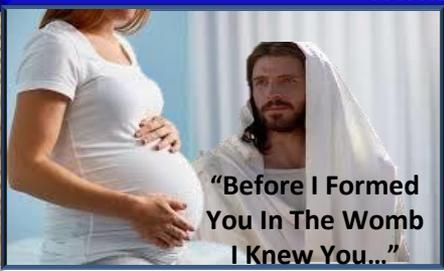


FATHER = SOURCE



Our earthly fathers are an important source of our genetic makeup. But God is the ultimate source of our lives. He knew us before we were conceived and formed us in the womb. **"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed**

**you a prophet to the nations."** (Jeremiah 1:5) **"But when He Who had set me apart before I was born, and Who called me by His grace,"** (Galatians 1:15)

FATHER = PROVISION



God Gives What God Is His Life **Fathers find joy in giving to their children. That's because a chief role of fatherhood is to provide. Jesus used this reality to explain the goodness of God when He said, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!"** (Matthew 7:11).

FATHER = CORRECTION



Children don't like discipline, but it fosters security knowing Mom and Dad love them enough to correct wayward behavior. **Good parents mirror the fatherhood of God when they administer the short-term pain of discipline to shape a child's long-term character.** As the Bible says, **"The Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son"** (Hebrews 12:6).

FATHER = LOVE



As a parent, you've probably received a small taste of how God feels as **"Our Father In Heaven."** **When parents look into the face of their newborn baby, they know they will love the child no matter what. That's exactly how God feels about us. "We Love Because He First Loved Us."** (1 John 4:19) This is **Our Father's** unconditional love for us!



**"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"** (1 John 3:1) Through the eyes of a fatherless child. People say strange things to a kid who's lost his dad. Well, they seemed strange to me. "You're the man of the house now," one aunt told me at my father's funeral, dabbing her eyes with bunched-up tissues. "You must take care of your mom and sister." As a kid just finishing third grade, I wasn't sure what to make of this. I certainly didn't feel like a man. And I imagined that this honor wouldn't get much mileage in everyday life. One does not say to one's mother,

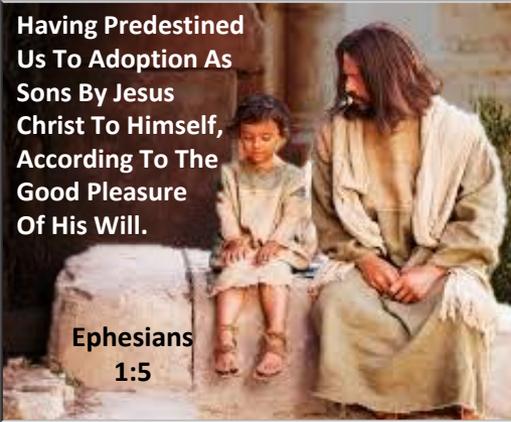
"I won't be eating my vegetables this evening. I'm the man of the house now." Another thing people said — once we started attending church — was that God would be my father. He was the **"Father of the fatherless,"** and the **"Protector of widows"** (Psalm 68:5). Could any other truth be more appropriate for our family? **They meant well, I know, but I quickly recognized that the term father, as it applied to God, didn't have precisely the same meaning as the word used to describe a guy who lives with a mother and some children. Yes, God was the powerful Creator, the source of wisdom, truth and love — but He wasn't going to be there to help a kid with his history homework or to throw a football around. The Architect of snowflakes and solar systems wasn't known for taking 10-year-old boys out for breakfast to talk about what sex means.**

