

M 2 · W E E K E I G H T

Our Father and Our father

Our approach to God shapes every other relationship — and every personality trait of the Father is the foundation of what an earthly father should be.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How do I see God?

WEEK EIGHT

Recap

As Millennium Men, we are beginning to understand our makeup better. God made us with unique talents and gifts. Our spiritual design, our personality, our parents, and our genetic makeup weren't an accident. God made them all, and nothing that has happened to you is a surprise to God.

JEREMIAH 1:5 · NIV

Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.

God wasn't surprised that you were born into your family. No matter how functional or dysfunctional your family was, God placed you in them for a reason. It could be that you were made to bring salvation to them. You might be the light in a very dark place. Perhaps you were born into godly, loving parents who modeled Christ in all they did — what a blessing if that is the case.

Unfortunately, today, many families are fractured and the relationships within them are strained. This seems especially true when it comes to the relationships we have with our biological fathers. American society has eschewed the practice of a rite of passage. I believe that practice leaves men searching for significance in unhealthy ways. We long to receive the blessing and approval of our biological fathers because he is the symbol to us of our Heavenly Father. *Every personality trait of God found in Psalm 23, every name of God, is the foundational viewpoint of what a father should be for his children.* Many men are broken today because they have a longing to belong, to be loved, and to be accepted by their biological fathers.

WEEK EIGHT

Part I · Our approach to God

I had approached God, or my idea of God, without love, without awe, even without fear. He was, in my mental picture of this miracle, to appear neither as Savior nor as Judge, but merely as a magician; and when He had done what was required of Him I supposed He would simply — well, go away.

C. S. LEWIS

Our view of God is crucial. Do you view God as a magician, a judge, or a Savior?

◆ Magician

◆ Judge

◆ Savior

MAGICIAN

What do you think of when you think of God? What is God's personality like? Are you like Lewis and approach Him as a magician — someone who should perform at your bequest and then slink away after He has obeyed you? Do you pray to God only when you need Him for a small miracle? Perhaps you pray when you receive an unexpected bill or when your child becomes sick. Do you expect God to jump at the sound of your voice when in need? This is approaching God as a magician. This viewpoint of God is one of idolatry. It places sovereignty in our hands, rather than God's. Jesus said we should pray like this in **Matthew 6:10**: "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Every prayer we pray should honor the sovereignty of God and the probability that His will may be different from ours. Jesus went to the cross even though He didn't want to. The Christian walk is not an easy one. It is not for the faint of heart; it is for real men. We are called to carry a cross of our own.

JUDGE

Do you approach God as a mighty judge who is waiting for you to get out of line? This was my approach to God for many years. I felt like the woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. I felt surrounded by my accusers with no way out. I knew that I was a sinner, and I know that I am one now. However, today, I know that God's mercy never fails and that He has provided Jesus as my sacrificial Lamb, who has paid for my sins — past, present, and future. There will be a time when God will judge everyone, but at this time, I am like the woman caught in my sin, but with a loving Savior.

JOHN 8:10–11 · NASB

Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

SAVIOR

Do you see Him as your Savior? Do you see Him as the only One who could pay the price for your sin? **John 3:16** says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Just as the Israelites did in the desert, we look to the cross for our salvation. Jesus paid the price for our sins. He said it all when He said, "It is finished" (**John 19:30**), then hung His head and gave up His spirit.

There is no sin that cannot be forgiven. There is nothing in your past that cannot be redeemed. When we view God as our Savior, we accept with humility that our own goodness cannot bring salvation. There is nothing we can *do* to get to God. **Ephesians 2:8** says, "For it is by grace you have been saved,

through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." God's grace is a gift that you must receive. There is nothing we can do to earn it. The greatest and most righteous man is still far from God, lost and destined for an eternity apart from Him. **Romans 3:10** says, "There is no one righteous, not even one."

If every man, woman, and child who had ever lived was standing on the sand at South Mission Beach in San Diego, and asked to swim to Hawaii, how far would the greatest athlete that ever lived get before he drowned? I don't know — but whoever that is would still drown. None of us can swim to Hawaii from San Diego. Only Jesus made the bridge between us and God. **John 14:6** says, "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" Everyone needs a Savior. And the only Savior is Jesus.

