

## GOD THE FATHER

Instructions for Leaders in RED.

**Leader's Notes:** *In preparation for this lesson you may want to read the excerpts given regarding the fatherhood of God, and the different aspects of God's fatherhood. The Leader's notes can be found at the end of this lesson. They are included to stoke your interest and passion for the lesson you are teaching, not so much to provide material you will use.*

### Lesson Outcomes:

- 1) Students will understand the unique and differing ways in which God functions as a father.
- 2) Students will understand the type of father God is.
- 3) Students will seek to live in a manner consistent with their Father's nature and will.

### OPENER:

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Give students handout for this study and have them silently fill out the opening question(s). Give them a couple minutes for this, once it seems like most of them are done, move on to discussion.

**ASK:** Let's talk about what you wrote on the handout. Who are some of the names you wrote down? Good examples or bad examples?

**ASK:** What do you consider to be the key traits of a good father?

### INTRODUCTION:

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Read over this ahead of time. Feel free to use these words or your own.

As we move through the Core series, we're spending a few weeks on the person of God and discovering what the Bible tells us about who God is.

**ASK:** Can anyone give me a recap of what we talked about last time? [God reveals himself to us; special revelation v. general revelation; God is most clearly understood through his actions and his attributes; etc.]

So, we talked about how the Bible plays a really unique and important role in revealing who God is. And one of the main ways that God has revealed himself is as a Father. But, let's look a little bit at the specifics of what that means.

### THE MANY FACES OF GOD'S FATHERHOOD:

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The Bible reveals to us that God is a Father, but that he acts as a father in many different ways. We're going to look at a few passages of Scripture and see what they tell us about God's many roles as Father.

[In this section, have one student read the passage, then ask them the questions that follow. Although there are numerous passages of Scripture that could be used for each

of the following categories, the lists are intentionally short, with the hope of prompting more discussion about the particular passage listed.]

\*\*\*[Many theologians begin this topic with a discussion of the universality of God's fatherhood, based on his role as Creator. For the sake of clarity and avoiding confusion, this study won't discuss that topic. For further thoughts on how God is a father to all creation, specifically in relation to Paul's speech in Acts 17, see the leader's notes.]\*\*\*

Exodus 4:22-23 "Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, "Let my son go, so that he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.'"

**ASK:** So, then to whom would we say God is a father, based on these verses?

[Have them fill in their handout. "God is father to Israel.]

**ASK:** Can you think of some ways that God is a father to Israel? [He chose them, watches over them, cares for them, etc.]

Alright, so we see that God is a father to the nation and people of Israel, specifically. But, there's more. So, let's keep going.

1 John 4:9-10 "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

**ASK:** So, then to whom would we say God is a father, based on these verses?

[Have them fill in their handout. "God is father to Jesus.]

**ASK:** So, that one was probably not too difficult, but let's consider what this means for a moment. God is Father to Jesus in some unique ways that don't pertain to any other realm of his fatherhood. Can we think of any? [Eternal relationship, the Son is the perfect representation of the Father, like him in every way, etc.]

[For further thoughts on the relationship of God the Father to God the Son, see the leader's notes.]

Okay, so one more to go. In addition to being the father to the nation of Israel, and to Jesus, God is father in one other, very significant way. Let's read a couple more passages and discover what it is.

John 1:12-13 "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, or a husband's will, but born of God."

**ASK:** So, then to whom would we say God is a father, based on these verses?

[Have them fill in their handout. “God is father to believers.]

**ASK:** How is God’s fatherhood of believers similar to and different than his fatherhood to Israel, and Jesus? [Like Israel, he chose us; unlike Jesus, we aren’t perfectly obedient sons and daughters; etc.]

## **BUT WHAT KIND OF FATHER IS HE?**

We began this lesson by thinking about the examples of fatherhood we have seen on television and then making a decision about whether or not they are good examples. In a sense, even exhibiting the worst traits imaginable doesn’t negate a man’s role as a father. Even bad fathers still have the position of father. When it comes to God, then, it is a fair question to ask, “We can see clearly from Scripture that God is a father, but what kind of father is he?” Not surprisingly, we’re going to look back at Scripture to find our answer.

[Assign different students in the group to read the following verses. After each passage is read, discuss with the group what that passage tells about the type of father God is.]

