

# GOD THE FATHER

John 1:1–18 • Char Brodersen

**Introduction:** Good morning, Church! On January 1, we began a journey as a church community to read through the whole Bible in one year. And we are dedicating this year to reading, studying, applying, and discussing the Story of Scripture. Within this journey through the Bible, we are taking time here on Sunday mornings to dig deep into various themes and topics of the Scripture together so that as we read through, study, dive in, and struggle with the Bible this year, it will help us to grow in our understanding of the full narrative and grand story of salvation and confidence of the goodness and unfailing love of our God. And by God's grace, to find our story being continually caught up, shaped, and transformed by the biblical story.

**This morning, we begin our next series considering together—Our Trinitarian God, and specifically God the Father.**

Christians uniquely believe that there is one supreme God who is over all things. He is the creator of all things in both heaven and earth, visible and invisible, and that this God is not singular and static in his person but is actuality dynamic and communal. God himself is a community—Father, Son, and Spirit—what we call the Trinity. Though the Scriptures do not use the word Trinity (it was first coined by Tertullian around 170 AD, and eventually declared in the Nicene Creed), we believe that the idea of what this word seeks to capture is clearly revealed in Scripture over and over again.

I'm not sure how much time and thought you've given to the study of God. And I'd be curious to know what comes into your mind when you hear the word or title God—maybe it's a picture of an old man with a beard sitting on a throne surrounded by clouds, far off detached from the world and any pain or suffering of humans. Or maybe you picture God more by characteristics like all-knowing, all-powerful, all-wise, ever-present ... Judge, Ruler, King.

There are all sorts of ideas we have about God and what we think he is like and what he's after. Our mistake is that we often begin with our own ideas about God, whether from Christian culture, our upbringing, or the surrounding culture, and then we try to fit the biblical God into that idea. And even though the biblical picture might be radically contrary to our own ideas, they tend to work as a default setting of our brain. Because of that, we need our minds renewed and rewired by the testimony of Scripture to know and understand the truth about who God is and what he is like.

Pastor and theologian A. W. Tozer once said *"That what we think about God is the most important thing about us."*—A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

What we think about God, his person, his character, his love, forgiveness, righteousness, and justice is actually of extreme importance to our own daily living, purpose, and even deep life satisfaction. What we believe about the person and character of the One we believe is ultimate, the source of all life, all joy and all being, the Judge and Ruler of all things, will radically affect how we live our lives.

## What Do I Mean?

The German Theologian Karl Barth once commented on how Adolf Hitler used to speak only of God as "the Almighty." Barth said, *"But it is not the almighty who is God; we cannot understand from the standpoint of a supreme concept of power, who God is. And the (person) who calls 'the Almighty' God misses God in the most terrible way. For 'the Almighty' is bad, as 'power in itself' is bad. The 'Almighty' means chaos, Evil, the Devil. We could not better describe the devil than by trying to think this idea of a self-abased, free, sovereign ability."*—Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*

Now Barth was not denying that the God revealed in Scripture is Almighty, but that mere might is not who God is. Or think if God were solely revealed as Ruler and Judge—what kind of salvation, restoration can God offer us? In this case, we would work diligently to keep the rules out of fear of judgment, not as a way to know God and be in relationship with him. Though the analogy breaks down at a certain point, it's like our relationship with the police or the highway patrol—you keep the rules in order to avoid having any kind of relationship ... if you know what I mean ...

In this case, salvation would simply be letting me off the hook, not giving me the consequences I deserve for my bad behavior. This might generate fear and/or gratitude in me, but not love, not a desire to know this God and to be in relationship with him. I actually couldn't possibly fulfill the greatest commandment—to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength and love my neighbor as myself.

Dare I even say that we should not think of God primarily as Creator even though this is how the story of the Bible begins—with God creating the cosmos. For if God is primarily Creator, what does that mean about God before creation? Who is God without creation if he is solely the Creator?

The God revealed in Scripture is not just Almighty, not just the King, the Ruler of all things, or even the Creator, but he is first and foremost Father.

We read in our opening verses this morning—**“No one has 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**

What John is telling us is that Jesus, the Son of God, has given us the insider take, the true revelation on who God really is, and what Jesus says about God more than anything else is that he is Father!

This is how Jesus spoke most often of the God of Israel—the One he came to reveal.

