

# 10 OUR FATHER

LANETTE: Mom, why did you marry dad?

MOM: Because I love him. What kind of question is that?

LANETTE: Well, I certainly don't know what you see in him.

MOM: Lanette, what is it? You're pretty angry with dad today.

LANETTE: Yeh, I guess I am.

MOM: Do you know why?

LANETTE: Well, he said he would come to my game yesterday and he never showed up.

MOM: He had to work, Lanette. He explained that to you last night—and apologized.

LANETTE: He's always working. I think he likes work better than he likes us.

• Every family has tough times. There is no family that just breezes along without ever having to work out a problem. This isn't because there is something wrong with families. It is because families are made of very powerful relationships and all relationships require attention, and sometimes a lot of work, to keep them strong. Perhaps Lanette and her dad will find a chance to talk about their problem and get it worked out.

Have you ever wondered why we call God "Our Father"? That's the way Jesus began the prayer he taught to his disciples—the prayer we know as the Lord's Prayer. If your guess has something to do with relationships, you're right.

## 3 STATEMENTS

- When we address God as "Our Father," we remind ourselves of the centrality of God in our lives.
- God, as divine parent, is both like and unlike our physical parents.
- Many word pictures have been used to describe the richness of our relationship with God.

the

*Source*

## JESUS' FATHER

Jesus was not the first to call God *Father*. For centuries before Jesus, the Jewish people took great comfort from how God identified the divine nature in these "father" terms.

Read the passages below to see how important the idea of God as Father was to the Jewish people many years before Jesus.

• *Deuteronomy 32:6*. This is a speech by Moses to the people, scolding them for their unfaithfulness. Notice how Moses calls God "your father."

• *Jeremiah 31:9*. Jeremiah speaks on God's behalf. First, there is the prediction that Israel will be defeated by an enemy. Then comes the word that God will lead the people of Israel back "for I have become a father to Israel."

• *Isaiah 64:8*. Isaiah seeks help from God for Israel and acknowledges that "you are our Father."

Jesus used the idea of God as Father very frequently. But with Jesus, something new was revealed about this relationship. In one of the most remarkable passages in the whole Bible, Jesus tells us something about God that even the Jewish people before him would never have thought possible. Read this remarkable passage in Mark 14:32-36.

You may recognize this as the night when Jesus was arrested. He truly wanted to avoid what was about to happen, but was willing to endure it, if it was God's will.

Do you see the word abba in verse 36? This is the revelation or understanding from Jesus. The best way to translate this word into English is "daddy." It is the word a Jewish child used to address the one in whom he or she had full confidence.

With this one simple word, Jesus told us more about God than we had known for all the centuries before. Abba—daddy. That is who God is for us.

In Matthew 10:29-31, Jesus tells about God in yet a different way. Read the verses. How much does God care for you? How well does God know you? Not even the smallest sparrow falls without God knowing it. Are you just "one of the flock?" Absolutely not. God even knows how many hairs you have on your head. By beginning his prayer with the words "Our Father," Jesus wanted to convey all of these thoughts. For Jesus, the relationship was just that close. Jesus wanted his disciples to experience that same relationship. It is the same for us, too, when we pray "Our Father."

## WHAT DOES MARTIN LUTHER SAY?

Turn to page 172 of your book and read Luther's explanation to the Introduction of the Lord's Prayer.

Luther certainly understood what Jesus taught us about God as a parent or caregiver. Notice the things that Luther says, especially the second sentence: "We therefore are to pray to him with complete confidence just as children speak to their loving father."

After you have read the explanation, answer the following questions.

1. What does God encourage us to do?

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2. Does Luther teach us that God is like a father or is truly a father?

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3. What is the benefit to us when we understand that God is a loving father to us?

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4. Is it easier for you to think of God as a father or mother? Why?

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## GOD'S CHILDREN

We have been thinking about how God is like a father. But there is another important side to consider. What is meant by calling ourselves children?

Begin by making a list of things that describe young children. Picture a four-year-old boy or girl. How would you describe this child? Be sure to include not only the kinds of things that might upset you, but the kinds of things that four-year-olds do to help us love them. Write or draw your ideas in the margin.



