

My Father Is ...

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Week 3, August 27, 2023

Jesus is a perfect representation of *God Our Father*.

But the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father commanded me. (John 14:31-NIV)

In the gospel of John, Jesus repeats the name of the Father, 156 times.

And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." (Matt 3:16-NIV 1977)

When you claim and call on God as your Father, you will experience a new story, a new identity, a new destiny.

In 1964, an American boxer converted to Islam. Cassius Clay who could float like a butterfly and sting like a bee, became one of Americas most famous boxers of all-time. Mohammed Ali.

In 1993, the artist formerly known as Prince changed his stage name to a symbol. Despite worldwide recognition as he sold out concert venues, he wanted more.

And perhaps you know these other famous name changers. In fact, let's do a little trivia. See if you know these artists or athletes?

Stephanie Joanne Angelina Gemanotta-Lady Gaga

Mark Sinclair-Vin Diesel.

John Rogers Stephens-John Legend

Ferdinand Lewis Alcindor-Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

Reginal Kenneth Dwight-Elton John

O'Shea Jackson-Ice Cube

Ron Artest, Jr-Metta World Peace

Edison Arantes do Nascimento-Pele

And God has been doing a little name changing since the days Abram left the region of Turkey and moved into Israel-Abram to Abraham. Jesus leading disciple Cephas became Peter. Jacob became Israel. Why all of the name changing in the bible? The new names are more than just a name change-it was a new story, new identity, a new destiny.

God wanted his people, from NT time forward to have a new story, a new identity and a new destiny with Him. And that was made possible because Jesus came to reveal the name God, loved the most.

So, he sent Jesus to give every Christ follower an introduction to God as Father. As wonderful as God's names are in OT, Jehovah Shalom, the God of all peace. And boy don't many of us need that name-PEACE who struggle with Depression and Anxiety.

In fact, some people have identified over 400 names for God in the OT. God doesn't just give us another name, for himself, he gives us his very intimate, personal, and loving self through that name.

If you're struggling to stay on course with Christ, if you often falter in your faith and at times want to throw in the towel, perhaps a new story, a new identity and new destiny with God will make that possible.

When I say God, what comes into your mind?

Some think of an impersonal cosmic force. May the Force be with you. Light. Energy. A divine being perhaps. A being that does not have a name as in Confucianism, animism or a god that has millions of names as with Hinduism.

For many, God is this angry being up in the sky, waiting for them to step out of line, so God can smash them. Just put an end to their miserable life.

For others God is like the divine score keeper, he is tracking every make and every miss. And don't you know there is going to be a benching if you don't improve your game?

When I say Father, what comes into your mind?

For many when you say Father, he is a caricature like a grandpa. Father is a sweet old guy who is moving kind of slow, not as sharp as he used to be, he is just that sweet old guy who we love.

For others, Father is like a heavenly butler. I know we would never admit that we treat God like a butler, but if you follow the action of people's lives, you see it clearly. So many don't think about God the Father until they have a need and then make all kinds of requests.

Requests for money.

God heal me please.

And for others, can you get this dead-beat boss off my back?

And then they go back to their life. Little interaction with God, until they get into a hard place. And we could describe many other scenarios of what people think of when you say, God or Father.

We have to get this right. If you have a flawed view of God, you will have a flawed view of life. Flawed view of life with God.

If you think of God or God as Father is all about just makes and misses, receptions, or incompletes, then your life has probably been reduced to, "I am trying to be a better person, or not as bad as I used to be.

Because I know God is watching all of my good stuff and getting ready to punish me for all of the bad stuff. " And that is what life with God is like.

If you have a flawed view of God, you will end up with a flawed life with God. So, it is essential that we get it right. God did not leave us down here on our own, to our own imaginations to figure out who God is or who God is as Father. God is not silent in this conversation.

And that is what John 14 is all about. Jesus makes it blindly clear he came to reveal God as Father. Jesus is God personified in human flesh.