Theologian Michael Reeves writes, *“Since God is, before all things, a Father, and not primarily Creator or ruler, all his ways are beautifully fatherly. It is not that this God ‘does’ being a father as a day job, only to kick back in the evenings as plain old ‘God.’ It is not that he has a nice blob of fatherly icing on top. He is father. All the way down. Thus all that he does he does as Father; and that means the way he rules over creation is most unlike the way any other god would rule over creation.”—Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity**

Remember A. W. Tozer's words: *what we think about God is the most important thing about us.* Think about how much it would change our lives if we understood and related to God first and foremost as our Father who dearly loves us?

## I. What do we mean when we call God Father?

- A. Let me first say what we don't mean.
- B. When we speak of God as Father, or “Our Father,” we do not mean that God is a male and therefore that males image God and females do not that somehow men are endowed with some greater authority or honor because God is a male. God is Spirit and beyond gender and according to Scripture, both male and female bear the image of God.
- C. Secondly, we don't call God Father because it is based on our relationship with our male parent. Rather, we understand what true fathering is because of the kindness and love God the Father displayed in and through Jesus. As Paul writes to the Ephesians: **“For this reason [the way God has acted in the world through Christ] I bow my knees before the Father, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and earth takes its name.”—Ephesians 3:14–15**
- D. Author and theologian, Luke Timothy Johnson writes, *“Christian language about God as Father is not simply a projection from the human experience of fatherhood, still less from the patriarchal*

*structures of society. The Christian understanding of God as Father is based on the way humans experienced God as creator, protector, and redeemer in the story of Israel, in the way Jesus bore witness to God as his Father, and in the way in which moved by the experience of the Holy Spirit in their lives (the Spirit prompting us to cry out to God as Father), Christians have also come to know God as their Father.”—Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Creed**

1. This means that when we speak of God as Father, we mean that he is the source of all being, the giver of everything good—from creation to salvation and everything in between—all of it finds its birth and source in God the Father. James, the brother of Jesus, speaks of God the Father this way: **“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.” James 1:17–18**

## II. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

- A. As I said, if we really want to know the God of the Bible, the God Jesus called Father, then we need to listen to how Jesus speaks of him.
- B. Jesus’ whole mission and purpose in his incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension was to reveal, to make known the love and true character of the Father. In his teaching and ministry, Jesus calls God Father over 165 times. Jesus said that everything he said, that he did—the miracles and works, the things he taught he learned from the Father—Jesus came to show us God’s true heart toward his people, that he wants to be known and related to as Father.
  1. But it’s not just Jesus’ direct references to the father in his teachings, but also in his story and parables that he is telling us something about the character of God. Andrew Wilson writes, *“His parables, strikingly, reinforce the picture of God as the irrepressible giver, even when they are not mainly about God. Once there was a farmer who scattered seeds so liberally that most of it didn’t take route. Once there was a king who gave remittance for a debt of ten thousand talents. Once there was a vineyard owner who gave people far more than their work was worth. Once there was a father who gave away half his estate to his rebellious son (and then gave him a feast when you came crawling back, having wasted it all). Once there was a nobleman who gave three months’ wage to all his employees, and then went on a foreign trip. Once there was a landowner who gave his vineyard over to tenants. Once there was a king who gave wedding invitations to every undesirable in the county. In fact, it is hard to think of a parable in which a God-figure features and he is not characterized by giving away far more than he should.”—Andrew Wilson, *Spirit and Sacrament**
  2. This all may sound kind of strange to us, like I’m actually implying that God’s character wasn’t quite clear through the Scriptures. That’s not what I’m saying, and in fact the most quoted Scripture in the Bible, by the Bible is about the character of God found in Exodus 34:6
    - a. There God declares who he is to Moses saying, **“The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”—Exodus 34:6–7**
    - i. The Scriptures speak over and over again to God’s covenant faithful love to his people. Or as one author put it his *“Never stopping, never giving up, un-breaking always and forever love.”—Sally Lloyd-Jones*

- ii. So then why do I say that this character of God is fully revealed in and through Jesus calling God, Father?
- iii. I think two things need to be pointed out—one about human nature and the other about the character of God.
- iv. **First**—I think that there is this human tendency to be suspicious about God’s intentions toward us. Who hasn’t had their illusions of love shattered by someone? A parent, a child, a spouse, a dear, dear friend— if you haven’t yet, you just haven’t lived long enough. My hunch is that we transfer that view of love and faithfulness onto God. From the outset of the human story, our first parents, due to the temptation of the serpent, doubted God’s good intentions; they failed to see all that God had freely given and provided, had failed to see that every good and perfect gift was from him and instead believed that God was not generous, kind, and good but instead selfish and withholding. Does God really love us?
- v. This lie continues with us today and it wreaks havoc in every human heart—for both followers of Jesus and those who are not religious at all but haunted by the fact that there is a God, and he has it out for them. And if we aren’t suspicious of God’s good intentions for us, we often turn God into a religious tyrant who only cares about pious acts of religiosity devoid of joy, emotion, and life. As I mentioned earlier, God may want good for us, but who could live up to his high standards?! God may love us, but there is a limit to all love ... right?

