

The Father's Heart

God of the Old Testament

In the Old Testament God is referred to by many different titles. The name "God" or "Lord" or "Lord God", as we see it in our English Bibles, conveys little more than the designation of Supreme Being and Sovereign of the universe. It tells us little about His character and ways. We can only find out more about Him as we look into the words used in the Hebrew language, the language God used to reveal Himself to the early patriarchs and prophets.

The name "Elohim" expresses the general idea of greatness and glory. It also contains the idea of creative and governing power, of omnipotence and sovereignty.

"Jehovah" is derived from the verb *havah* meaning 'to be' or 'being' and *chavah* meaning 'to live' and 'life'. The name expresses the self-existence of God and that he is life and the source of life. However, the Jewish people never uttered this name but instead substituted the word "Adonai", meaning 'the name'.

"El-Shaddai" is translated God Almighty and express the all-powerful or mighty characteristic of God. This name is derived from the word *shad* meaning breast and carries the meaning of total sufficiency. A mother's breast is full of every nutrient, antibody and nourishment a child needs to grow up strong and healthy. El Shaddai is the all sufficient one, sufficient for our every need in spirit, soul and body.

"Jehovah" is compounded with other names such as "Jehovah-Jireh" which means God provides, "Jehovah-Rophe" – God heals, "Jehovah-Nissi" – God my banner, "Jehovah-M'Kaddesh" – God who sanctifies, "Jehovah-Shalom" God is peace, "Jehovah-Tsidkenu" – God our righteousness, "Jehovah-Rohi" – God my shepherd, "Jehovah-Shammah" – God is there, He is present, and so on.

All of these names by which God was known are such that we can fear Him, revere Him, honour Him as the Sovereign, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnipresent Creator and ruler of the universe. But this we can do at "arms length". None of these titles express the intimacy of relationship that is contained in the title "Father".

The "Father" revealed

Now there is something very significant. God is not revealed as "Father" in the Old Testament, largely because they were not born again, they did not have the Father's seed in them so they could not know Him as Father. But when Jesus became incarnate and came to dwell among us on earth as Man, He referred to God as "Father". He came to reveal to us that over and above all God is "Father". He came to bring us a revelation of the Father. He said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" ([John 14:9](#)). He said, "I and the Father are One" ([John 10:30](#)). In [John 10:38](#) He said, "The Father is in Me, and I in the Father". He came to reveal to us that in the Father was incorporated all the attributes and characteristics contained in the various different names by which He was known in the Old Testament, but, more than that, He is to us all those things in an intimate and personal way. Jesus knew that He had come to Earth so that through His death and resurrection we might be born again. The Father was to

birth in us the life of His Son. We were to become His birthed children. He was to become our Father even as He was the Father of the Son, Jesus. So Christ came to reveal Him as Father.

He is a Father who cares for us, loves us and protects, heals, provides and cleanses us, as a Father who is on the constant look out for His children. As Father He incorporates everything that is contained in the Old Testament names for Him. But more than that He is One who is ever watching over us to relate to us in an intimate and personal way and to ensure and bring about the very best for us.

Not only that but the Jesus came to reveal that He and the Father, along with the Holy Spirit, would take up residence in us.

John 17:20-23 ... *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me".*

How would this happen? In John chapter 3 Jesus said we would be born again. In 1 Pet 1:23 we read that the Father's Seed would be placed in us. In Col 1:27 we are told that Christ is in us.

In the Old Testament, in the dispensation or era of law, God was 'out there', external to man, but could be sought out and followed. Now in the dispensation of grace, to those who are born again, He now lives in us. We are His children in an intimate family relationship with Him. He is not just the infinite, all powerful, Sovereign God out there, but He is the personal and intimate caring Father who is in us and never apart from us no matter what.

He is love. He is truth. He is your Father who dearly cares for you and seeks to walk in an intimate relationship with you. He desires to reveal Himself to you and to live and act and speak through you. He wants to share His heart with you and He wants you and me to have His heart and be His ambassadors expressing all His attributes and characteristics to the world in need around us.

But sadly for some there are things that block His love and intimacy from being a reality in our lives.

Some rhetorical questions to ponder:

What are **your** thoughts of who God is and what He is like?

On the one hand:

- Do you know God to be a loving, caring Father?
- Do you know Him as someone you can love and trust absolutely?
- Do you know Him to be someone who is worthy of your absolute loyalty and commitment?
- Do you find it easy to relate to Him in a personal and intimate way, like chatting to a close friend and do you enjoy spending time with Him?

