

John 14:8-10

What We Believe: The Father

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I lead a small group study this last winter called Life Explored. The second session opens with a quote by the pastor and author A. W. Tozer. He said, “What comes to mind when you think of God is the most important thing about you.” Barry Cooper, the teacher leading this session, says this:

What we think about God, positive or negative, determines if we want to know him. So when someone says, “I don’t believe in God” I say, “Which God don’t you believe in?” What if the God we don’t believe in or don’t trust isn’t actually the real God, the God of the Bible. And if you knew the real God could make you happier than anyone or anything else, wouldn’t you want to meet him?

When you think of God, who do you think of? Do you think of a wrinkly old man sitting on a throne with a big white beard and balding head? When you think of his eyes, are the angry eyes of a cantankerous old neighbor, or the eyes of a doting grandpa whose just here to please.

If you believe in Jesus, maybe when I say “God” you think of him. But what if I were to say, “God the Father.” Who would you think of then? Would your mind go back to the old man on the throne? Or maybe you think of an invisible spirit that no one can see and live.

As part of our What We Believe sermon series, I want to introduce you to God the Father. I believe that what comes to mind when you think of the Father, is one of the most important things about you. For me, the initial picture of God the Father I get in the Bible is a distant, far away God we can’t know very well.

God the Father is the distant God.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the Bible describes who God is. God the Father is a good place to begin when explaining God because what is true of the Father is also true of the Son and the Holy Spirit. So when I talk about the **attributes** of God the Father (an attribute is a characteristic or trait), these attributes also apply to the Son and Holy Spirit. Let me read the first half of Article #3, which lists these attributes.

The Father (3a): We believe in God the Father, almighty Creator of heaven and earth, eternal in His being, perfect in holiness, sovereign over all creation, all-knowing (omniscient), all-present (omnipresent), and all-powerful (omnipotent)...

Last week we learned there is one God (one finger), but three distinct persons (three fingers), who are each fully God. But just like **members of a family** are responsible for various tasks, **dad** mows the lawn, **mom** does the laundry, and **kids** vacuum, so when we think about **creation**, we think of the Father, and when we think of **redemption**, we think of Jesus, and of **sanctification** we think of the Holy Spirit.

When we think about God the Father this way, it pushes the Father back into the distant past. He becomes not like a father, or even a grandfather, but a **great-great grandfather** you’ve never met. He was here at creation, but now he’s gone. What really matters is Jesus and the Holy Spirit, because I think about Jesus and experience the Holy Spirit today, but not the Father. In reality, every person of the Trinity is **active** in each role, just like **mom** sometimes mows the lawn and **kids** sometime fold the laundry, maybe not very well, but they try. **Dad** of course does laundry and cleans the floor perfectly. If we look at the rest of the attributes in this article of faith, they can push the Father’s **relate-ability** further and further away. He is...

- 1) **Eternal** - We believe the Father is “eternal in his being.” **Isaiah 40:28a** says, “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.” God has been here since before the beginning and will be here long after the end. I can hardly imagine tomorrow, how can I begin to fathom someone who has existed for longer than time itself?
- 2) **Holy** - We believe the Father is “perfect in holiness.” One of God’s character qualities is his absolute goodness and perfection. **Leviticus 19:2b** says, “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.” There’s no blemish in him, no impurity. He’s cleaner than an operating room and brighter than the sun. He’s absolutely separate from evil, but it’s that very goodness that pushes me and my sin away.
- 3) **Sovereign** - We believe the Father is “sovereign over all creation.” This means he rules everyone and everything. **Proverbs 16:9** says, “In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.” God orchestrates everything. When we imagine him on a throne, that’s right. He reports to no one. He’s the boss. You may like your boss, but may also have a hard time relating to him or her. The father seems like a distant king. It’s because of God’s next three attributes we can say he is sovereign.
- 4) **Omniscient** - We believe the Father is “all-knowing (omniscient).” **1 John 3:20** says, “If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and *he knows everything*.” God knew E = mc² long before Einstein was born. God knows what has happened, what will happen, and what could happen, like if Einstein was never born. You can’t teach God something because he knows everything, and he has the greatest memory in the universe, never forgetting. I know a little about theology, and CrossFit, and being married, and I just learned how to change my lawnmower’s carburetor, but that’s it.
- 5) **Omnipresent** - We believe the Father is “all-present (omnipresent).” **Jeremiah 23:24** says, “Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?” declares the Lord. ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth?’ declares the Lord.” God isn’t a thin layer of plastic saran-wrap covering everything, but he does fill the whole universe. He is everywhere, but he’s not everything. He is especially present in some places, like this church service, communion, prayer, and when we share the gospel, or wherever he chooses.
- 6) **Omnipotent** - We believe the Father is “all-powerful (omnipotent).” **Matthew 19:26** says, “Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’” God’s power is unlimited. He can do whatever he desires, but thankfully only does things in accordance with his nature, which is good. As weak, finite, creatures, we don’t fully understand what this means.