WEEK EIGHT

Why do bad things happen to good people?

God is not the source of our pain. We have an enemy that is bent on destroying us. He hates everything God loves, and he hates you because you bear your Father's image. Unfortunately, many times our suffering comes from those we love and trust the most.

Hurt people hurt people.

We all come from a long lineage of brokenness. Every person has a story of soul-crushing pain, of love, of loss, and of hope. God's love is interwoven into all our stories if we look closely enough. No matter how broken, no matter how painful, God provides comfort, and He reveals Himself through our most trying moments. He was there in the fiery furnace for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He was in the lion's den with Daniel. He was in the belly of the whale with Jonah. And He was with you at your darkest hour.

PSALM 56:8 • NLT

You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.

We understand that we live in a fallen world. God doesn't plan mass shootings or wars. Those senseless acts are inspired by the enemy. They weren't and aren't God's plan. All injustice is contrary to God's holy nature. Every injustice that has ever happened to you or your family isn't from God, nor was it sanctioned by God. God gave mankind free will, and unfortunately that free will can lead to human actions resulting in tragedy. There is no racism or discrimination that is from God. God made every man in His image. He made different cultures and races because He is creative and loves diversity, just as we

see in nature that not every beach or tree is the same. God is creative, and His creative nature is found in His most precious creation — His people.

QUESTION 1

Is there any pain in my past that I've used to define myself?

QUESTION 2

Does my past pain influence how I see God?

WEEK EIGHT

Who is God?

The Israelites had to completely rely on God and His power to defeat the Egyptians and then eventually take the Promised Land. They learned to call on God in their darkest hour, and God never failed to deliver them as long as they were following Him. Knowing and understanding the Hebrew terms for God can really help us get to know our Heavenly Father.

Psalm 23 contains what is called a *remez* in Scripture. Read in the original Hebrew, Psalm 23 becomes a deep introspection into the personality and traits of our Father.

DEFINITION · REMEZ

A hidden treasure or glorious find below the surface, behind the words.

Read Psalm 23 aloud, using and defining the names of God that King David uses. Feel the names of God resonate with your spirit as you speak them aloud. Own the names of God by saying "my" and then His specific name. **Psalm 46:1** says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." If we view God through His names and allow these names to be our "Bat-Signal" to God, He will listen, heal, comfort, and lead us when we cry out to Him.

God is *not* trying to distance Himself from you, judge you, or make your life harder. He loves you. He sent His own Son to die in your place. What kind of love is that? That is not love with boundaries; that is total and complete love. That is the love of a Father who inspired Paul to write these words:

ROMANS 8:38–39 · NIV

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Proverbs 18:10 says, "The name of the LORD is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." We can call on the names of our God in times of trouble. David ran for his life from Saul for years. His own men turned on him, and his sons betrayed him. Through the Psalms we can see him battle almost every human emotion, but consistently turn back to God for grace, redemption, and strength. His love for God never wavered, and I believe that attribute was why God called him "a man after my own heart" (**1 Samuel 13:14**).

THE NAMES OF GOD IN PSALM 23

Jehovah-Raah — The LORD, my Shepherd — "*The LORD is my shepherd*" (v. 1).

Jehovah-Jireh — The LORD, my Provider — "*I shall not want*" (v. 1).

Jehovah-Shalom — The LORD, my Peace — "*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters*" (v. 2).

Jehovah-Rophe — The LORD, my Healer — "*He restoreth my soul*" (v. 3).

Jehovah-Tsidkenu — The LORD of Righteousness — "*He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake*" (v. 3).

Jehovah-Shama — The LORD is Present — *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for thou art with me"* (v. 4).

Jehovah-Ezer — The LORD, my Help — *"Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me"* (v. 4).

Jehovah-Nissi — The LORD, my Standard of Victory — *"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies"* (v. 5).

