

The Father You've Always Had

The Everlasting God and Why to Know Him is to Love Him

One in four children in the United States live without a father in the home. That's 18.4 million children—enough to fill New York City twice. These children are more likely to have behavioral problems, more likely to commit a crime and go to prison, more likely to face abuse and neglect, and more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, suffer obesity, and drop out of school. They are at four times greater risk of poverty, two times greater risk of infant mortality, and seven times greater risk of teen pregnancy.

Let's flip that around to the positive. Children with a father in the home will more likely have healthy infancies, healthy emotions, fewer injuries, better physical fitness, and better academic achievement. They will be less likely to abuse substances, be abused, or end up in jail.¹

We can see in these simple facts that little human beings thrive best with a father in their lives. Given that God Himself designed us with a Father-shaped space in our hearts, would He not answer to this need? So let's lock in that one point right now: You *do* have a Father, and He reigns in heaven, your eternal, safe, secure home. This study will lay out some truths about Him that should transform your time on earth, giving you more peace than you ever thought possible.

Let's approach this topic by examining what the Word says about God's capacity and character. In other words, in what capacity does God operate, and with what character qualities does He do all the amazing things He does?

Capacities

When we speak of a Being Who is the very fabric of reality itself, Who looms so large that we can't see Him, Who holds the very structure of the universe together in ways we would never know unless He stopped, and Who, because He loves us, never will, words fail us. How can we describe God? We can't. His nature exceeds our ability to comprehend. However, we can observe the various roles He plays.

Creator- Imagine a perfect life except that you have no one to share it with. Now imagine you have the ability to create beings with which to share all that perfection. This is where God stood before He created the worlds and their inhabitants. His could not contain His joy and love, and so he partnered with the Son and the Spirit to bring forth a universe teeming with sensate, intelligent life.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” Genesis 1:1.

That's the first line of the entire Bible. Must be pretty important! Then, in the last book, John the Revelator sees a vision of God on His throne, a sea of glass before Him, surrounded by celestial

¹ See <https://www.fatherhood.org/father-absence-statistic>.

beings rapt in worship, falling down before Him, saying, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created,” Revelation 4:11. Father God works in the capacity of Creator, and because of that, deserves our worship.

Source- In human procreation, the parent’s own loins produce the substance of sperm and egg that miraculously merges to become a life. And because of that sharing of DNA, children can be uncannily like their parents, can’t they? Thus all of our lives derive from our Father in heaven. Paul said, “There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live,” 1 Corinthians 8:6. Notice that all things are *of* the Father, *through* the Son. Father God is our Source of life. And we can be, by natural capacity, uncannily like him!

Sustainer- Just as a good earthly father toils to feed his children, our heavenly Father “slumbers not nor sleeps” (See Ps. 121:4). The loving surveillance of Father God keeps creation thriving. Job said, “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life,” and Paul said, “In Him we live and move and have our being,” Job 33:4; Acts 17:28. God “satisfies the desire of every living thing,” Psalm 145:16. This loving care continues moment by moment, day by day as our Father cares for us.

God is “before all things, and in Him all things consist” Colossians 1:17. The axial tilt of the earth is 23.4 degrees. The distance to the sun is 92,960,000 miles. The earth’s surface gravity is 32.1740 feet per second. If any of these conditions changed even slightly, human life would become unsustainable.² Philosophers and scientists argue about the existence of God, but if we just look around us, we see evidence of His ongoing care.

Sovereign- And just as any good father also presides over his household, God governs His universe. Jesus said, “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows,” Matthew 10:29-31. This passage poetically speaks to the fact that while God doesn’t stop sparrows from falling, He does feel the loss when they do. And if He sheds a tear for a falling sparrow, how much more when one of His own, a child made in His image, suffers a fall?

We may see God’s will in a number of ways. God’s *perfect* will would have prevented all sin and suffering. But alas, He gave us agency, and we chose sin. His allowing of free will, a necessary risk of love, might be called His *permissive* will. Then ultimately, because of His *redemptive* will, all the horrors of sin will be recycled for His glory and our good. We can thank God’s sovereignty for this coming-out-on-top miracle. He will rule and overrule in astonishing and creative ways to bring about His good providence. God allowed Job to suffer at the hands of Satan, but He used Job’s story mightily, and restored everything to him in the end.

