

Part 20: God as Father

Begin with this prayer:

Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your name
your kingdom come
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

Reflect for three minutes on the name Father.

God as Father

Our most familiar and used picture of God is as Father and yet for each of us, this word is heavily loaded with many images. Probably the strongest effect is from our experience of our own earthly father. If we had a strict and controlling father, chances are that we will experience God as rigid and severe, whereas a fathering of kindly affirmation may encourage an image of a benign, if somewhat soft, God. Jesus, in 'showing us the Father', uses many familiar themes to show something of what God is like. In Luke 11:11 he speaks of human fathers, though evil, knowing how to give good gifts to their children and how much more the Father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those that ask him, this being the essence of all God's goodness. In Luke 15 and the story of the prodigal son, Jesus reveals a father who is caring and forgiving beyond human measure.

Well-known scripture passages risk becoming 'old hat' and yet in them God's word to us may be the loudest and most direct. If we read them with the notion of finding new ideas or novelty we will be disappointed. We need to see in them God's word to us, leading us on the next step, feeding us in our being and not only in our minds. Hebrews 4:12 speaks of God's word, sharper than a sword, penetrating joints and marrow, and judging the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

In the light of this, read Matthew 6:25–34, which is one such familiar passage. Read it quietly now with the awareness of where it is addressing you, whether it is boring to your mind, or touching your feelings and heart.

Reflect on this passage for 12 minutes, then work through these questions:

1. In your life at present, is there anything that is causing you anxiety?
2. In what way does worry affect you?
3. Do you remember a time when you were aware of the Father's care for you? If so, what was the awareness of it like for you or if not, what do you sense it could be like?
4. What difference would it make in your life now for you to 'seek first God's kingdom'?

Take 10 minutes with these questions and then share some of your reflections with your group.

At home, notice and record your experiences of God's provision in your life as the birds of the air and lilies of the fields would. Dialogue with your Father.



Sergio Milandri has a Masters in Personal Formation and has been a relationship mentor in South Africa for over 25 years. He and his wife, Elizabeth, live in Hout Bay, Cape Town, and run the Sans Pareil Retreat Centre from there.

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