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9-NIV)

Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? (John 14:10-NIV)

If you want to see what God is like, what God is like as a Father, you look at who Jesus is, and what Jesus says and does. Jesus taught us many things about God.

God is all powerful.

God is loving.

God is a judge.

God is coming back.

God is compassionate.

Jesus' priority teaching about God, is that He is a Father to all who surrender to Christ's atoning work on the cross. Over 200 times in the 4 gospels, Jesus teaches us this one priority lesson about God.

And the priority lesson is that God is a Father. A Father who is in heaven. Of all his names, Father is God's favorite. We know he loves this name the most because this is the one, Jesus used the most.

While on earth Jesus called God, "Father" hundreds of times. In Jesus first recorded words, he explains to his parents, "*didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house. (Luke 2:49-NIV)*

At end of Jesus ministry, on the cross the last words spoken by Jesus were, "*Father into your hands I commit my spirit.*" (Luke 23:46-NIV)

In the gospel of John, Jesus repeats the name of the Father, 156 times. And after all, Jesus taught his disciples when you prayer, begin the prayer with, "Our Father." Our Abba.

What is a common practice in our prayers to say, Father...was unheard of in Jesus' day. Join me at the river Jordan. (pictures of Jordan River)

And after being baptized, Jesus went up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and coming upon Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." (Matt 3:16-NIV 1977)

From this opening account of Jesus baptism, I want you to see this insight. This truth.

Before Jesus ever did a miracle, taught a sermon or prayed a prayer, He already had His Father's blessing.

When you are submitted and surrendered to Jesus Christ, you are automatically a recipient of a Father's blessing. Father's favor. The eternal Father's encouragement.

I see 3 experiences with God as Father and heaven that unfolded that day at the Jordan River. Look closely at the text with me for a minute:

(1) *The Heavens were opened...*

(2) *The Spirit descending like a dove, and coming upon him...*

(3) *...a voice out of the heavens, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." (Matt 3:16-NIV 1977)*

The Father did not say, this is my beloved worker, servant, he said, SON!

Now, just a 30 second tangent about the Jordan River.

When Naaman, the Syrian General retorted about dipping into a small muddy river in Israel, to experience healing from leprosy, what he did not realize, this was more than a body of water, more than a tributary flowing into the Dead Sea.

The Jordan River is a 156-mile-long river that flows north to south from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. It lies on the eastern border of modern-day Israel and the western borders of both Syria and Jordan. Because of its great length and central location, the Jordan River is mentioned in the Bible over 185 times.

This was the place where God, did some of his greatest miracles, and revealed some of his more important truths about Faith. The nation of Israel crossed the Jordan River at flood stage when they entered the promised land. At the river Jordan we learned that Jesus and each of you, have a Father's blessing even before you do anything.

Now, our Father, not only wants to bless us, he wants to respond to our deepest need. Everyone longs for the opportunity to say, "Father, look at me!"

All of us want a Father's blessing. It is hardwired into each of us. As little kids, when dad showed up at the pool, we would say, "hey dad, watch me dive." If dad showed up at the ballpark, we kept glancing at dad, from 1st base to make sure he was watching.

When dad shows up at a play, a recital, at a restaurant you work in, everything changes for the son or daughter. And what kicks in is this deep longing, "Father, look at me."

But the challenge is many of us have lost our fathers to death, depression, divorce, dysfunction and maybe disinterest. Even though our earthly fathers are out of the picture for some, God can supernaturally become your Father. The bible says that God is a Father to the fatherless.

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling.

*⁶ God sets the lonely in families,^[a]
he leads out the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land. (Psalm 68-NIV)*

When my kids were little, when I came home from work, or return from a trip to Mexico, Israel, Kenny and Beka would often come running. Yelling. And sliding right into my shins full of enthusiasm for me to see them. Approve of them. Bless them. Daddy, what did you bring me? Can I carry your briefcase daddy? Hey, daddy, come and see what I learned in school? Daddy let's go bike riding.

Each of us are hardwired with the need for a dad to see us, approve of us, and to bless us.

