

# Our Loving Heavenly Father



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Matt. 7:9–11, John 14:8–10, Luke 15:11–24, Matt. 6:25–34, Heb. 9:14.*

**Memory Text:** “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 John 3:1, NKJV).

Jesus delighted to speak of God as the Father. According to the Gospels, Jesus applied the name Father to God more than one hundred thirty times. On various occasions, He added adjectives: “‘heavenly Father’” (*Matt. 6:14, NKJV*), “‘living Father’” (*John 6:57, NKJV*), “‘Holy Father’” (*John 17:11, NKJV*), and “‘righteous Father’” (*vs. 25, NKJV*). The name describes the intimate bond that should unite us to our Lord.

Traditionally, a “father” provides love, protection, security, sustenance, and identity for a family. A father gives a name to the family and keeps its members together. We can enjoy these and many other benefits when we accept God as our heavenly Father.

Though it is so essential for us to know the Father, our aim should not be just intellectual and theoretical knowledge. In the Bible, to know someone means to have a personal, intimate relationship with him or her. How much more so with our heavenly Father?

This week we will explore what Jesus taught about our Father and about His infinite love for us. We will look, too, at the close relationship of the Father with the Son and with the Holy Spirit.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 5.

## Our Father in Heaven

Father was not a new name for God. The Old Testament sometimes presented Him as our Father (*Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4, 19; Ps. 103:13*). However, it was not the most used name for Him. For Israel, the personal name of God was YHWH (probably pronounced Yahweh), which appears more than six thousand eight hundred times in the Old Testament. Jesus did not come to reveal a different God from YHWH. Rather, His mission was to complete the revelation that God had made of Himself in the Old Testament. In doing so, He presented God as our heavenly Father.

Jesus made clear that the Father is “in heaven.” It is important to remember this truth in order to have the right attitude toward God. We have a loving Father who is concerned with the needs of His children. At the same time, we recognize that this caring Father is “in heaven,” where millions of angels worship Him because He is the only Sovereign of the universe, holy and omnipotent. The fact that He is our Father invites us to approach Him with the confidence of a child. On the other hand, the truth that He is in heaven reminds us of His transcendence and the need to worship Him with reverence. To emphasize one of these aspects at the expense of the other would lead us to a distorted concept of God, with far-reaching consequences for our practical, daily lives.

**Read** Matthew 7:9–11. What does it tell us about how a human father can reflect the character of our heavenly One?

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Not everyone has had a loving, caring father. For various reasons, some may not even have known their father. Therefore, for them to call God “my Father” may have little, if any, meaning. However, all of us have an idea of what a good earthly father would be. Besides, we may have known some people who did portray the characteristics of a good father.

We know that human fathers are far from perfect, but we also know that most fathers love their children and, in spite of their shortcomings, they try to give them the best they can. Imagine, then, what our Father in heaven can do for us.

**What does it mean for you, personally, to address God as your heavenly Father? What should it mean to you?**

## Revealed by the Son

Talking about the Father, John says: “No one has ever seen God” (*John 1:18, NIV*). Since the fall of Adam and Eve, sin has hindered us from knowing God. Moses wanted to see God, but the Lord explained to him: “ ‘You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live’ ” (*Exod. 33:20, NKJV*). Nevertheless, our priority should be to know God, because eternal life is to know the Father (*John 17:3*).

**What** do we especially need to know about God? See Jer. 9:23, 24. Why are these things important for us to know?

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In the great controversy, Satan’s main attack has been against the character of God. The devil made every effort to convince everyone that God is selfish, severe, and arbitrary. The best way to meet this accusation was for Him to live on this earth in order to demonstrate the falsehood of the charges. Jesus came to represent God’s nature and character and to correct the distorted concept that many had developed about the Godhead. “The only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (*John 1:18, RSV*).

**Read** John 14:8–10. Notice how little the disciples knew about the Father after being with Jesus for more than three years. What can we learn for ourselves from their lack of comprehension?