Or:

- Do you believe in God and all His attributes as described in the Bible, but think of Him as some kind of impersonal or remote being that cannot be known personally?
- Do you see Him as a big, stern looking old man that is constantly looking out to catch you out and judge you?
- Is He a God 'out there' somewhere who you can approach when you need Him?
- Do you struggle to relate to Him as Father in a personal and intimate way?

So now let us spend a little time having a look at God as Father and see how that relates to those who may struggle to believe in Him or trust Him, because of hurts or disappointing experiences. We will look at how this may be resolved so we can walk in an intimate and personal way with Him. So that we may know His heart and fellowship with Him and live in accordance with His hearts desires for us.

It is one thing to talk about God, of who He is and what He is like, but a totally different thing to talk about our responsibility towards Him if He is a loving and just Father.

God, our heavenly Father, created us to be people, vessels, in whom He could place His very nature and life. He gave the life of His only begotten Son on Calvary's cross so that we could be partakers of His divine nature. He did that so that we could live by His life, so that we could love by His love, so that we could be secure and confident in who we are as His children, and so that we could live in a relationship of love and trust with Him.

Do you think of, or can you imagine, how wonderful this world would be if we all lived the in way God desired and planned for us to live – living by His life and love and loving and relating to Him and one another as He planned for us to do?

The problem is that for some, our selfishness and emotional hurts hold us back from knowing God as our "Father" and being the people our loving Father created us to be.

Our heavenly Father loves us and cares for us and wants us free from any hurts or selfishness, so that we can be secure in who we are and in our relationship with Him. He wants an intimate and close personal relationship with us. One of absolute love and trust.

Wounded Hearts

More rhetorical questions:

Did your parents, or your father in particular, tell you that he hated you, or that you were no good, or that he wished he had never given birth to you, or that he wished you were dead? Did you have a father that never spent time with you, despised you and did not relate to you in a loving way? Did you have a father who you disrespect because of the way he lived and the way he treated you or other members of

your family? Do you come from a broken home? Did your father pass away when you were very small leaving you with no father to know and relate to as you grew up? Were you raised as an orphan or by people other than your own parents? Were you sexually or violently abused? Was your father violent towards your mother or your peers? Are you one who cannot ever recall your father having told you that he loved you? Do you come from a home that denied God, moral absolutes and the importance of the family unit?

If your answer was “yes” to any of these questions then it is possible that you carry emotional wounds, feel rejected and your relationship to God as Father may have been affected in a negative way.

There are other additional pressures which exacerbate the situation. Like economic pressures (coming from a low income background where there was never enough of anything), crime (you may have been ripped off badly), violence (you may have suffered violence in the home or bullied at school), environmental disasters (droughts, floods, famines) and racial and class prejudices (you may have suffered injustices due to your skin colour, or due to the side of the railway line you lived on). You may feel like all these things happened because God had something against you and was trying to punish you. You may feel like God let you down.

These are some of the things that cause us to have distorted views of God. We view Him through the lens of our own experiences and when these experiences have been negative it contributes to a wrong impression of God.

When we project our negative experiences onto God it deeply affects our ability to relate to Him in the right way. We avoid Him or keep Him at arms length. We don't want to get close to Him and we battle to approach Him with love or trust.

The word refers to this state as a “broken spirit” or “crushed spirit”.

Proverbs 15:13 ... “A joyful heart makes a cheerful face, but when the heart is sad, the spirit is broken”.

An example of a hurt person with a broken spirit was Saul's daughter Michal. She was raised in a home where violence, irrational behavior, anger and jealousy were the order of the day. Saul, her father, was impatient, insecure and a very angry man. This must have affected Michal.

Saul was so jealous of David, who was to succeed him as king, that he devised a plot to kill him. He did it in a subtle way. He offered David one of his daughters to marry if he killed one hundred Philistines, thinking this young lad David would never be able to do it and in trying was certainly going to be killed. Well David killed two hundred Philistines and much to Saul's dismay, took his daughter Michal as his bride.

But soon Saul went into one of his rages against David and David fled, leaving Michal behind. A few years later he returned and found Michal married to another man. David demanded her return and, against her will and that of her new husband who she loved, she was torn from the arms of her weeping husband and forcefully returned to David. (2 Sam 3:13-16).

Michal was treated like some inanimate object, like a pawn in a chess game, by her father and David. As a result she grew up with bitterness against these men, especially David. In [2 Sam 6:12-23](#) we have the record of the occasion where the ark was being moved from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David, where David, in praise and worship to the Lord, took off his outer garment and danced before the ark of the Lord. Michal saw him doing this and despised him in her heart. She later mocked him and the result was she was barren for her whole life.

