Who's Your Daddy?

Discover the God that Jesus reveals

Paul Ellis
Who's Your Daddy?

When my first child was born, there were some complications and she had to spend a few days in a special care ward. During that time, she was kept in an incubator and the only way I could touch her was by putting my arms through holes in the side of the incubator wall. She was only a few hours old when I came to her, stroked her, and asked her a question.

“Who’s your daddy?”

I didn’t expect her to answer, so I answered for her.

“I’m your daddy, and I love you.”

It thrilled me to tell her this again and again.

“Who’s your daddy? I am. It’s me. I’m that guy. I’m your father, you’re my baby, and I love you.”

The communication was all one-way but that was fine with me. I couldn’t shut up. I had just become a father, and my heart was fit to burst. This little girl belonged to me and I belonged to her.

There were many things I wanted to tell her, but the first and most important thing she needed to hear was that I was her daddy and I loved her.

She’s older now, but I have never stopped telling her that I’m her daddy and I never will. My desire is that she will live her entire life knowing who I am and how much I love her.
The most important question you will ever ask is, “Who is my father?” Your answer to this question will influence every other question of life. Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here?

Get the father question wrong and you will miss it on every other issue. Your identity will be muddled, and you will have no lasting security. In your legitimate desire to define yourself, you may settle for inferior choices such as career or ministry. “I am a doctor.” “I am a pastor.” But the truth is you are more than what you do. You are your father’s child.

But who is your father?

My wife, Camilla, and I recently had lunch with a primary school teacher. This lady told us her school had just started a breakfast club for poor kids. The purpose of the breakfast club is to provide toast, milk, and cereal for students who come to school with empty stomachs. Although we live in one of the world’s wealthiest nations, in our city, many thousands of kids don’t have enough to eat. The breakfast clubs are a great idea because learning is hard when you’re hungry.

“What kind of families do these breakfast kids come from?” I asked.

“Teenage mothers with no parenting skills,” was her quick reply. “The fathers are long gone, and many of the moms have boyfriends who view these children as nuisances. It’s not uncommon for the boyfriends to beat the kids.”

My heart breaks for these children. I wonder how they will turn out given that the dominant male influence in their lives comes from men who don’t love them. I wonder what kind of fathers the boys will become, since they have no
fathers of their own. And I wonder if my children will be providing breakfast clubs for their children.

The worst part is that this story is hardly unusual. The kids in the breakfast club are merely the latest victims in an ancient cycle of poor parenting. Our family tree dates back to Adam, who fathered a murderer. Is it any exaggeration to say that the number one problem in this world is fatherlessness? Pick any wife-beater, drug dealer, or pedophile, and the odds are good you will find someone who had a bad dad. Fathers matter.

I know something about fatherlessness because my own dad died when I was eight years old. As a boy growing up with no father, the odds were stacked against me. Only they weren’t. By the grace of God, I was delivered from Adam’s cursed family and adopted into another. I knew who my Father was and how much he loved me, and that has made all the difference.

Jesus answers the most important question: “Who’s your Father? God is your Father!”

In the Old Testament, no one dared speak of the Almighty in such familiar terms. God was the Creator, the Lord of heaven and earth. He was a distant mystery glimpsed occasionally by the prophets and select others. Back then, people prayed formal and lofty prayers to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then Jesus came and said we should pray like this:

Our Father in heaven … (Matthew 6:9)

Can you imagine the shock of those who heard these words? “God is my Father? Are you sure about that, Jesus? Surely you mean he’s your father, not mine.” Yet in his Sermon on the Mount Jesus identifies God as your Father and our Father no
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less than sixteen times. This was good news then and it’s good news now. The One who measures the universe in his hand is your Daddy.

What is God’s name?

Before Jesus, no one called God “Father.” It just wasn’t done. But after Jesus, every New Testament writer spoke this way. James declared, “Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father.” John boasted, “How great is the Father’s love.” And Paul began nearly all of his letters with, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father.”

The saints of the Old Testament had many names for God, but Jesus gave us the best name of all: “Abba, Father” (Mark 14:36). Abba is not the name of a distant and mysterious God. Abba is your heavenly Father who cares for you and longs for you to know him. Abba is your Daddy who loves you so much he sent his Son to tell you.

Why did Jesus come? Jesus came to reveal God the Father to you. He came so that you might know who you truly are. He came that you might experience the abundant life of living as the apple of your Father’s eye.

Why do I write? I write so that you might know your heavenly Father is the very definition of awesome. He’s better and bigger than you think he is. And I write so that you might know you are his beloved child.

Your heavenly Father is for you. He has tilted the universe in your favor. With a Father like this, how can you fail?

Jesus said, “Father, glorify your name!” (John 12:28). What is the name of God that Jesus wants to glorify? He just told us. It’s Father. He has other names, but this is the name he wants us to use when we talk to him.
My purpose in writing is Jesus’ purpose. It’s to draw your attention to a God named Father. This is the name Jesus gave us and it is the name we esteem above all others. You need to see God as Jesus did—as a Father.