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Jesus was sad and astonished to hear Philip’s question. His gentle rebuke actually reveals His patient love toward His dull disciples. Jesus’ response implied something like this: Is it possible that after walking with Me, hearing My words, seeing My miracles of feeding the crowds, of healing the sick and of raising the dead, you do not know Me? Is it possible that you do not recognize the Father in the works that He does through Me?

The disciples’ failure to know the Father through Jesus did not mean that Jesus had misrepresented the Father. On the contrary, Jesus was sure that He had fulfilled His mission of revealing the Father in a fuller way than had ever been seen before. Therefore, He could say to the disciples: “ ‘If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; . . . He who has seen Me has seen the Father’ ” (*John 14:7, 9, NKJV*).

## The Love of Our Heavenly Father

Jesus came to emphasize what the Old Testament had already affirmed: the Father looks at us with incomparable love (*Jer. 31:3, Ps. 103:13*).

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!” (*1 John 3:1, NKJV*). It is amazing that the Almighty God, who rules the immense universe, would allow us insignificant and poor sinners living on a tiny planet in the midst of billions of galaxies to call Him Father. He does so because He loves us.

**What** supreme evidence did the Father give us to demonstrate His love? See *John 3:16, 17*.

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Christ was not nailed to the cross in order to create in the Father’s heart a love for humanity. Jesus’ atoning death was not the means to convince the Father to love us; it happened because the Father had already loved us, even before the foundation of the world. And what greater evidence do we have, could we have, of His love than the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross?

“The Father loves us, not because of the great propitiation, but He provided the propitiation because He loves us.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 13.

Some tend to think that the Father is reluctant to love us. Nevertheless, the fact that Jesus is our Mediator does not mean that He has to persuade the Father to love us. Christ Himself dispelled this wrong idea when He said: “ ‘The Father Himself loves you’ ” (*John 16:27, NKJV*).

**Read** *Luke 15:11–24* and meditate on the Father’s love of the prodigal son. Make a list of the many evidences the son had of his father’s love.

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**How are we, each of us in our own way, like the prodigal son? In what ways have you experienced something similar to what he did?**

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## The Compassionate Care of Our Heavenly Father

It is important to know that we are cared for. Even though some people may be indifferent and neglectful toward us, Jesus taught that our heavenly Father cares for us in every possible way. His mercy and tenderness are not subject to the ups and downs so common in human temperaments; His love is steadfast and unchanging, regardless of the circumstances.

**Read** Matthew 6:25–34. What encouraging words are found here? How can we learn to better trust in God, as He is revealed in these verses?

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“There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest. ‘He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.’ Psalm 147:3. The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 100.

Amid all the encouraging words here, we cannot ignore the fact that tragedy and suffering do strike us. Even in the texts for today, Jesus spoke of how “sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (*Matt. 6:34*), implying that not everything is going to go well for us. We do have to live with evil and its doleful consequences. The point is, even amid all that, we are assured of the Father’s love for us, a love revealed to us in so many ways, most of all, by the Cross. How crucial, then, that we constantly keep the gifts and blessings of our heavenly Father before us; otherwise, we can easily become discouraged when evil strikes, which it inevitably does.

**In what ways, during a time of crisis, were you able to see the reality of God’s love for you? What did you learn from that experience that you can share with someone else who might be struggling and, amid those struggles, questioning the reality of God’s love?**

## The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

In different ways, Jesus taught and demonstrated that Three Divine Persons constitute the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Although we cannot explain this truth rationally, we accept it by faith (like many of the truths revealed in Scripture), and together with Paul we strive to attain a full “knowledge of the mystery of God” (*Col. 2:2, NKJV*). That is, though there is much we don’t understand, we can seek by faith, obedience, prayer, and study to learn more and more.

**The Three Persons of the Godhead were active in the key moments of the life of Jesus. Summarize the role of each One in the following events:**

*Birth: Luke 1:26–35* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Baptism: Luke 3:21, 22* \_\_\_\_\_

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*Crucifixion: Heb. 9:14* \_\_\_\_\_

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When Jesus’ earthly ministry was about to finish, He promised His distressed disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit. Here again we see the three Persons working together. “ ‘I will pray the Father,’ ” Jesus assured them, “ ‘and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, . . . the Spirit of truth’ ” (*John 14:16, 17, NKJV; see also vs. 26*).