Forgiveness

Through the events in her life Michal was deeply hurt. You may have been deeply hurt by the events of your life. But difficult as it was for her and difficult as it is for you, there is only one way out of the prison of hurt – and that is through **forgiveness**. You may say “never, that is impossible”. Well, it may be difficult, but it is not impossible. Ask anyone who has walked this path and has forgiven and you will see that they are free.

Have a look at Jesus. He was born into poverty. His race was ostracized and His home town ridiculed. He was not good looking and people questioned His friendships. His father died when He was young. In His latter years He travelled the streets and cities homeless. He was misunderstood in His ministry, ridiculed, mocked, lied about, falsely accused, betrayed and finally, abandoned in death. Yet some of his last words on the cross were “*Father, **forgive** them; for they do not know what they are doing*” ([Luke 23:34](#)). (We would do well to consider these words before blaming others for hurting us, because our fathers, mothers and others who have abused or mistreated us are just kids who grew up and had kids. They may have suffered injustices and learned that way of life and just passed it on. They, like us, were born in sin. They knew no better way. It is Satan and sin that is to blame.

We, mankind, treated Jesus in this appalling manner and killed Him, yet He used the act of our greatest selfishness and unkindness to be the source of our forgiveness. It was by His forgiveness that we were set free. It is by our forgiveness of others that we can appropriate and walk in that freedom for which Christ set us free.

Jesus didn't focus on the injustice that was leveled against Him and the pain He suffered; He chose to look through that to the final victory, to the joyful event where He saw us come to salvation and freedom from sin and shame. He saw us restored in our relationship with the Father living according to His eternal plan. He looked through forgiving eyes.

[Heb 12:2](#) ... *“fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”*.

Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, came into the world to bring us healing and hope. We live in alienation because of our selfishness, and the selfishness of those who have sinned against us. We experience this alienation within ourselves, with God and with others. Jesus came to introduce reconciliation in place of alienation, healing in place of wounds, and wholeness in place of brokenness. He came to show us the Father's heart of love, acceptance and forgiveness.

There may be some here tonight who are like Michal, and some who have may have suffered far worse, but you don't have to end up like Michal – bitter and resentful. You don't have to live at 'arms length' from God.

It's our misconceptions of God and His love for us that can block His love from healing and restoring us. Let's look at some of those misconceptions, and also the truth of who God is :

1. The Father's Authority – you may have visited a friend who has a dog. When you get there the dog either cowers away from you, trembling and finally flops over on its back with its tail between its legs and pees itself in fear, or, the pooch in joy and exuberance jumps up on you, not giving a thought about its filthy paws or slobbery tongue, but so happy that there's someone come to play and romp with him. The exuberant dog obviously comes from a home where it receives lots of love and attention and sees you as a friend who will love him and play with him, while the browbeaten fearful dog comes from a home where he has been mistreated and simply cannot trust you to be any different from the others that have mistreated him.

So it is with the way man approaches God. Our past experiences influence our response when God reaches out to us.

Authority figures in your life as a youth may have been harsh and mistreated you. Our problem is that we, like the browbeaten puppy, shrink away from the heavenly Father whom we assume will be like the other authorities in our life. But He is not like them. He is love.

1 John 3:1 ... *"See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are".*

1 John 4:16-19 ... *"We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us".*

2. The Father's faithfulness

You are God's child, He calls you by name, but you may doubt His faithfulness. As a child you may have experienced the absence of your father through premature death, divorce or he may simply not have been there for you. He may have been taken up with his career or social life and never been at home for you. You may have a memory of broken promises and neglect.

This may have coloured your view of your heavenly Father. But it is not Him that has failed you. He was there through all you went through, weeping for you, feeling your pain. Because you are His born again child He is right there in you right now longing to throw His caring arms around you to lift you up and encourage you. He is saying to you *"I came that they might have life, and might have life abundantly"*

(John 10:10). 2 Tim 2:13 TLB says, “even when we are too weak to have any faith left, He remains faithful to us ... and He will always carry out His promises to us”.

3. The Father’s generosity

Were you always scolded for making a mess on the furniture? Told “don’t touch”, “Leave it alone”, “go outside”. Always reminded that “things” were so valuable and important and how terrible you were if you broke something or messed something up. Did you subconsciously learn that *things* are more important than *me*? Did you seldom or never hear the words, “I love you” from your parents?

