

January 18, 2026

“Gentle and Lowly: Father of Mercies

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Since September, we have been and are looking at the “heart” of Christ; the center of who He was . . . at His core; [the heart] being that place from which everything else flows. When Jesus invited people – and He still invites people – to “Come to [Him]” if they were weary and carrying heavy burdens, He promised to give “rest.” He also invited people to take on His way of living and being (His yoke) and then described Himself as “Gentle and Humble in heart.” Using various scriptures and the writing of Dane Ortlund, we’ve been looking at the many facets of Jesus’ “Gentle and Humble heart.” By the way, Jesus still invites people to “Come to Him.”

But now (actually starting last week), Ortlund begins a little side bar with us. We’re focused on Jesus, God the Son who came in the flesh. But what about the other two members of the Trinity? How does God the Son line up with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit?

Holy Spirit was last week. (You definitely need to watch or grab a copy of Josh’s sermon.) So what about God the Father?

[Ortlund helps us answer that question using the opening of one of Paul’s letters.]

Scripture Reading and Prayer

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

(A.W. Tozer in *The Knowledge of the Holy*)

And Tozer isn’t a Puritan! He was an Evangelical Mystic in the 20th century.

While we or others might come up with something different as the “most important thing about us,” Tozer’s point is well taken. How you and I see God plays itself out in numerous ways, including how we both relate to God AND reflect God to others. Our picture of God impacts each of us at a deeper level than we might ever know.

When we think about God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it’s likely we might see God the Father in a different light than the other two members of the Trinity; specifically in a different light than we see God the Son in the person of Jesus.

Ortlund is clear about what he hopes this brief chapter will accomplish: “I am seeking to help us leave behind our natural, fallen intuition that God is distant and parsimonious (stingy, holding back) and to step into the liberating realization that He is gentle and lowly in heart.” [Page 127]

So how do you and I specifically picture God the Father?

Beyond the Santa Claus picture – or at least the older guy with the white beard that we might carry around with us in the recesses of our mind – how else do you picture God the Father? I’m thinking of some less-helpful pictures.

Do you picture – or have you ever pictured – God the Father as stern with arms crossed?

Performance-Oriented? Outcome-Focused?

Waiting on you to make the first move or mess up?

Passive-Aggressive? Control-Freak?

A demanding coach or teacher . . . or parent?

To be sure, it’s easier to picture God the Son because Jesus literally came “in the flesh” and “lived among us.” How we see God the Father is also tricky because of the fact we all have fathers . . . who are imperfect (at best), or distant or demanding or abusive (at worst). And all of that has a way of bleeding over into our pictures of God as Father.

What is God the Father like – in your mind . . . right now?

And, important for this chapter, what do the Father and Son have in common?

How do they compliment one another and work in concert together?

[Ortlund takes us to Paul’s 2nd letter to Corinth.]

As is true at the beginning of all Paul’s letters, his opening words are intentionally crafted – each written for specific congregations with specific struggles/challenges. Knowing what he needed to address, he also prayerfully thought through how to best challenge and encourage his churches in the right way. And that included starting his letters “in the right way.” [We can also add that he was helped in this task by the “inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”] Here in 2 Corinthians – after the opening greetings – Paul jumps in with a very specific picture of God: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation (comfort), who consoles (comforts) us in all our affliction . . . (2 Corinthians 1:3)

“The Father of mercies . . . who comforts us when we find ourselves afflicted or in trouble . . .”

Is that one of the first things that comes to mind when you picture God?

Or do you tend to see Jesus more in that light and the Father as more demanding?

All this Father, Son and Holy Spirit stuff can be a little elusive. [I echo **Josh’s comment last week** about running from anyone who claims to have the Trinity figured out.] Additionally,

NOT having the language of Trinity in the Old Testament typically means pictures of God gathered from Genesis-Malachi probably get lumped in more with God the Father than either the Son or Spirit. **[We're looking at God and the OT in the next 4 weeks/chapters]**. As Ortlund also mentions, the classic understanding of atonement tends to create a picture of the Father having a lot of wrath and the Son stepping in on our behalf to calm Him down. [Page 128 is a helpful and brief treatment of that subject.] And as I said previously, how we see God the Father can also tend to be complicated by the pictures, images and memories of our own fathers.

