

# The God Who is Father

Genesis 1:1; Luke 11:2

1) Shirley MacLaine, the award winning actress and a high priestess of new age religion said:

The most pleasurable journey you take is through yourself. . .the only sustaining love is with yourself. . .When you look back on your life and try to figure out where you've been and where you're going, when you look at your work, your love affairs, your marriages, your children, your pain, your happiness – when you examine all that closely, what you really find out is that the only person you really go to bed with is yourself. . .The only thing you have is working to the consummation of your own identity. And that's what I've been trying to do all my life.

At the risk of sounding terribly narrow and simplistic, I have a completely opposite view. I am more convinced than ever that life's major pursuit is not knowing self. . .but knowing God. As a matter of fact, unless God is the major pursuit of our lives, all other pursuits are dead-end streets, including trying to know ourselves.

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah quotes the Lord saying,  
***"Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me. . ."*** (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

Why is it so important to know God?

- It is the foundation upon which everything rests!
- It determines our lifestyle and dictates our philosophy;
- shapes our moral and ethical standards;
- directly affects our response to pain and hardship;
- motivates our response toward fortune, fame, power, and pleasure;
- gives us strength when we are tempted;
- keeps us faithful and courageous when we are outnumbered;
- enhances our worship and prompts our praise;
- gives meaning and significance to relationships;
- stimulates hope to go on, regardless;
- sensitizes our conscience and creates the desire to be obedient;
- and enables me to know what to reject and what to respect while I'm riveted to planet Earth.

2) God has given us a general revelation of Himself in the heavens. He has written His handiwork in the heavens. The Psalmist declared, **"The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands."** (Psalm 19:1)

God has revealed Himself to us through His Word. But, of course, we Christians believe that God made a full and complete revelation of Himself through Jesus – so much so that Jesus could say:

**"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."**  
(John 14:9)

3) Jesus called God "Father." We are so accustomed to it that it hardly raises a ripple in our minds anymore, but I wonder if we can try to appreciate how much that one word changed our world. We do not say that Jesus was the first, or the only one to pronounce that name.

- In the Old Testament, before Jesus, it was whispered 7 times.
- Even the Greeks with their many gods had a vague idea of the Father of all gods, and built their altars to the Great Unknown.

But it was Jesus who took that picture word and taught mankind to say it boldly. He said,

**"When you pray, say: 'Father. . .'"** (Luke 11:2)

In the New Testament you find it 275 times.

4) Some will object and say it is a human word. Of course, it is a human word. What other kind of words do we have? The word is rich for me. My earthly father is a man that has always loved me no matter what. He was always in my corner, even when I didn't deserve it. He has believed in me, even when (especially in those adolescent years) I surely disappointed him many times. My father has given, and given, and given again and again that my life may be better.

Those experiences of father are all stored in my mind. So when Jesus says God is a father, I call upon those memories of father stored and processed in my mind, and they help me to know and understand God. My earthly experiences of father remove my fear of God and help me to know, that as a heavenly Father, He is always for me. He believes in me, loves me, and generously gives and gives to bless my life.

I hope that is your experience as well. For most of you, it probably is, but there are some here today who do not have good memories of a father. He may have been absent or non-existent. Maybe he abused you physically or emotionally. Your memories of father are not good.

5) All human language is limited, and its meaning is filtered through our experiences. Much of our Bible was written from an agricultural culture that most of us don't live in today. It's been a while since I have seen a shepherd, yet David's words still resonates when he says,

***"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters. . ."*** (Psalm 23:1-2)

a. I don't have to have been a shepherd to know what a shepherd does – he takes care and protects the sheep. And God is like that. He is taking care of and protecting me like a good shepherd would do.

b. Even if your memories of your father are bad ones, and he was never the father he should have been – you know instinctively that your experience is an aberration and is not, thank God, the norm. You don't have to have had a good father to know what a father is supposed to be.

6) When Jesus said, "Father", all the yearnings and hopes of the human heart are gathered, and it is the key word to understanding all the mysteries of life.