“But Paul, you’re talking about the Ancient of Days and the Most High God.” I am, and he is all those things and infinitely more besides. He is magnificent beyond words and beautiful beyond comprehension. But above all titles and all names, he is your Father and my Father.

Theologians like to ask, “What was Jesus’ favorite subject?” Some observe that he spoke often about the kingdom. Others note that he spoke much about money and love. But Jesus’ favorite subject by a long stretch was his Father. Everything he said and everything he did was grounded in the relationship he shared with his Father.

“I do what I see my Father doing,” said Jesus. “I speak what I hear him speaking.” Near the end of his life, Jesus prayed,

Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known ... (John 17:25–26)

Jesus is in the business of making the Father known. Yet many don’t know God as their Father. Like the saints of old, they may see him as Lord but not Abba. It’s as if Jesus never came.

What is God like?

A.W. Tozer once said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” Your picture of God is the single greatest
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influence on your life. Define God and you define yourself. For instance, if you imagine God as a terrifying punisher, you’ll likely be fearful and guilt-ridden. If you see him as a semi-deaf sky-Santa, you’ll likely be a superstitious worrier. And if you believe him to be distant or dead, chances are you’ll act as a little god of your own little world. How you see him affects how you see yourself.

Your view of God matters, but what is God really like?

Read the prophetic visions in the Bible and you will discover some truly fantastic images. Isaiah saw the Lord wearing a colossal robe and surrounded by six-winged singing angels. Ezekiel saw God as a glowing metal man wrapped in a rainbow. And Daniel saw a white-haired ageless figure seated on a burning throne with burning wheels. But these prophetic pictures are only glimpses into God’s nature. They describe aspects but not the whole picture. If you want to know what God is really like, you need to look elsewhere.

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son …

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being … (Hebrews 1:1–3a)

What is the Father like? He is exactly like the Son. Or the Son is exactly like the Father. God is like Jesus. Not roughly so, but exactly so. Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). If you ran into God the Father at a party you might mistake him for Jesus or vice versa. That’s how similar they are.

This similarity makes it easy for us to dismiss the silly caricatures of manmade religion. Since Jesus is not a semi-deaf sky-Santa, then neither is God. And since Jesus is not a terrifying punisher, neither is God. Your heavenly Father is exactly like Jesus.
Maybe you think God is a bookkeeper recording all your sins. Perhaps someone told you, “When you get to heaven, they will play a video of your life and all your secret sins will be exposed.” But God is not like that. How do we know? Because Jesus is not like that. Jesus didn’t shame sinners. He loved them and had dinner with them and introduced them to his Father.

Or maybe you think God is a passive and ineffectual sovereign who lets the universe run on auto-pilot. “Everything that happens is his will. If I get sick, God ordained it. If my baby dies, it’s because God took him home.” But God is not like that. How do we know? Because Jesus is not like that. Jesus is not a fatalist. His desire was to see the Father’s will done on earth as it is in heaven. This is why he healed the sick and raised the dead.

Or maybe you think your sins put you in danger of an angry God. “God hates sinners and plans to crush them under his feet without mercy.” But God is not like that. How do we know? Because Jesus is not like that. Jesus is a friend of sinners; therefore, God is a friend of sinners too. Indeed, he is the best friend a sinner could have.

God the Father and God the Son don’t have separate agendas. God is not in heaven recording your sins while Jesus is forgiving them. Nor is he giving you sicknesses so Jesus can heal you. The Father and the Son are exactly alike, they’re on the same page, and they have the same heart. Jesus said, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

What about the God of the Old Testament?

Some find it difficult to reconcile the Jesus of the Gospels with the stern God they’ve been raised with. “Jesus I like, but I’m not too sure about his Dad.” They
picture Jesus as a big brother sheltering them from the blows of an angry and abusive Father. But God is not like that at all. How do we know? Because Jesus is not like that, and Jesus is the exact representation of the Father.

“But didn’t Moses say God would curse us if we broke his laws?” Moses may have said it, but Jesus never did. Moses had good reasons for saying what he did when he did, but Moses had only a partial understanding of God’s true character. Jesus is the complete picture. Moses had a glimpse, but Jesus gives us the full 360-degree panorama.

I am sometimes asked, “How does the angry God of the Old Testament fit with the nice God of the New?” This question makes it sound like there is more than one God or that God has changed over time. Perhaps he went to anger management classes. But the truth is God never changes. God has always been our loving Father. The first man, Adam, was called a son of God (Luke 3:38). The problem is not that God stopped being our Father. The problem is we ran away from home.

The so-called “God of the Old Testament” is a fuzzy photograph taken with a telephoto lens by those who could not appreciate what they were looking at. Moses, Elijah, and the other Old Testament prophets had a revelation of God but they did not fully know him. Before Jesus, nobody did. God is simply too big for mortal minds to grasp.