Matthew 7:9-11 [**God is good to his children.**]

James 1:16-18 [**God is good and faithful.**]

Romans 8:15-17 [**God is generous with his children.**]

This is only a small sampling of what we know to be true about the character of God the Father. Last time we talked about how we can know God because of his actions and attributes.

**ASK:** Can anyone think of any other attributes of God that help us understand the kind of father he is?

So, how would we summarize what kind of father God is? Take a moment or two and write your thoughts on your handout.

## **SO WHAT?**

So, we’ve just cruised through a good amount of Scripture, trying to discover what it tells about the ways in which God is a father, and what kind of father he is. But, what does that mean for us?

**ASK:** What difference does it make for us to know that God is a father, and, specifically, the father of believers?

**ASK:** Which of the fatherly traits of God do you find most encouraging?

If they’re having trouble with this, draw them back to the question at the outset about the traits of an ideal father and then ask them if Scripture reveals God to be that way.

## **REFLECTION:**

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Have them use their handout for this reflection time. Give them about 5 minutes or so (or until they all finish) to complete this. After they've done both the question and the prayer, spend some time discussing. The first question says:

*Turn to 1 John. Once there, read 2:28-3:10. How does John say a child of God should live? Does your life reflect this?*

Have a few of them read their responses and then,

**ASK:** How could we, as a small group, help one another to better live out what John says in 1 John 2 and 3?

## **PRAY:**

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Ask if one or more of them will read the prayer they wrote.

*Take a few moments and write out a prayer to God, reflecting on what you've learned and been challenged by in this lesson.*

After they've read their prayers, close the prayer time.

## **LEADERS' NOTES:**

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### ***Regarding The Fatherhood of God:***

*From "Knowing God," by J.I. Packer:*

You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one's holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian, as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God.

### ***Regarding The Universality of God's Fatherhood:***

Acts 17:24-26, 29 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live...Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine Being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill."

Malachi 2:10; "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?"

In both Paul's speech in Acts and in Malachi, creation is the basis for God's fatherhood. In some sense, then, that fact that humans are created in God's image means that God is a father to all creation.

*From "The Book of Acts," in The New International Commentary on the New Testament series, by F.F. Bruce:*

17:29 – We are, then, the offspring of god, says Paul: not, of course, in the pantheistic sense intended by the Stoic poets, but in the sense of the Biblical doctrine of man, as a being created by God in His image and after His likeness. There is, indeed, a mighty difference between this relation of men to God in the old creation and that redemptive relation which men of the new creation enjoy as sons of God "through faith, in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26). But Paul is dealing here with the responsibility of all men as God's creatures to give Him the honour which is His due.

*From "Systematic Theology," by Lewis Sperry Chafer:*

[Hebrews 12:9; James 1:17; Job 38:7; Malachi 2:10; Acts 17:29], with 1 Corinthians 8:6, where it is declared, "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things," teach that it is within the latitude of the Biblical use of the word *Father*, as applied to God, to comprehend all created beings as belonging to that Fatherhood. Thus it is revealed that there is a form of universal Fatherhood and universal brotherhood which, within its proper bounds, should be recognized; but this, as important as it may be, is in no way to be confused with that Fatherhood and brotherhood which is secured by the regenerating work of the Spirit.

### ***Regarding The Relation of God the Father to God the Son:***

*From "Systematic Theology," by Lewis Sperry Chafer:*

The phrase "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is the full title of the First Person of the blessed Trinity, and it incorporates, also, the full title of the Second Person. True, God the Father is also the Father of

all who believe, but for all eternity to come He must first be recognized by that surpassing distinction which, in part, has been His throughout the eternity past, namely, the *God* and *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ. The relation of the Second Person to the First Person has from all eternity been that of a Son, and, like all else related to the Godhead, is not only eternal but unchangeable.

***Regarding Believers's Status as Children of God:***

*From "John," in the Expositor's Bible Commentary by Merrill C. Tenney:*

(Cf. John 1:12-13) "Become" indicates clearly that people are not the spiritual children of God by natural birth, for we cannot become what we already are. This verb implies a change of nature...Believers are God's "little ones," related to him by birth. "Not of natural descent" excludes a purely physical process; "nor of human decision" rules out the result of any biological urge; "or a husband's will" shows that this kind of birth is not merely the outcome of a legal marriage. The relation is spiritual, not biological.