- By that one word, He cancelled out the major fallacy of polytheism – that monstrous illusion that behind the dim unknown is a multiplicity of wills, a plurality of gods, demons, deities and divinities.
- By that word, too, He cancelled pantheism so attractive to millions. Pantheism – that God is in all things, therefore, God is all, and the Creator is indistinguishable from His creation. God is in His world, to be sure, and His spirit pervades all living things. But He is more than the sum total of the parts, and we cannot pray to a cosmic essence or to an "it."
- Jesus shattered to the far-off absentee god of the deists – that the world is a great machine governed by the impersonal laws of force and motion – that God is the "First Cause" which we name but cannot know.

7) I think we all understand that the most important question is not, "Is there a God." We know something's out there. The more important question is, "What kind of God is there that is?"

a. It is humanity's everlasting debt to Jesus that He gave a friendly name to the footprint and the Thinker beyond the thought. Someone like a father, not an "it" – not a monarch sitting on his throne outside

the world, ruling over it, but a living, loving Spirit working within it and perpetually creating it.

b. Jesus lived so intimately with God He never thought of trying to prove Him or define Him. In sensitive awareness, He wondered how anyone could miss Him with His footprints everywhere. When He preached, it was always from the open book of the earth, the world of nature, which to Him was the expression of the Father's mind.

- No blade of grass ever lifted its green head through the sod of spring that was not nourished by His care.
- No sparrow ever fell from the sky that escaped the Father's notice.

He said,

***"If you then. . . know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give. . .?"*** (Matthew 7:11)

This house of life, for Him, was not empty. It was the Father's house. He was in it, loving it, working His will through it.

8) Moving to another phase of the matter, when Jesus said, "Father," it is the key to our understanding of divine limitation. We say in the Apostle's creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty." Some will fasten on that word "almighty" and say, "That's power isn't it? If God made the world, then, there is nothing He can't do. Why doesn't He get on with it? If I were God, I would show people who's boss."

a. And with that picture of unlimited, almighty power in their minds, they grow petulantly impatient with Him, like the little boy who prayed: "Aunt Stella isn't married yet. Uncle Hubert hasn't got a job. Daddy's hair is still falling out. I'm tired of saying prayers for this family without getting results."

b. Sometimes the silence of God is puzzling. We wait around for something to happen that never does. Life is quite full of it – full of sad people wondering why. Vice triumphs over virtue, and things go terribly wrong. Why doesn't God get a move on and take over?

9) When Jesus said, "Father," he brought within our human reach some glimmer of the wisdom behind the dim unknown. No father is almighty in the sense that he can snap his finger and get his will done in a hurry. A father is limited by his fatherhood. However much power he holds in his hands, he is by his nature limited in the use of it.

a. A father must withhold power and wait – with infinite patience, wait. A father must wait for the child to grow, for a small mind to catch up with his mind. A father must wait for a child to learn, and his heart may sometimes be broken in the failure of his sons, which is the risk of fatherhood.

b. Dictators may bulldoze people, violate the human will, and achieve their little ends; but in the long-time purposes of God, the Almighty Father must wait, must strive with the stubborn heart of man, and wait for the free cooperation for the human will. We begin to get an understanding of why there is a cross in this world of stubborn and sinful people. Not even to redeem us will He invade or violate what He Himself made to be inviolate.

c. You ask, "But how can that be? How can the Almighty strive and wait, see His plans go wrong, and with infinite patience, wait?" I don't know, but in the word "Father" I get a hint. And because God is like that – not Almighty Ruler, but Almighty Father, He holds the glad allegiance of our hearts.

10) When Jesus said, "Father," He gave us the key to understanding the divine compassion. God is the One who works, who waits, and who also seeks. In today's church, we hear a lot about seekers – people who come and are looking for something they may not even understand themselves. Sometimes, we call our churches seeker-friendly, and we do want to be welcoming to those who are searching.

a. But, in reality, the search is on the other side. What you will find in the Bible, from the first chapter on, is not the story of the human quest for God, but the Divine quest for man.

- Are we knocking on His door, or is He knocking on ours.
- Is He eluding us, or are we eluding Him?

b. There was an old Methodist preacher who had two sons – one was almost always good, and the other almost always bad. One day when the father returned home, he learned that the one son had run away. He had run away with the circus – now 2 states away. The old father got on a train and went to find his son. When he found him, the son was indignant, "How did you find me", he cried. The father said, "Son, I will always find you. I will never stop looking."

c. When Jesus said, "Father," He was telling us that God is like that – a Father out on the road calling our name.