Jehovah-M'Kaddesh — The LORD, my Holiness and Sanctification — *"Thou anointest my head with oil"* (v. 5).

Jehovah-Manah — The LORD, my Portion — *"My cup runneth over"* (v. 5).

Jehovah-Cheleq — The LORD, my Inheritance — *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever"* (v. 6).

WEEK EIGHT

Healthy view, healthy relationships

To have healthy human relationships, we must have a right view and relationship with God. I'll go even further and say that to have a healthy self-worth, we need to know God and know His nature. To know God, we must study His nature. We can discover God's nature through His creation, through His Word, and through His character.

THROUGH CREATION

Romans 1:20 says, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse." When we think of the vastness, beauty, detail, artistry, and precision of the universe, we can begin to understand — in its limited way, the created can possibly understand its Creator.

My mind cannot conceive the wonderful being and nature of God, but it can conceive enough of God to know that He is faithful, righteous, holy, and true. I liken my understanding of God to my dog's understanding of the combustion engine. My dog sees me get into my car and drive away almost every day. He understands that a vehicle takes me away and brings me home. But I could never get him to look at the schematics of the engine of my car with any comprehension. He would never understand it, no matter how great the teacher or extensive the class. Likewise, I cannot understand the mind of my Creator. But in my limited capacity, I can understand enough to know that He is for me, that He loves me, and that He made me to worship Him.

GOD STILL SPEAKS THROUGH CREATION**PSALM 19:1-4 · NIV**

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

This is how the Magi found Jesus lying in a manger, and this is how those who have never heard the name of Jesus find God today. God has not forgotten the lowly or those in the darkest jungles. God speaks to them through His nature because He loves everyone. He has made a path of salvation to all. There are missionaries who have gone to tribes and told them about Jesus, and they have responded, "So that is His name? We knew Him all along, but we never knew His name."

THROUGH HIS WORD

God's Word has been studied for centuries. It is a comfort to me that so many men have studied the Word of God and believe in it. The Bible was written by at least 35 different authors on three separate continents, across at least fifteen centuries. There are many scholars who have tried to find errors and refute the Word of God, but none have been successful. In 1980, Lee Strobel was a writer for the *Chicago Sun*. His wife had recently converted to Christianity, and as an atheist, he set out to disprove Christianity. He concluded that Jesus was either a liar, a lunatic, or He was Lord. Through his research, he converted to Christianity and wrote the book *The Case for Christ*.

When we read the Word of God, it penetrates our soul.

HEBREWS 4:12 · NIV

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

God's Word is unchanging and unfailing because God's nature is unchanging and unfailing. **Mark 13:31** says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." God doesn't change with the times, nor is He old-fashioned. The times and culture may change — the *New York Times* might have a headline that says, "God is Dead" — but God is very much alive, and He has revealed Himself to us through His Word. If we want to understand more of who our Father is, we just need to study His Word.

THROUGH HIS NATURE

God's nature is love. When Adam broke the law, he was removed from the Garden of Eden and therefore removed from God's presence. The Bible tells the story of God's desire to reconcile with the sons of Adam. He proved to the Israelites that He would forgive them over and over and over, even after they continually grumbled and pursued other gods. In the same way, God desires reconciliation with you. **Romans 5:8** says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." This is not the nature of a God who wants to play Whack-A-Mole with His creation. This is the nature of a loving God who pursued His people and forgave them, even as they sent Him to the cross. Jesus demonstrated His nature while He was being tortured to death:

LUKE 23:34 · NIV

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Knowing and understanding the nature of God — His boundless love, His holiness, and the fact that He desires a true, intimate relationship with you — is the key to healthy self-worth and healthy relationships. And the same God that loves you requires you to forgive others, as He has forgiven you.

MATTHEW 5:43–44 · NIV

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

We can begin by forgiving our fathers.

WEEK EIGHT

Part II · The rite of passage

The only command we have with a promise is the fifth commandment, found in **Exodus 20:12**: "Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you."

There are no contingencies for honoring our father and mother. Whether they are just and righteous, or unjust and wicked, God says that we must honor our father and mother. This is a command, not a suggestion. We must honor our father and mother, no matter the circumstance. How do we honor our parents?