And what is true of each of us, is seen in the relationship between Jesus and his Father. One more story. The setting is on a mountain in northern Galilee.

The books of Matthew, Mark and Luke all see Jesus and a couple disciples up on the mountain during the last months of Jesus ministry. Mt Hermon towers over every other mountain in Israel. Mt Hermon was a perfect place for Jesus to take Peter, James and John for a little retreat.

Together they stand on this massive mountain overlooking the Sea of Galilee and they can see all the way to the Dead Sea.

Jesus went to pray, and once again get strength from his Father. Jesus was only months away from the cross and he needed supernatural strength to encounter the spikes of the cross and the cursing of the people.

Jesus wanted to continue to remind his friends and followers, they too were just one prayer away from encountering the supernatural.

Jesus wanted Peter, James and John to see where Jesus got his strength...from a Father.

And where you get your strength from a Father.

And where you get your miracle from a Father.

And where you get your answer from heaven, from a Father.

As Jesus prayed the carpenter who ate pita bread and shish kebabs and spoke with a Galilean accent, exploded, erupted, and burst into a cosmic figure of light.

The light was brighter than the sun. A light brighter than Alpha Centauri. Heaven's glory had pierced earth fog and showed up announced.

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. (Matt 17-NIV)

This is Jesus wearing his pre-Bethlehem wardrobe and his post resurrection garments. This is not a fragile human with a pale Mediterranean color, this is the towering eternal son of God.

Suddenly, James, Peter and John are standing on holy ground like Moses. Oh, they had seen Jesus walk on water.

They had seen Jesus multiply bread.

They had seen Jesus open blinded eyes.

They had seen Jesus banish demons.

They had seen Jesus raise the dead.

The only begotten by the Father, was now transfigured and radiant like the Father. Suddenly Jesus is having an intimate conversation with Moses and Elijah. Each one steps through a veil so thin that Jesus had entered heavens realm. Heaven's reality. Heaven's realness.

The giver of the Law and the Prince of the Prophets are now discussing a Father's eternal plan. ³¹ *They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. (Luke 9-NIV)*

Moses and Elijah get an update on how it is going. Jesus is experiencing a Father's support. Standing with Jesus are 2 towering giants of the Jewish faith.

Jesus prays and heaven opens and in an hour of need, in a pre-crucifixion hour of need a Father encourages a son. A Father blesses a son. A Father speaks to a Son.

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" (Matt 17:5-NASB 1977)

That day on a mountain, God wanted a Son to be fully prepared for the road that lay ahead of him. So, the heavens open. A Father announces what a Son has done, and what a Son will do, which is bringing great joy and satisfaction to a Father.

Days before the greatest act of love is about to be experienced by mankind, heaven opens and announces a Father's love for a Son.

The one who flung the stars.

Who empowered the prophets to do miracles.

The one who caused the sun to stand still for Joshua.

The one who applauded David as he took down Goliath was experiencing his Father's blessing.

Why not get in on your own mountain top encounter with your Father? One who not only loves and blesses his Son, but loves and blesses you? A Father is ready and waiting to announce to you, this is my beloved Son or Daughter, I am well pleased.

Of course, the Father loves His Son, He is perfect, but what about us?

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. (Luke 15-NIV)

A son was willing to be a servant and earn his way back to son status. A Father, who always declared son status over his boy, even when he was still a long way off...said, no doing!

With a house full of celebration, and a brother full of anger, a Father, pours out his love on a son who did not deserve it, but got it anyway because a Father's love is unconditional.

When you claim and call on God as your Father, you will experience new story, new identity, a new destiny.

How can I be sure this is really possible? I seem to fall short, more often than succeed. Perhaps, one more verse can give you the assurance you need.

Rev 3:17, I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it. (NIV)

When you arrive in heaven at the Father's house, you will have a new body, sing a new song, and possess a new name. And once and for all you will have a new story, new identity and new destiny.

I can't wait. Now about YOU?