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Your list probably included a number of things. Four-year-olds tend to be full of energy, but fall down a lot. They talk, but sometimes don't know enough words to get their ideas across. They can be silly or have temper tantrums. They can cuddle up to you one minute and run away from you the next. They like to play fantasy games, particularly ones in which they are the super heroes.

*God, as divine parent, is both like and unlike our physical parents.*

From God's point of view, the human race must seem just like a four-year-old does to us. We think we are grown up, but aren't we just like the four-year-old we described? It is no wonder we have kept God so busy all these thousands of years!

But there is one more important thing to say about a four-year-old that really describes the heart of our relationship with God. Four-year-olds trust and four-year-olds are completely dependent upon parents or caregivers. When supper time comes, the child expects a meal. If the child gets a skinned knee, the child expects that it will be taken care of. If the child has a problem, the child expects help. The child expects these things because that's the nature of children. Only children who have been severely disappointed by a parent or caregiver will stop expecting.

God wants us to be like expectant children—not because we deserve anything from God, but because we trust God so completely. To call ourselves children of God is to say quite a lot about God, and about us. *When we address God as "Our Father," we remind ourselves of the centrality of God in our lives.*

## BUT DIFFERENT

★ A problem surfaces, though, when we think of God in terms of father, parent, or caregivers. Most of what you know about parents is from your own



parents, or from those who raised you. *God, as divine parent, is both like and unlike our physical parents.* More and more, we know about many parents who do not take their parental responsibilities seriously, and neglect, abandon, or abuse their children.

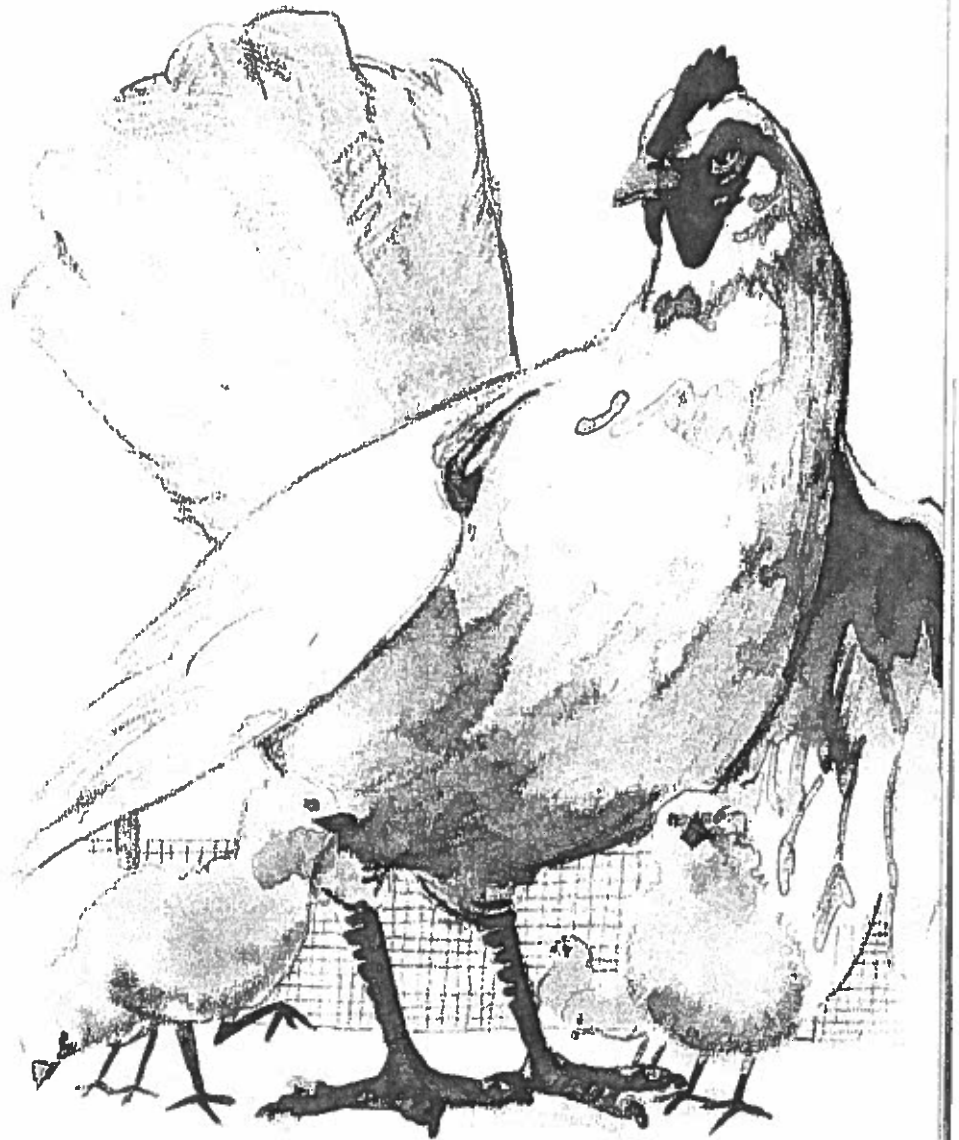
An adult woman who had been sexually abused by her father when she was a little girl once said, "I can't pray the Lord's Prayer because I can't call God my father. If God was like my father, I'd become an atheist and stop believing in God altogether." This woman's feelings are very strong.