² <http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/teleological-argument-for-gods-existence/#ixzz37Dl4O23F>

Character

The Bible says more about God's character than any other aspect of Him. In fact, the character of God could rightly be considered the central theme and interpretive key of Scripture. Someone once told a man his wife was cheating on him. He said, "Uh, no." He didn't need to hire a detective. He knew her character.

Moses said to God, "Show me your glory" Exodus 33:18. Here is God's self-description:

The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation. Exodus 34:5-7.

In this passage, we see the following traits:

Merciful- Notice that, in the context of sin, God mentions His mercy first. Psychotherapists and communication experts tell us to "lead with empathy." Like the Good Samaritan, God first binds up our wounds, and if He asks any questions about how we got wounded, it will be later, once we're on the mend.

Gracious- This Hebrew word, *chanan*, is only used as an attribute of God. Like a debtor crying "Be gracious to me!" when he has nothing with which to pay, we recognize that we can never repay our sin-debt.

Longsuffering- Oh, but to give this grace greatly costs the One giving it. God's love has always been self-giving, but once sin entered the picture it became self-sacrificing. Like the father humiliated and inconvenienced by a teen son's DUI, it costs our Father something to be so good! This word, *arek anaph*, literally means slow anger (or "slow nostrils" because in anger, nostrils flare!). Think of an edgy, easily-angered person--God is the opposite!

Good- "Abundant in goodness" *rabab chesed*, taps into the concept of covenantal love. *Chesed* correlates with the Greek *agape*, which identifies the unconditionality of a relationship based not on our promises to God, but God's promises to us. Contrast controlling love (I love you to make you love me), and contractual love (I love you if you love me), with covenantal love (I love you whether you love me or not). This important distinction keeps us from lowering and trivializing the character of God's love.

True- This Hebrew word, *aman*, is most often rendered "faithful." "Faithful" is literally "full of faith." "True" means honest. God is optimistic but honest about us. Concerning our sin, He falls neither into the ditch of faithless despair nor dishonest denial. He can see the worst of our case and yet hope for better.

Forgiving- In the Hebrew, *noseh avon*, or forgiving iniquity, is used of sacrificial animals in a sin-bearing capacity. The consequences of sin don't just evaporate. Someone must bear them away. Whoever does the forgiving does just that.

The phrase “iniquity, transgression, and sin” mentions three aspects of sin. While sin means “missing the mark” as an archer misses a target, “iniquity” implies a willful twisting or perverting of God’s will, and “transgression” means purposeful defiance. Don’t count yourself outside of God’s forgiveness because you have been intentionally bad! It’s not over, even for the most rebellious of us.

Just- Only at the end of God’s own self-description does He communicate His justice. His merciful-gracious-longsuffering-good-true-forgiving introduction should have calmed our nerves by now. He is not coming for blood. He is coming *with* blood, His own blood, shed for us.

God will “by no means clear the guilty” meaning merely excuse sin arbitrarily. He will not bring the machinations of reality, the cause-and-effect loop of sin and its consequences, to a grinding halt in order to let us off scot-free. No, but He Himself will bear our sin. And in this way He can be “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” Romans 3:26.

The Radiance

In spite of the beautiful picture of God in the scrolls of the Old Testament, darkness regarding His goodness prevailed in Jesus’ day. And truly, our world today is even darker. Because of our great need, we will now turn to Jesus and the breathtaking witness of His life. Consider these words:

Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice—one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgments upon them. It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men.³

Blogger Terri Guillemets says, “Every son quotes his father, in words and in deeds.” In word and deed, Jesus quoted His Father. He did so by being “the radiance” of God’s glory and “the express image of His person,” Hebrews 1:3, NASB. Jesus said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” John 14:9. While the capacities and roles of the members of the Godhead may differ, the character does not. To know One is to know the Other.

What character traits did Jesus want to emphasize, to lead with? Consider what occurred at Jesus’ first scripture reading. He unrolled the scroll of Isaiah and read (See Luke 4:16-22):

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,” vs. 18-19.

If you look at the text itself, Jesus stopped before the next phrase, which read, “the day of vengeance of our God” (See Is. 61:1-2; Jesus didn’t read vs. 2b).

