

GOD IS: FATHER

Do you struggle with the concept of God as heavenly Father? If so you likely also wrestle in relations with your own earthly father. Today's worldly culture pushes you to abandon "fatherhood" as understood by our forefathers. But truly understanding God as "Father" transforms your relationship with Him.

1- God reveals Himself as Father. Isaiah 64:8 declares "*O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of Your hand.*" The Bible opens with God creating Adam in his own image (Genesis 1:26). The Bible is a "revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator" and "Father" is the Christian name for God, says theologian JI Packer. "*Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?*" Malachi 2:10 proclaims. Scripture presents God in action as Father, creating, instructing, protecting, caring, in loving relationship with His children. But the Bible is an honest book.

We better understand God's divine nature through His personal relationship to us. This includes His desire that His children become like Him. So we also see God throughout Bible history, warning mankind against sin, pronouncing consequences of disobedience, and carrying out deserved punishment. Perhaps that's what reminds us of earthly fathers. Their feeble attempts at parenting are confused with God's awesome holiness and covenantal love for His children. Packer points out, "everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God." He declares, "our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption." For it is in our spiritual adoption that we call God the Father our "abba," our daddy. Relationship and fellowship!

2- God redeems you as your Father. Isaiah 63 presents God dealing with His people "*according to His compassion*" and "*abundance of steadfast love*" and "*He became their Savior*" and "*redeemed them; He lifted them up and carried them from the days of old*" and "*You, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is Your name.*" Indeed, the name Jesus in Hebrew means "Jehovah saves." God gave His Son Jesus who came to reveal the Father, speak His words, and do His will. Disobedience is saying NO to God, and reaping the consequences. But knowing God as Father is saying YES to Him, and receiving the rewards. Packer observes, "You sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father." The Father who gave His Son to save you. Packer says, "to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of being God's child, having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all."

To become a Christian is to become God's child. John 1:12 explains, "*To all who did receive Jesus, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.*" While every person is created in God's image, in the physical sense considered a "child of God," you are not His child in the spiritual sense unless you are born again from above by the Holy Spirit. John explains those who believe in Jesus "*were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*" That's "*adoption as sons*" in the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:5, Eph 1:5). God the Father becomes "daddy." Just as my adopted son was born in God's plan by the will of the flesh, he became "my son" when the beautiful procedure of legal adoption made him my own. So it is with God's spiritual children, His reborn inheritors (1 Peter 1:3-5), redeemed into relationship and into fellowship with God the Father.

3- You represent God as Father on earth. God put Adam in Eden to "*work and keep*" the garden He planted (Gen 2:15). Adam was to become one flesh with his wife Eve, and they were to "*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion*" over God's creation, as His representative stewards, male and female. Richard Phillips' book "The Masculine Mandate" explains, "The two main obligations of fatherhood are to nurture (*work*) and protect (*keep*). A man is called to work the hearts of his children that they might become fertile soil for the gospel and devotion to Christ. And a man is called to keep and protect his children from the influences of sin - in the world and in their own hearts - so that all the efforts to draw that young person's heart to Christ may not be swept away." This involves discipline (*training*) and discipling (*teaching*) to guide them to personal trust in Jesus. Not just your own children.

Are YOU reproducing spiritual children who know God as Father, through Jesus as Savior and Lord? As re-creations, every Christian is called to be God's representative - His ambassador - *imploring others to be reconciled* (2 Cor 5:20). All by the power of the promised Holy Spirit. God saves you. And transforms you. Relate to Him as YOUR loving Father, creator, redeemer, submitting to Jesus. Fulfill His mandate, through the indwelling Holy Spirit: live out the life of Jesus, the Son of God, through your own life.