Her case is extreme, but it points out something for Christians to remember. Human parents are both parents and human. Parents are not perfect, even when they try hard to be the best parents they can be. Parents, like all people, need forgiveness.

## MANY IMAGES

While *father* may be one of the most common images of God in the Bible, it is far from being the only one. *Many word pictures have been used to describe the richness of our relationship with God.*

What are some other images you can think of? Write or draw them in the space below.



*Shaping*  
life

### IS GOD A "HE"?

Why do we call God *father* instead of *mother*? What we have said about the nature of being a father can certainly be said of mothers as well. The answer is not totally satisfactory. We call God father because that is what God was called for many years and because that is the way Jesus addressed God. We should remember, though, that in ancient times, there was a very strong belief that men were superior to women in many ways. Because of this, it was natural for people to speak of God as father rather than mother. However, there are many instances where the Bible uses female imagery for God. In Matthew 23:37, for instance, Jesus

says, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"

The emphasis in Scripture is not on the maleness of God, but on the parent-like nature of God. God has made a remarkable relationship with us, treating us as beloved children and acting toward us as a loving parent.

*Many word pictures have been used to describe the richness of our relationship with God.*

## FURTHER

# opportunities

### *Bible Reading and Reflection*

Read the following passages during the week and spend time reflecting on how they can enrich your understanding of God as our divine parent.

- Matthew 19:13-15
- John 1:10-13
- Romans 8:12-17
- Galatians 4:1-7
- 2 Corinthians 1:2

### *Memory*

Turn to the Introduction of Luther's explanation to the Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism on page 172 of your book. Memorize this brief, but beautiful explanation.

### *Activity 1*

Make a "Parent Poster" by cutting pictures from magazines showing the many different kinds of things that parents do. Look for pic-

tures that show parents nurturing, discipling, protecting, giving birth, working, and so forth. Label the poster with words from Luther's explanation, "Truly, God is our Father and we are his children." Or you can label it, "Truly God is our divine parent and we are God's children."

### *Activity 2*

Interview your parents or those who have parental responsibility for you. Ask them what are the easiest and hardest parts of being a parent. Also find out from them if being a parent turned out to be different than they expected.

### *Activity 3*

Using the key words from this session that are listed below, make your own word find. If possible, make enough copies to give to each of your classmates. (Add other words if you wish.)

FATHER  
PARENT  
CHILD  
RESPONSIBILITY

MOTHER  
DIVINE  
ABBA

## FOCUS

### ON CHILDREN IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

When Jesus taught that we must become like little children to enter the kingdom of God, he must have really startled his hearers. Children in Jesus' day, while certainly loved by their parents, had no rights whatsoever. They were not considered to be very impor-

tant until they had their bar mitzvah (and that was only for boys). With such low status, children were very unlikely candidates for the example of how we must all be to fully receive the richness of God's kingdom.