In contrast, your heavenly Father sees you as precious and valuable. So generous was he that he did not even withhold His own Son’s life but gave Him for you that you may have eternal life. When you have a moment read Psalm 139. God values you and has an abundance of forgiveness, mercy and love for you.

4. The Father’s affection

Did you have an absence of affection from your father when you hurt yourself or were bullied as a child? Did he just say, “boys don’t cry. Come on, sort yourself out”. Are you one who cannot recall have been sat on your father’s lap and been shown some paternal affection and encouragement when you needed it?

Your heavenly Father was there with you through your entire childhood. He was there when you were bullied, when you were confused and just could not understand the maths or other subjects that troubled you in exams, when you fell and hurt yourself. He was there. Psalm 139:17 says, “How precious also are thy thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them!”

5. The Father’s presence

Were you a child who after making something couldn’t wait for your dad to come home so you could show him your great feat, only to have him brush you aside and pay no attention or interest in you or in what you wanted to show him? Was he always too busy to give you attention? Your dad may never have looked, but Father God always did, and He took delight in the work of your hands.

Your heavenly Father is with you 24 hours a day and more than that he gives you His full attention all the time. 1 Pet 5:7 TLB says, “Let Him have all your worries and cares, for he is always thinking of you and watching everything that concerns you”.

6. The Father’s acceptance

We live in a performance-oriented society. Acceptance is always conditional.

Did your father always make his love and acceptance of you conditional on your performance? “If you do well at school”, “if you mow the lawn”, “if you do this or that”, then I’ll Always a condition to his love and acceptance. If you came last in the race did he look the other way and disown you? And that really hurt you. Was he ashamed of you and didn’t want you around him?

Father God's love is unconditional. His love is not based on your performance. He loves you because He is love. 1 John 4:16 "God is love". God's promises are conditional but His love is unconditional. He loves us despite all our inadequacies or shortcomings. He loves us and accepts us just as we are.

He longs to shower His love upon you, but you have to receive it.

Imagine if you bought a bouquet of flowers for your wife or girlfriend to show her your love, and when you gave them to her she ran off got some money and came to pay you for the flowers. How would you feel? All you want is for her to say thank you and throw her arms around you in gratitude and acceptance of your love.

What is your response to your heavenly Father when He tells you He loves you? Can you receive His love without rushing off into frantic activity to earn His approval? Do you feel like you always have to be doing something for God to gain His approval and acceptance so you feel worthy?

Eph 1:6 NKJV ... *"to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved"*.

Zeph 3:17 NKJV ... *"The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing"*.

7. The Father's communication

Do you have difficulty looking people in the eye? Was the only time you had eye contact with your parents when they yelled at you or criticized you?

Ps 34:15 ... *"The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and His ears are open to their cry"*.

2 Chr 16:9 ... *"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His"*.

Your heavenly Father longs to communicate with you and share the secrets of His heart with you.

Jer 33:3 ... *"Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know"*.

Summary

I just want to encourage you, if you have been hindered in your relationship with the heavenly Father, due to some kind of parental failure or hurt you have suffered, then take this to the Lord.

Our fathers, mothers and other authority figures in our lives may have failed us. No one is perfect and the important thing is that you forgive those who have failed you. Unforgiveness and bitterness will consume you and prevent you from entering a close and intimate relationship with your heavenly Father.

The most important thing for you is to know Father God for **who He really is**, not who you **think** He is. He is the perfect Father; He is kind, loving, gracious, patient, generous, and longs to spend time with

you, showering you with His love. The Father's heart yearns for you to be whole and for you to fellowship with Him in His infinite love for you.

As you bow your hearts before the Father I believe the Holy Spirit wants to do a work of grace in those who need a touch from Him right now.

- Will you be made whole so you can know the Father's heart and through a close relationship with Him enter into the purpose for which He has made you?
- You are His child and He has a grand purpose for you.
- Draw near to Him so He can reveal Himself to you and express Himself through you to those in need around you.

- Will you choose to believe and accept His word that tells you who He truly is; a loving, caring Father?
- Will you receive His love, acceptance and forgiveness?
- Will you forgive those who have failed you?
- Will you receive His forgiveness for the grudges you have borne against others?
- Will you ask Him to wipe out those bad memories of the past and fill your mind with the truth?
- He's patiently waiting for you to come to Him.

Cast all your burdens on Him for He cares for you.

Will you come to Him now? His loving arms are outstretched and waiting to embrace you and make you whole.