The Son's Invitation

It's true, of course, that God presents Himself as a Father. **Throughout the Gospels, Jesus makes more than 150 references to God as a Father. For the Jews of that time, this was a new way of addressing God.** While Old Testament writers sometimes described God using qualities of earthly fathers (and mothers), Jesus referred to God using more informal, intimate language. He also invites us into this relationship, teaching us to address God as **"Our Father in heaven"** (Matthew 6:9). It is only through Christ's work on the Cross that we are adopted into this family relationship. (Ephesians 1:5) **"Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."** Some people may have a difficult time relating to God as a father. Fatherhood is an idea that we're all very familiar with, and we may project our expectations or experiences of what a father should be, or has been, onto our heavenly Father. A boy who longs for a dad has a hard time

seeing God as capable of filling that role. A girl who feels she has to succeed in sports and school to earn her father's approval may see her relationship with God in a similar way. For others, the word father may bring up memories of abuse or neglect. How tragic that such a beautiful facet of God's character — that He is not a distant, impersonal ruler, but a warm and welcoming papa — is often tainted by the weaknesses of our fathers humanity.

"Glimpses Of His Character"



As you read scripture with your children, you'll see that Jesus often illustrates God's Kingdom by using pictures that we are familiar with: Seeds And Soils, Sheep And The Shepherd. For Those Who Thirsted After Truth, The Parables Of Jesus Were Profound, Memorable Windows Into The Nature Of God. When Jesus Calls God A Father, we might think this is another metaphor: That God, while not

being an actual human father, shares some similarities to earthly dads. Pastor Gene Veith writes; "We should see God as the actual, literal father. Earthly fathers have certain remote similarities to Him," and he goes on to say; "The essence of fatherhood is found in God, not in human beings." A photograph can never capture the full experience of something, the pictures we have available to understand God are limited by our inherent inability to recognize the depth of His glory and goodness. The image of an earthly father, as a way of understanding God, is a good picture — and it's made clearer the better dads do their jobs — but it is still just a partial glimpse at something much bigger.

"Fathers Are Created To Imitate His Goodness"

Our Heavenly Father's desire is for all fathers to reflect aspects of His character, an earthly mirror of a heavenly reality. Matthew 7:9-11 illustrates this quite clearly. In this passage, Jesus is speaking to a group that must have included many fathers. Note what He says: "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him! From God's perspective, all fathers — even ones who are not Christians — are created to imitate His goodness.



"But There Is More"

When you contemplate the symbolism in Jesus' examples in Matthew 7:9-11, a deeper meaning, especially for fathers, is evident. For example, consider the comparison of **Bread To A Stone**. Especially to a small child, a piece of bread and a small stone may look the same and feel the same. But they are not the same. Bread was, and remains today, a key source of physical life and sustenance, and it represents spiritual life as Christ's body, which was broken for the salvation of the world. A stone, especially in the time of Christ, could be a tool of destruction and death. Remember, stones were used to martyr Stephen. Now consider the symbolism in the comparison of a fish to a serpent. The fish is a key symbol of the Christian faith. Of note, Jesus' first disciples were fishermen whom He transformed into "Fishers Of Men." These men fervently shared the good news that salvation is available for all men. In contrast, the serpent is the symbol of the Evil One who seeks to thwart the Gospel and lead humankind down a path of destruction and death. What Jesus is saying in this passage is that fathers should make sure their children have both physical and spiritual life. Godly fathers are to provide a pathway and a connection to God's saving grace because when they give their children "Good Gifts," it makes it much easier for children to connect with a heavenly Father Who gave the best gift of all — His Son, Who died on a cross for their sins. So when their children hear, "Dear heavenly Father," it's winsome rather than worrisome.

"Why Did He Invite Us All To Call God "Father"?"

The Christian faith acknowledges Jesus Christ as the One and only Son of God. Yet Jesus taught His disciples to address God as "Our Father In Heaven." Since Jesus is the only Son of God, why did He invite us all to call God "Father"? Obviously, Jesus holds a unique position as God incarnate, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Consistent with His teachings, however, believers have always used the word Father when referring to God. One of the most important creeds in Christian history begins with the phrase, "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible." This simple affirmation carries several important truths our children need to understand. Here are some of those essential truths: