

GOD OUR FATHER

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What does it mean to be a father? Have you ever thought about it? What is it that fathers are supposed to do? What makes the difference between a "good" father and one not so good? What can we learn about these questions from God our Father?

Do you know of any schools that teach young men how to be fathers? Certainly society is in need of such instruction. Our world today is in confusion about sex, about marriage, about the proper role of fathers and mothers. Many in today's world have no real comprehension of why families exist, nor what a family is supposed to be.

One common view in today's permissive society is that families are supposed to be democratic institutions—with nobody really in charge, especially not the father (Isaiah 3:4-5, 12).

Some fathers have done very well in nurturing, instructing and guiding their families. But all too frequently, fathers have abdicated their responsibilities—often giving scant attention to their wives and children. Another common occurrence in our society is abusive treatment directed against children and mothers by fathers, step-fathers or live-in boyfriends.

It's essential to our future that the family unit be restored—and it must begin with fathers (Malachi 4:5-6). There is no school that I know of where men are taught to be fathers. Where do you find what a father is supposed to be?

God created the family. In a very real sense, God is a family. The obvious place to look for instruction in how to be a father, then, is the Bible. In the Bible it's revealed not only that God is the author of the family institution, but that God himself is our Father. God himself is the perfect example of fatherhood.

From the Bible we can learn what kind of Father God is, and thus what kind of fathers we should be, that is, those of us who are or have the potential to be fathers. But this subject should be of interest not just to men. In it are lessons for all of us.

While we may not all be physical fathers in this life, there are principles of human and godly relationships in God's example of fatherhood that we can all learn from and apply. For several reasons wives and mothers—and daughters—need to understand these principles, just as men do.

For one thing, mothers often have a vital role in teaching their sons important principles regarding fatherhood. Moreover, God is the Father of all of us, and it's important to everyone to understand how God relates to us as our Father, and we relate to him as his children.

God is love (1 John 4:7-8). God loves his children (John 5:20; 16:27; 1 John 3:1). Love,

real love, the kind of love God has—edifies (I Corinthians 8:1). "Love" here is translated from ἀγάπη (*agape*), which, as used in the Bible, is the divine love which proceeds from God. It is **outgoing concern**, which manifests itself in benevolent conduct.

God is not the kind of father who oppresses, who berates and provokes his children. He does not maltreat or ignore them. The direction of God's actions as a father is to build up—to edify. God is an active Father who constantly displays love for his children in what he does for them. God provides for his children. But much more—he teaches them, sets standards for them, guides them, corrects them when necessary, forgives them, comforts them, praises them, strengthens and encourages them, rewards them, and glorifies them. These qualities of behavior, all directed toward building up, or edifying, are revealed consistently throughout the Bible.

God is the progenitor, ruler and head of his family (Isaiah 9:6). Note that this Scripture is specifically speaking of the "Son," Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who also is in a sense our spiritual Father, even as God the Father is. And this title, "Father," is used here in the context of government.

God views the created beings he has made—including both the angelic host and human beings—as an extended family, of which he is the head (Ephesians 3:14-15). Temporarily, God is allowing rebellion against his benevolent rule to be exercised, so that mankind will learn, through the school of hard knocks, so to speak, important lessons. But ultimately, all will be brought under his authority (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

Mankind, beginning with Adam and Eve, chose to rebel against God, and chose to follow Satan instead (Genesis 3:1-13; the "serpent" is not referring to a literal "serpent," or snake, as many suppose, but is a metaphor for Satan, cf. Revelation 12:9). Satan is an angelic being, who had been an Archangel, the highest ranking among the angelic host, but who rebelled and became God's adversary (Isaiah 14:12-24; Ezekiel 28:13-16).

Thus, Satan has been allowed to continue through all of human history up to now, to be the "ruler of this world," and the "god of this world" (Matthew 4:8-9; John 12:31; II Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 6:12). Satan's rule, in contrast to that of God, is characterized by spiritual blindness, ignorance, deception, suffering, death and destruction—the opposite of that of a loving father.

But, though God possesses the power to rule his creation, and ultimately has supreme authority over everything and everyone, he rules in love, in such a way as to edify the members of his family. He will in due time through Jesus Christ depose Satan and Jesus Christ will begin to rule directly over the earth, without Satan to mislead and confuse mankind (Revelation 11:15; 20:10).

Have you ever thought about the fact that you would not exist except for the fact that the Father -- that is God -- created you and gave you life? (Deuteronomy 32:6). The Hebrew

word *qânâh*, translated "bought," in this verse in the New King James Version, could also be translated "created." The *New English Translation* is, "Is he not your father, your creator? He has made you and established you."

Not only did God create you, he also bought you, with the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:17-19). Now notice how the Father of the tribes of Jacob led them, guided and nurtured them: Deuteronomy 32:8-12.

God guides his children, and even when they go astray he directs them back to the right paths (Jeremiah 3:4, 12-13). The Father teaches us, and we, if we are receptive to his instruction, can learn from him (John 6:45). As a loving father, God seeks to mold and shape us into children pleasing to him (Isaiah 64:8; Ephesians 1:1-12, 15-19; 2:4-5, 10, 18-22).

God provides for his people, and treats them with loving-kindness and mercy (Psalm 103:2-13; James 1:17-18; Jeremiah 3:19; 31:9, 14, 20; Matthew 5:44-45; 7:7-11; Colossians 1:12-13; 1 Peter 1:3-5; Revelation 21:7).

As a loving Father God is concerned for the well being of his children. He knows that lawless and destructive behavior will bring them to ruin. So God sets standards of conduct for his children (Deuteronomy 30:15-16; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:48; 1 Peter 1:13-16; 2 Corinthians 6:17-18; 7:1; Ezekiel 18:30-32).

Although God is great in mercy and kindness, when necessary he corrects his children as a loving father (1 Corinthians 11:31-32; Hebrews 12:5-13).

God corrects us occasionally when necessary, but he also comforts us (Psalm 23:4; 71:20-21; Psalm 119:49-50; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).

When we please God, he praises us (2 Peter 1:17; Romans 2:27-29; 1 Corinthians 4:5).

God empowers and strengthens us (Ephesians 3:14-21; Philippians 4:13).

Finally, God rewards his children (Luke 6:35; Colossians 3:23-24; Hebrews 10:35-36; Revelation 22:12).

While the world's society often denigrates the family and heaps scorn on family values, or pervert them in various ways, God sees the family in a positive light. God is a loving Father, who's primary concern is for his children, and he is focused on nurturing them and helping them to reach their potential in every way possible. God loves, provides for, teaches, molds, corrects, comforts, and strengthens his children. He is the perfect example of what a Father should be. We need to be deeply thankful as grateful children to God our Father, and love him above anything or anyone else. And we need to strive to become like him.

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