DEFINITION · HONOR

To regard or treat with admiration or respect.

You may find it difficult to honor your parents, but you must. If you don't know how to do that specifically, start by praying for God to show you how. If they have passed away, honor them by forgiving them and try to remember their good qualities instead of focusing on their mistakes.

Forgiving is not reconciliation. It takes two to reconcile, and you should pray about whether you should do so if there is a breach in your relationship. However, you must forgive your father as God has forgiven you. He may have been wrong, but *you* are going to be responsible for *your* response to injustice one day before God. Focus instead on the positive things your biological father gave you. When we shift our focus to gratitude, it helps us forgive.

REFLECT

Write down three things you admire — or are grateful for — about your biological father.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Many of us did not get affirmed by our biological fathers. We are like a loose wire looking for a connection. When we connect with Christ, He replaces our old self with a new creation. We become His children. We are not orphans or fatherless; we belong to Him. However, there remains a longing to hear affirming words from our biological dads. I don't believe this longing ever leaves us. The only way to replace it is to define our lives through the eyes of God, rather than the eyes of man.

Jesus renamed Simon to Peter. He gave Peter the name which means "rock," rather than "reed." It was a father that bestowed a name within their culture. Jesus, in a sense, was taking a fatherly role over Peter. Peter is the foundation of the Church and an example of how God forgives and restores. Jesus, as an act of His Father, while fully God and man, also takes ownership of each one of us. God is now our Father. We no longer have to seek the affirmation of broken, sinful men; we can live for the One who created us. This is fulfillment. Sonship of our Heavenly Father brings peace, puts our spirits and souls in proper order, and restores us to Him.

OBEDIENCE IS THE ANSWER

Just as in a relationship with our parents, we are reconciled to God through obedience. God knows we love Him through our obedience. We love, therefore we obey. **John 14:15** says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." We emphasize the word *love* over *keep*, because it precedes the keeping. We cannot keep the commandments without first loving God. Loving God is the key. When we love God and keep His commandments, we have our longing for affirmation fulfilled. God modeled the kind of affirmation He gives to His children by affirming Jesus at His baptism.

MATTHEW 3:17 · ESV

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

I believe that every man longs to hear these words from his dad. Unfortunately, many of us did not hear these words, and worse, we heard words that were not life-giving. I am sorry if you did not hear the life-giving words that God wanted you to hear from your earthly father. That is why we must forgive and understand that hurt people hurt people. The good news is that the cycle of hurt can end with you. You can start by forgiving your earthly father if there is anything you've held against him.

BAR MITZVAH

The Jewish tradition takes a boy at thirteen and has his elders speak blessings over him, lay hands on him, and endow him with manhood. Westerners do not understand that the Hebrew words "Bar" and "Mitzvah" literally mean "*son under the Law*." A man is no longer lawless, but responsible for God's law on his own accord. There were 613 laws in the first five books of the Bible, most of them found in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. The boy studied the law from childhood, so that he knew what he was responsible for when he became a man.

This is the rite of passage that we all must confer onto our sons and daughters. There is a deep desire for each of us to belong, as God modeled by saying, "This is my Son." There is a deep desire for each of us to be loved, wholly and completely, as God said to Jesus, "whom I love." And we all desire to be honored by our parents, especially our fathers, as God modeled to Jesus when He said, "with whom I am well pleased" (**Matthew 3:17**). Without this endowment ceremony, boys will search for manhood in unhealthy places for much of their lives. They will follow those flawed men and flawed masculinity, seeking something that only God and their father can fulfill.

Teach your sons and daughters the law of God and bless them. Be careful what you speak over them. Pray often over them and draw out of them their God-given giftings. We can decide, right now, to raise up a generation of men under the banner of our Father — with healthy hearts, healthy masculinity, and a sense of belonging, of being loved, and of knowing that we are proud of them. Should we bring a Bar Mitzvah to the Christian community? I believe we should. I believe it would help us all heal and confer a sense of direction upon us.