³ Ellen White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 10.

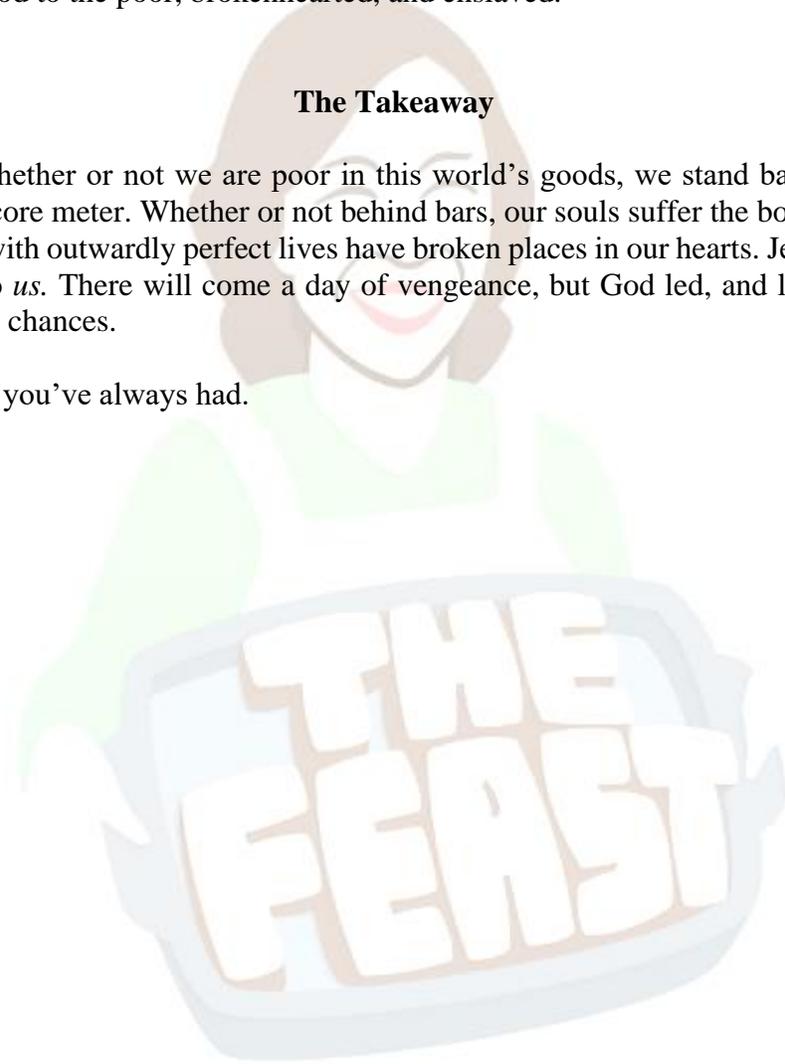
Out of a thirst for revenge against their Roman oppressors, the Jews of Jesus' day loved to hear of "the day of vengeance." What was once an innocent desire for justice crossed the line into a thirst for revenge.

When Jesus read the prophecy, stopping short of their favorite part, "The eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.'" Luke 4:20. He stood before them, the fulfillment of every messianic prophecy, the desire of every wistful heart, the embodiment of mercy and grace. He had come to demonstrate the kindness of God to the poor, brokenhearted, and enslaved.

The Takeaway

And that's us. Whether or not we are poor in this world's goods, we stand bankrupt before the heavenly credit score meter. Whether or not behind bars, our souls suffer the bondage of sin. And even those of us with outwardly perfect lives have broken places in our hearts. Jesus came to show God the Father to *us*. There will come a day of vengeance, but God led, and leads, with mercy, grace, and second chances.

This is the Father you've always had.



Quiz

1. Each and every one of us has a _____.
2. To understand God, we examine both His capacities and His _____.
3. God's capacities include Creator, Source, Sustainer, and _____.
4. In Exodus 33, we find God giving a _____-description.
5. What are some of God's self-descriptors? _____, _____, _____, _____, _____, and _____.
6. God forgives iniquity, transgression, and _____.
7. Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern _____.
8. Jesus was the _____, or outshining, of God's glory.