(a) This is why Jesus, the Son of God came to show us how deep and how wide the love of God is for us. God has done the unthinkable in and through Jesus. God has demonstrated his love in that while we were sinners, separated from God and even in rebellion toward him, Christ Jesus gave his life on the cross to rescue and redeem us, to bring us back to God and back into his Father’s love.

(b) I’m reminded of one of the stanzas from the old hymn, “The Love of God,” when it says, *“When years of time shall pass away, and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall. When men who here refuse to pray and on rocks and hills and mountains call. God’s love so sure, shall still endure, all measureless and strong; redeeming grace to Adam’s race, the saints’ and angels’ song.”*—The Love of God

- vi. Second, though the Scriptures are very clear about God’s heart and intentions for Israel, his covenant people—to be their God, to be their King, to care for them as a father cares for his children—it is through Jesus, the Son of God, that we see and hear the Father’s heart for those who were not his people. (Remember the parables of Luke 15—Jesus has come to bring the Father’s lost children back into the Father’s household.) God doesn’t want to only be the Father to Israel, but his desire is to gather all people—every tribe, tongue, and nation—into his family and into his kingdom. As the Gospel of John says, **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”**
- vii. It is through Jesus, the Son, that we can be fully assured of God’s great love for us. I don’t know when the last time was that you felt the smile of God on you, but can I just be the one to remind you that God loves you, that he doesn’t just tolerate you but actually likes you and even loves you. That no one forced God into the work of creation and redemption but that this is the overflow of his enduring love for us.

- viii. And because he loves us so much, he is working in you and I, transforming us so that we would live in a dynamic relationship of love with him as beloved children relating to their Father and relating in love to those around us.
- ix. I love this quote by Dallas Willard. He says, *“We must understand that God does not ‘love’ us without liking us—through gritted teeth—as ‘Christian’ love is sometimes thought to do. Rather, out of the eternal freshness of his perpetually self-renewed being, the heavenly Father cherishes the earth and each human being upon it. The fondness, the endearment, the unstintingly affectionate regard of God toward all his creatures is the natural outflow of what he is to the core—which we vainly try to capture with our tired but indispensable old word ‘love.’”*—Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*
- x. Or as Eugene Peterson used to speak over his children, *“God loves you, God is on your side. He is coming after you, and he is relentless.”*—Eugene Peterson

III. **Are you beginning to see how our view and understanding of God is vitally important to how we live? Can you see how this changes everything?**

- A. John the apostle writes to the Church, **“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”**—1 John 4:10–12
  - 1. If this is how God is toward us—rescuing, welcoming, forgiving, receiving, loving, self-giving Father. We ought to love one another in this same way.
  - 2. Now I believe that the application of this truth has to be discerned by you and God’s Spirit working out this love of God through your life to those around you.
  - 3. The thing I want to leave you with this morning is what Jude, the brother of Jesus, said to the Church—**“Keep yourselves in the love of God!”** What do I mean by that? Keep yourselves under that ever-flowing stream; that never stopping, never giving up, un-breaking, always and forever love of God.
  - 4. Prioritize time to bask in God’s relentless love for you. Just marinate in it. I believe that there is nothing more vital to our lives—not just as Christians, but as humans—than to bask in God’s great love for us. It is the truest thing about you. I often think of Brennan Manning saying, *“Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is illusion.”*—Brennan Manning, *Abba’s Child*
    - a. One way that I have done this in my own life is to read over the story of Jesus’ baptism (Mark 1:10–11). There at Jesus baptism, as Jesus goes down into the water and reemerges, the sky is torn open and a voice from heaven speaks—*“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”* And for all who are in Jesus, those who are his people, we share this identity as God’s beloved children. God the Father speaks over us—You are mine (identity statement), I love you (worth, value statement), I am pleased with you of (worth or value statement). We must constantly keep this truth before us, letting it wash over us and cleanse us from our false identities and our wrong ideas about our Father who loves us.
  - 5. As you and prioritize and we keep ourselves in the love of God, this knowledge and experience of the unfailing love and kindness of the Father will begin to transform us, so that you and I will be filled to overflowing with love, and that love will spill over on those around us, and so that just like Jesus, others will come to know through our lives that the Father loves them, that he’s in their corner, that he’s coming after them, and that he is relentless in his love.