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. (John 1:18)

The only person who can accurately explain God is God himself, and he did this by sending us his Son. Jesus is God explaining himself to the human race. Jesus is the answer to the question, “What is God like?”
What kind of God does Jesus reveal?

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son … God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16–17)

Jesus reveals a loving God who cares deeply for us and will not let us slip quietly into the night of our sin. Our forefather Adam rejected God in the Garden, but our heavenly Father did not reject us. We built a wall, but he made a door. We ran and hid, but he came and found us.

God sent Jesus because he wants us to know how much he loves us. He’s not interested in condemning us or treating us as our sins deserve. His desire is to rescue every last one of us, from the best of us to the worst of us. His Father-heart beats for more children. It beats for you and for your family. It beats for your neighbors and those kids at the breakfast club. It even beats for their dead-beat dads and their negligent mothers. The Father’s heart of love beats for the whole world.

“Paul, that sounds like you’re preaching unconditional love.” Is there any other kind? For too long religion has prostituted the love of God by telling us we must do stuff before our Father will love us. This is the greatest crime ever inflicted on the human race. It has left us orphaned, messed up, and in the pigpen of dead works. Manmade religion says God is angry and must be appeased. But Jesus shows us that God’s face is shining on us with love and grace.
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We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth … For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:14b, 17)

If the law came through Moses and grace came through Jesus Christ, then God the Father must be a grace-giver, not a law-giver. And since the Son came full of grace and truth, the Father must be full of grace and truth too. And he is. He sits on a throne of grace, not a throne of law.

Some imagine that God gives us law while Jesus gives us grace. God hammers us with holy judgments while Jesus gives us cuddles. This is nuts. It’ll lead you to cling to the Son but run from the Father.

The good news declares that Jesus is the embodiment of the Father’s grace. Jesus is fantastically gracious, but he is no more gracious than God himself. They are the dynamic duo of graciousness. There is no attempt to manipulate you into cooperation. There is just grace upon grace radiating from the throne of grace.

Life is full of cares and worries, but Jesus said, “Do not worry, for your heavenly Father knows your needs” (see Matthew 6:31–32). And Jesus wasn’t talking about great spiritual needs, but ordinary, everyday needs like food and clothing. The bad news of the orphaned life says, “You are on your own and nobody cares.” But the good news Jesus proclaimed says, “You are not alone and your heavenly Father cares about even the smallest details of your life.”

Perhaps you have come here with some questions. Who am I? Why am I here? Is God angry with me? Good fathers love it when their kids ask questions, but you will never get good answers unless you see God as your good Father.

Who am I? You are your Father’s dearly loved child.

Why am I here? Because your Father loved you into existence. You are his dream come true.
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Is God mad at me? Nope. He rejoices over you with singing.

Can he forgive me for the things I’ve done? He already did.

Does he love me for who I am? He thinks you’re great! You’re a one-of-a-kind special and he delights in you.

Will he disown me if I sin? Never. Would you disown your own children?

What does he expect from me? He expects you to settle in his love and flourish in his grace.

Life is more than eating and drinking and paying bills. The abundant life that comes through Jesus is nothing less than the adventure of exploring the limitless love of a great God. It’s riding atop the shoulders of the One who made all things.

Whether you are in the pigpen of dead works or the special care ward for broken people, you need to know that your heavenly Father loves you like crazy. He reaches down with love in his eyes and healing in his hands and asks, “Who’s your Daddy? I’m your Daddy, you’re my child, and I love you.”

This is the good news an orphaned world most needs to hear.

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ENDNOTES
1. See James 1:17, 1 John 3:1, and the opening verses of most of Paul’s letters.
2. See John 5:17–20, 8:28, 12:49–50. In the four gospels, Jesus mentions the kingdom 106 times and God the Father about 175 times. However, it would be incorrect to think Jesus treated his Father as merely one subject among many. His Father was the lens through which Jesus made sense of everything. For instance, when discussing the kingdom, he described it as “my Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26:29).
Manmade religion says, “Don’t ask questions.” But Jesus says, “Ask and you shall receive.” Asking questions is how we receive from the abundance of God’s wisdom. Asking questions is how we grow.

Questions are keys to treasure and doorways to discovery. A good question can change your life. The questions in this book will take you places. They will cause you to dance on the uplands of your Father’s favor. Best of all, they will lead you to a deeper relationship with Jesus, who is the greatest Answer of all.

What others are saying about The Gospel in Twenty Questions...

“One of the best books I have ever read.” — ED ELLIOTT, Word of Life World Outreach

“Another home run!” — PAUL C. MATA, Word for All Nations, Philippines

“When I stumbled upon the beautiful revelation of the new covenant, it was Paul Ellis's writing that affirmed and helped me make sense of my newfound freedom. Now, in one brilliant book, Paul has answered the biggest questions people have about the gospel of grace!” — ERIC DKYSTRA, author of Grace on Tap

“I love questions and, wow, I love this book!” — AMAZON REVIEWER

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