Jesus explained that there is complete harmony and cooperation between the Three Divine Persons in the plan of salvation. As the Son glorified the Father, demonstrating His love (*John 17:4*), so the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son, revealing His grace (and love) to the world as well (*John 16:14*).

**Think through some of the other revealed truths that are difficult to comprehend through rational thought alone. At the same time, think about many things in the natural world that are similarly difficult to comprehend. What should these mysteries tell us about the limits of our rational thought and the need to live by faith? Bring your answers to class on Sabbath.**

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “A Personal God,” pp. 263–278, in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8.

“In order to strengthen our confidence in God, Christ teaches us to address Him by a new name, a name entwined with the dearest associations of the human heart. He gives us the privilege of calling the infinite God our Father. This name, spoken to Him and of Him, is a sign of our love and trust toward Him, and a pledge of His regard and relationship to us. Spoken when asking His favor or blessing, it is as music in His ears. That we might not think it presumption to call Him by this name, He has repeated it again and again. He desires us to become familiar with the appellation.

“God regards us as His children. He has redeemed us out of the careless world and has chosen us to become members of the royal family, sons and daughters of the heavenly King. He invites us to trust in Him with a trust deeper and stronger than that of a child in his earthly father. Parents love their children, but the love of God is larger, broader, deeper, than human love can possibly be. It is immeasurable.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 141, 142.

“Our heavenly Father has expressed his love for us individually in the cross of Calvary. The Father loves us, he is full of compassion and tender mercy.”—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*<sup>®</sup>, September 30, 1889.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 If someone tells you that he or she has difficulties in loving God and trusting in Him as a heavenly Father because of bad experiences with an earthly father, how could you help this person to love God and have confidence in Him?
- 2 We know God loves us. Why, then, is there suffering?
- 3 As a class, go over your answers to Thursday’s final question.
- 4 Think about the incredible size of the universe. Think, too, that the One who created it, Jesus, was the same One who died for us on the cross. How do we wrap our minds around this hopeful news? How can we learn to rejoice, moment by moment, in this amazing revelation of God’s love?

## On Our Way Rejoicing

I met the Savior while studying in a simple little Seventh-day Adventist school in my home village in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. God gave me a burden to spread the message of the Adventist faith, and I began to share my faith in the neighborhood around my home church.

Then I learned about Global Mission and began working to plant a church in an impoverished suburb of Kinshasa. I found a few Adventists in the area and called them together to ask God for guidance to build up His church. These few Adventists brought their friends to study God's Word, and before long 17 more believers were baptized.

I was transferred to another area in Kinshasa, where I found three Adventist families who lived far from the nearest church. We began meeting in a member's yard every morning at five. The neighbors heard us singing and preaching, and some joined us. The members invited other friends as well. Soon 30 people worshiped together in that little yard.

We've continued to grow, and today we have more than sixty adults and children. We've outgrown the member's yard, and we rent an unfinished building that has no roof. We've hung a tarp to protect us from the sun and the rain. In spite of the lack of shelter, we are not dismayed. People continue to come. We have begun a Bible study program, and we're confident that we'll continue to grow even more.

When the owner of the building in which we worship completes its construction, we will have to find another place to worship. Our members are poor; most don't have money to feed and clothe their families and can't help build a house of worship. But we have abundant faith, and we pray that God will provide a house of worship for us.

Recently we learned that Global Mission will help us find land and build a church. We rejoice that the world church cares about us and will help us build a simple house of worship.

We don't have Bibles to share with new believers, so it's difficult to nurture them. Many members can't afford to pay for public transportation to attend church every week. But our situation is not unique in Africa, and we don't let our poor circumstances dismay us. We continue on our way rejoicing that the King of heaven is our Father, and He is preparing a heavenly mansion for us there. In the meantime, we thank God for His children everywhere who have not forgotten us and who faithfully give their mission offerings so that more of His children can be gathered in for the great harvest.

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*JEAN LONGOMO is a Global Mission pioneer in a suburb of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.*