God the Father is the distant God. As we look at God’s attributes, we realize it’s hard to relate to this kind of God. The father I’ve described for you is a bit like the **businessman** who is never home. He checks in on his kids through his Nest video cameras, watching them, but not interacting with them. His nanny and housekeeper take care of his kids, not him. His presence is always known, but never felt. He’s the type of father that everyone respects, but nobody loves. This type of father doesn’t sound good, does he?

The good news is that our Articles of faith at Cornerstone don’t end here. The next two words say “we rejoice.” Why can we rejoice? Because the Father may feel far away, but he doesn’t stay far away.

God the Father is the distant God who draws near to us.

God has more attributes than the ones I listed above. God has attributes that don’t just make him feel far away, but draw him close to us. Let’s look some **implied attributes** in the second part of our article.

The Father (3b): ...We rejoice that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men, hearing and answering prayer, and that He saves from sin and death...

Love - We believe the Father “concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men.” God the Father loves and cares about you. **1 John 4:8** says, “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” What did we learn last week is so important about the **Trinity**? If God is three in one, he is a **relational being**. He loves himself, but not selfishly. I read a chapter from the book *Delighting in the Trinity* this week. It said that of there is no Son and no Holy Spirit, and if God just loved himself, it would be like God was sitting around looking in a **mirror** all day. **Strict monotheism** is a selfish kind of love. But our God’s love isn’t selfish. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father. The Holy Spirit communicates the love. And guess what, the father extends that same love to you and me.

Application: When I think of God the Father, I think either knowingly or unknowingly I imagine him to be a little bit like my **earthy father**. In a very real sense, our fathers are our first **analogies** of God. That means that as a child, before you ever crack open your Bible, you may come to perceive God as a kind and loving dad who spends time with you when he gets home from work, who goes to all your baseball games, and who will pick you up when you fall down.

Or for some of us, we had **bad earthly fathers**. Our fathers were like the father in Cat's in the Cradle, a poem sung by **Johnny Cash** and others that tells the story of dad too busy to spend time with his son. Or maybe you had the kind of father who you wished was absent more often, because when he was around, he wasn’t very pleasant. Most of the friends I have who don’t have good fathers, still wish they had a good relationship with their fathers. The good news of the Bible is that is possible to have a good relationship with your Heavenly Father, a father who loves you and cares about you. God the Father can be the perfect type of father for you. *God the Father is the distant God who draws near to us.* The Father is loving.

Faithful - We believe the Father is “hearing and answering prayer” right now. **1 John 5:14-15** says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” God uses his **attributes**, his sovereignty, his omniscience, his omnipresence, his omnipotence, to help us. He uses his power to work in this world to answer our prayers. Our God isn’t a **static** God who has decided everything past and present so there’s no use praying.

He calls on us to pray because somehow he wraps up our earthly human prayers into his **divine will**. In Christ, my will somehow becomes God’s will and God’s will becomes my will. The Bible says that if we ask anything in his will, he will give it to us. If he knows something is good for us, he will give it to us. But if we ask for something we think is good for us, and it’s not, he won’t.

Illustration: Whenever I’m around parents, they seem to have this gift to tell apart fake **screams** from real screams. When something is really wrong, moms and dads know. We have a heavenly father who knows what’s really going on, who is attentive, who hears our hearts. One of my **favorite memories** of my dad growing up is him tucking my brothers and me into bed. He would go around to each of our beds, sit on the edge pray with us, listen to our prayers, and kiss us goodnight. We have a father who listens to our real tears and our goodnight prayers for mom and dad and for a new pony or bike.

