is powerful. “Light” connotes purity and perfection. There is no defect in God’s parenting, we could say. He does not disappoint us, fail us, or let us down. Better than that, he never will! This is because the light of his perfection is one that never dims, flickers, or goes out. The shifting of shadows is the indication that the light about it is changing, but God’s light is always in the same position, shining with the same intensity. The blessing of being a child of God is that we always have the smile of his face beaming upon us (Numbers 6:25, Psalm 67:1).

Isn’t that a breathtaking thought? There is nothing that can ever weaken or sever the bond of love God has with his blood-bought children. Even *our* sin, rebellion, *and* disobedience to our good Father will not get us kicked out of his house. Stop

your doubting. Quit the concern that your missteps will make him love you less. Replace your fear with this fact: He is the Father who is faithful, even when we are faithless. He is the Father who never changes. Speaking of adoption, J. I. Packer writes that we cannot forget this important truth: “it is a blessing that abides.” He goes on,

Social experts drum into us these days that the family unit needs to be stable and secure, and any unsteadiness in the parent-child relationship takes its toll in strain, neurosis, and arrested development in the child himself... But things are not like that in God’s family. There you have absolute stability and security; the parent is entirely wise and good, and the child’s position is permanently assured.¹

God is the first Father. He is also the forever Father. To come into his loving arms now through faith in Jesus Christ is to stay there for all eternity. Even the greatest parent-child relationships on earth change and eventually come to an end. Anxiety and fear will grip the child when they first move out of the house. Tears will fall at our parents’ deathbeds. In the end, that feeling of security we get from curling up in our father’s lap and being held in his embrace will be a distant memory. But the Christian is given this promise—a promise that is good now and forever: “The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut 33:27).

¹ Packer, *Knowing God*, 209.