For a lot of reasons, many pictures come to mind when we think about God as Father; and they're not always pictures of mercy and comfort.

We don't know all the reasons Philip was still unclear about God the Father. Toward the end of Jesus' life, just after Jesus declared that His Father's house had many dwelling places (not mansions) AND described Himself as the Way, Truth and Life, Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied." (John 14:8)

Jesus is a bit frustrated. "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know Me? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father." (John 14:9) He goes on to say they are both "in each other." You got a little Karl Barth from Josh last week – and there will be more. I like what he told us about Barth's statement that there is no "hidden God" behind Jesus. Jesus – God the Son in the flesh – tells/shows us everything there is for us to know about God.

Paul and the writer of Hebrews echoes this in different ways. In Hebrews 1:3, Jesus is described as "the exact imprint of God's nature." In Colossians 1:15 and 19, Paul tells us Christ is "the image of the invisible God" . . . "where the fullness of God dwells." In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul again speaks of Jesus as the "image of God." And just after that in verse 6, Paul is more poetic – telling us that God gave us a "light [that] shines in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." This is God language more than just about God the Father, but I think this all runs together in a wonderfully mysterious bundle of Trinitarian love.

So let's put ourselves back in the conversation with Jesus and Philip.
Can you hear our Gentle and Humble Savior?

'Philip . . . and all of you, My disciples; if you've seen Me you've seen the Father too. We are inextricably intertwined . . . and the Spirit is our living presence gifted to you SO THAT you can live with and for Me AND do for others what we do for you: show mercy, give comfort. Well, that's at least how it plays out on paper.

Still, there is a tendency to see God the Son as the cool/nice older brother who is a bit more chill and God the Father as the strict and often frustrated one. And ATONEMENT theology overemphasized or wrongly emphasized may contribute to this. And as I've said a couple times

already, our own fathers and The Church (led for centuries by fathers as well) have definitely left us with distorted pictures and impressions of God the Father.

But “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” (A.W. Tozer in *The Knowledge of the Holy*) It’s definitely worth exploring what’s in there; in our hearts and minds. I’m convinced that for almost all of us, at some level, part of what’s in there is connected to our own fathers.

This is one of the reasons we are committed to using Emotionally Healthy Discipleship tools on a regular basis. One of the components of the material includes “**Going Back in Order to Go Forward.**” In Session 3 we honestly assess – without disrespecting – our family of origin. This includes our fathers and mothers. I can’t really talk about your fathers – although I’ve talked with some of you about your dads. What I can do is share some of the ongoing work in my life – related to my faith and my dad.

As many of you know, my dad died of cancer when he was 40 and I was 15. My dad was my hero. He was a spiritual leader in our church. He was wonderful in so many ways. One of my primary memories with my dad was playing catch in the backyard: football and baseball. (I can’t watch “Field of Dreams” without crying.) When he died, I didn’t know how to integrate my sadness and grief with my Christian faith. That’s taken years and is still a work in progress.

Part of what I had to discover and name has included noticing other things about my dad: that he was quiet, pretty serious, strong and – this was important to name a few decades ago – stingy with the words “I love you.” I felt his love in so many ways, but I rarely heard him say it. And then he died and I would never be able to hear him say it again.

What I have had to discover are the nuanced and numerous ways my experience of my earthly father has impacted my relationship with my Heavenly Father. I cannot tell you all of the various ways God has helped me process and sort all this out. It goes back to at least 1987 – 7 years after he died. It includes conversations, counseling, scriptures, sermons, conversations, songs, podcasts and books; timely connections and the space for sabbatical in 2015 and 2023. And each time we lead another Emotionally Healthy Spirituality or Emotionally Healthy Relationships course, every time I read through the Day-by-Day Devotional with Daily Offices, every time I “Go Back in order to Go Forward,” God the Father gives me a clearer picture of who He really is. This and so much more has been a prime example of God’s mercy and comfort in my life. And God has done this SO THAT I can better reflect God by comforting others.

Do you need God’s comfort and mercy? Or more of that comfort and mercy?

Do you need to learn/relearn how to see God as the Father of Mercies?

For all of us, the best thing we can do is to keep looking at and listening to Jesus. Keep following Him. Once again, it’s time to “Come to [Jesus].”