Monica and I have a good **friend named Joe** who is a global missions partner for a church in South Carolina, which means he acts as a liaison between them and foreign missions opportunities, like Myanmar, India, and Europe. One of the places he is researching is Camp Ted in France where our youth are going. He’ll be there the first couple days to potentially lead a team from South Carolina next summer. As he was praying about this trip, he was a little concerned about expenses and where to stay, so he began to look at hotels online. He thought about staying at two places, Grenoble, and Chamberi, but didn’t know which one. So he prayed, “Well Father, I like this place here, but what about that place? You’ve been there, you know what it’s like, you’re there now also, which one do you suggest?” Joe skipped the earthly Yelp for the heavenly Yelp. Before he decided, literally three minutes later, he received a text from Monica telling him

the **Camp Director** was inviting him to stay in a tiny room they have in the attic, and to let him know how many meals he would need, and it would all be inexpensive. If you ever get to know Joe, you'll learn he didn't have a great biological father, or an adopted father, but has a great great heavenly father who takes care of all his needs. We have a faithful God who answers all of our needs.

Merciful - We believe the Father is merciful to us, and "that He saves from sin and death..." **Luke 6:36** says, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Because of sin, because of that barrier that separates me from God's presence, I deserve judgment. I deserve sin and death, but God the Father grants me a pardon. Mercy is different than grace. Grace is receiving a gift you don't deserve. Mercy is not receiving a punishment you deserve. Because of sin, we each deserve hell, but the Father grants us eternal life.

Why can God the Father relate to us this way. How can the one who is holy, and distant from our sin because of that holiness, draw near to us in love?

God the Father is the distant God who draws near to us through Jesus.

I want to highlight the very last line of this article of faith. We can relate to God the Father not as "a father," but "my father," because of God the Father's first Son, Jesus Christ.

The Father (3c): ...He saves from sin and death *those who believe in Jesus Christ.*

It's through Jesus Christ, the Father's eternal Son, that you and I can experience the nearness of the Father. One of Jesus' disciples named Philip asked Jesus to show him the Father, and Jesus said this.

John 14:9-10 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.* How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. *Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.*

When we encounter Jesus, we **encounter** the Father. In Jesus, we encounter the Father's **attributes**, his eternality, holiness, sovereignty, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, but also his love, faithfulness, and mercy. On the cross, Jesus paid for our **unholiness**, but also draws the holiness of the Father to us. **On the cross**, Jesus is **forsaken** so we can experience the Father's **love**. On the cross, our prayers are answered for a Father who is good and true to come into our lives and love us. Through the cross...

The Father adopts us.

After Jesus rises from the grave, he encounters **Mary Magdalene** in the garden outside the tomb. At first she doesn't recognize him, but when she does, she cries out and clings to him, and Jesus says this.

John 20:17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to *my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.*'"

Through Jesus Christ, you and I aren't just pardoned, we're welcomed into the family. You and I become **children of God**. You and I share in all the rights and privileges that Jesus has. You and I begin to **share** some of the **attributes** that the Father and the Son share. We don't become omnipresent or omniscient, but we do become holy. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we become more loving, faithful, and merciful. Did you know we even become a little **sovereign**? To be sovereign is to reign like kings and queen (2 Tim 2:12). In eternity, we'll reign as kings and queens with King Jesus (1 Cor 6:3). We even get **eternity** going forward through the gift of eternal life. Eternal life comes to us through the Triune God's eternal life.

We wrote our Article of Faith as a team. We did a great job, but there's one word we're **missing**, adoption. At the end of the day, the most important thing about you is being a child of the Father. If you believe in Jesus, you're a child of God. When we join the family, we become like the family. My call for us is to...

Draw near to the Father.

Take time to draw near to the Father in your daily walk. **Father's Day** was two weeks ago, but like any good dad, he accepts late gifts. Take some time tomorrow or in this coming week and write your Heavenly Father a **Father's Day card**. Tell him how much you love and appreciate him, how grateful you are for him, and that you want to draw close to him. You can type it, or hand write it, or if you can even go CVS or Walgreens and pick out a greeting card for him. Maybe you've **never picked out** a Father's Day card before because your earthly father isn't worth it. Your Heavenly Father would love to receive the first Father's Day card you purchase. Just know, no matter which card you pick out, it won't surprise him, but he will love it.

God the Father is the distant God who draws near to us through Jesus.

A little over a year ago a viral video racked up some 36 million views. The video recorded a teenager girl giving her **step-father** a gift. In the video, the man reads her letter, which is full of all sorts of sappy stuff about how great a dad he is, and the great times they share, and then he opens the gift. He immediately chokes up because in the box is a **petition for adoption**. She asks him to go from being her step-father to her legally true real father.

If you don't know God the Father as your Father, would today be the day your petition him for adoption by putting your faith in Jesus. Would today be the day that comes to mind when you think of God is longer an angry or absent father, but a father who loves and cares for you so much he has drawn near to you through Jesus. *God the Father is the distant God who draws near to us through Jesus.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. Click here to listen to more sermons or click here to read our story.